

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH pt.1 5-16-10

Man of Boldness

(I Kings 16) We begin today an exposition of the latter portion of I Kings and especially the life of the prophet Elijah. But first another name – Solomon. Do you remember Solomon? Solomon was that immensely wise king. But, although a man of wisdom, he was not a man of great perseverance, and Solomon, toward the end of his days strayed from the Lord into idolatry which caused the entire nation of Israel to suffer. During the early months of the rule of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, ten tribes of Israel broke away to establish their own nation called Israel, with its capital in Samaria and its first king being Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Separated from the Davidic rule and from the temple in Jerusalem the people of Israel began a long spiritual decline. Its kings became progressively worse until there arose as king over Israel a man named Ahab. Ahab was to reign over Israel 22 years and they were some of the darkest years in Biblical history. 16:**30-33** *Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him. 31 It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. 32 So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.* This is the one whom R.G.Lee called that vile toad who squatted upon the throne of Israel. His wicked wife is one whose name has lived on in infamy. She was a domineering, aggressive, devilish woman who not only worshipped vile idols but, thru her hen-pecked husband, made the worship of Baal the state religion of those once called by the name of Yahweh. When our second child was soon to be born, my wife and I developed some irreconcilable differences over what we should name this baby if it happened to be a girl. One of us preferred *Hannah Elizabeth* and the other preferred *Sarah Beth*. So, to solve our dispute we put the matter to a vote of our, then quite small, congregation. We distributed ballots with three choices for names: Sarah Beth, Hannah Elizabeth and Jezebel Delilah. Those familiar with their Bibles would know that we were just kidding about that last choice, although it did get two votes. Nobody would name their daughter Jezebel anymore than they would name their son Judas. Jezebel and her weakly wicked man led Israel into the pits of spiritual perversity.

But then along came John. In this case John was named *Elijah*. We know very little about the background of Elijah. We cannot name his parents. We know little of his home or heritage or

development. Elijah comes onto the scene of Old Testament history like a lightning bolt and electrifies the nation. 17:1 *Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.* King Ahab, meet Elijah the Tishbite. Elijah is undoubtedly one of the greatest men of God who ever lived. In the history of Israel only Abraham, Moses and David can rival him in fame. You'll remember that when Jesus appeared in glorious light at his transfiguration he was seen standing with two men. One was Moses, the other Elijah. He was the first of a long line of prophets whom God raised up to call his people to repentance. It will be our privilege today and in the next few weeks to learn from his life and his example. As we begin our meditations I want you to think for a moment about your ideal Christian. Imagine someone who is the model of godliness. What is that person like? What is true godliness? I ask you that because if you are an average church-goer I'm convinced that your model of godliness does not measure up to Moses or Paul, to Elijah or Peter, to David or John the Baptist. I find one major contrast between the modern view of the man of God and the biblical one. As I read the Bible one outstanding feature of the heroes of faith impresses me time and time again; and that feature is boldness. Courage, fearlessness, boldness. The saints of Scripture were men who roared like lions in the face of the enemies of God. When I think of Elijah I picture a rock-hard man wagging a long, bony finger in the face of a soft, pompous king. Elijah was a rugged man from the hill country of Gilead, rugged in the way he lived and the way he spoke as you will see. Not everything about Elijah is worthy of imitation, but he was a great man of God whose outstanding character quality was boldness. Today we want to see **how** Elijah was bold and then **why** he was bold.

First of all we see that Elijah was bold in that he confronted the powerful. Verse 1 of I Kings 17 leaves a great deal unsaid but it seems as if Ahab was standing out in his garden one day wondering when rain was coming when Elijah slipped past his secret service men, got right in his face and said, "Because of your idolatry Mr. King there will be no rain in Israel until I say." Now that's pretty bold I think - to speak to anyone in those terms, much less your king. Christians are often very bold when it's easy, when you address those who are weak. But it's another thing to say hard words to those who can kill you or fire you or ostracize you. But that's what Elijah did. The text doesn't say what he did after he delivered his message. He may have been dismissed as a loonie. He may have preached and run but he did preach his message to the king. You know, some people wonder if it's right for preachers to speak out on politics. There's no need to wonder - just read the

book. Moses confronted Pharaoh, Samuel reprovved Saul, Nathan rebuked David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos - all the prophets spoke out on politics and to politicians. And they did it in spite of the danger to themselves. After this first encounter between Ahab and Elijah the king determined to kill the prophet but could not find him. So, after three years Elijah went looking for Ahab. In the eyes of the king, Elijah was public enemy number one. But Elijah went to him 18:**17** *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?"* Now listen to what Elijah said back, **18** *He said, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals.* Now, what about you? Do you think you have the nerve to do that kind of thing? If you knew it was right could you confront your boss? Samuel Goldwyn once said that he wanted to be surrounded by employees who would tell him the truth, even if it costs them their jobs. Indeed, if you tell the boss what you truly think, the truth could set you free. Does the truth matter that much to you? Could you confront a sovereign ruler like Ahab? That would be tough wouldn't it? And I want you to know it was tough for Elijah. How do I know that? Because Elijah was human. James 5:17 says he had a nature like ours. Would you have been afraid? Then we can assume Elijah was to. Its only natural to resist confrontation, especially with the powerful. Elijah would have been terribly afraid - afraid of the king's power for one. He was also probably afraid of embarrassment. How would you look if you made a statement like he did and then failed to deliver? I think Elijah was a very nervous prophet, and that is why I think he was a very courageous prophet. You see, courage is not the opposite of fear. Courage means to do what is right in spite of your fear. Fear is a prerequisite for courage because to be courageous, to be bold, means to do or say what is right in spite of the risks. It means overcoming your fears.

Now that is often very difficult. Normally we see people dominated by their fears, acting in self-protective ways. One of my favorite authors, Dave Barry, in an article on the meaning of life took on the subject of creation vs. evolution. And Barry wrote this: *I have done a lot of study on both theories, and I firmly believe that the evidence supports the theory that anybody who supports either theory gets a lot of nasty mail, so I'm staying out of it. And I'll stand by this position.* That's where most of us live. We are paralyzed by our fears and are unable to speak all that God says and unable to do all that God says, especially if that involves rebuking someone with power. Why then was Elijah, a man of like nature, able to demonstrate such boldness? I offer you two answers. Answer #1: Elijah was bold because he knew he was accountable to God. Put another way, Elijah

feared God. Look at what he said to Ahab, "*As the Lord lives before whom I stand.*" "*Before whom I stand.*" It could also be rendered as "*whom I serve*" but the point is the same. Elijah was conscious that he lived as a servant of the Living Lord, and was accountable to Him. When he came and stood before Ahab he didn't see himself as standing and speaking before the king so much as he was standing and speaking before God. Do you see that? And do you see how critical that perspective is if we are going to fear God and not men? Before whom are you standing? Whom do you serve? Do you realize that you are living under the watchful eye of God? That, and that alone will make you bold like Elijah. It will make you bold like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who stood before King Nebuchadnezzar in the flesh but before God in the spirit and said, "we will not serve your gods." It will make you bold like Martin Luther who stood before the pope and said, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God. I will not recant anything. Here I stand I can do no other." "Here I stand" said Luther. Where did he stand? On the authority of Scripture yes, but in his own mind Luther was standing before something greater than a church court. He stood before the Lord of Lords. And when you realize that. When your accountability to God grips your soul you will be moved by higher motives than to please men or protect self. And I want to tell you that for all our American talk about living as free men, when we live in bondage to the opinion of others we are not really free. I love the line in Braveheart, when the hero, William Wallace, is being encouraged to betray his conscience to be spared a torturous death and he says this: *all men die. Not all men really live.* His last word in the movie is *Freedom!!* And his point is that life really becomes life when you live it under God, but free from bondage to others, either political or emotional.

Our second reason why Elijah was able to demonstrate such impressive boldness is that he knew God was with him. Again, notice his words, "*As the Lord, the God of Israel lives.*" Elijah knew that the God he served was alive and well. His servant was not acting alone. And how critical that understanding is for one called to proclaim God's truth. That was the concern of Moses - remember? He complained that he could not stand before Pharaoh, but God said "I will be with you." When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet Jeremiah said, "Lord I'm too young." God said, "Don't say that for I will be with you." And when Jesus sent out his apostles to preach the gospel what did he tell them? "I will be with you." When you do God's work you never do it alone. And like they say - one man with God is a majority. The assurance that God is with me gives power,

gives courage, gives boldness. One of my favorite proverbs in Proverbs 28:1, the verse about the wicked flee. 28:1 *The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.* 1b *the righteous are bold as a lion* Why? Because God is with the righteous.

Now, Elijah knew God was with **him** because (and this is crucial) Elijah had been with God. James 5 tells us that Elijah had prayed before he met with Ahab. Elijah had heard the word of the Lord. And it should be noted that he did not hear it in the hustle and bustle of big city life. He heard it in the hill country of Gilead. He heard it in the quiet and solitude of time spent alone with God. Before you stand before men, be on your knees before God, just as Moses came down from the mountain with God to speak to the people. That is the model to follow. I've heard it often said that a pastor has to be intimate with his people or he won't know how to speak with them but I find as well that if you're not intimate with God you won't have anything to say **to** them. For the same reason, Tozer says a pastor must never come up to or into the pulpit. He must always come down to the pulpit, coming down from the presence of the Lord. And beloved, this is very important for boldness. I can testify sincerely that what little confidence and boldness I have as a preacher, as a pastor, as a man is due to my time spent alone with God. Where do you think you can learn this kind of boldness? Where do you go for boldness lessons? Do you get this at seminary? You most assuredly do not. One of the greatest preachers I have heard is a man named Leonard Ravenhill. Ravenhill is with the Lord now, but I heard him say once that a woman came up to him after a sermon he had preached and asked, "what seminary did you go to." He replied, "Bush University." What's that she said? Bush University. The lady said, "I've never heard of that, who else went there?" He said, "Moses." Moses? Moses who?

Moses went from the Thebes Tech, where he learned all the wisdom of the Egyptians, out into the desert where one day he met a burning bush that spoke like God and it was there he learned the kind of boldness that could challenge mighty Pharaoh. Moses went from the wilderness to Pharaoh, David left his solitude as a shepherd to face Goliath. Jesus prayed alone in Gethsemane as He stood before the horror of his death. And the strength of Elijah came as well, thru his praying. When James looked for an example of a man mighty in prayer he picked Elijah. James 5:17,18 *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.* The life of Elijah, written by James, had two chapters. Chapter one was entitled, "He prayed." Chapter 2 was entitled, "He prayed again." Private prayer is the

source of public power. In prayer we nurture a fear of God that overcomes any fear of man. Daniel 11:**32b** *the people who know their God will display strength and take action.* If you want to be bold like Elijah you have to get to know the God of Elijah by spending time with him on your knees.

There are no shortcuts.(R)

And may I say that what is true of individuals is true of churches. If North Park is going to make a difference in our city this year or any other year, it will happen only if we pray and as we pray. Charles Spurgeon once said this: *The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace-ometer, and from it we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if He be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be a slothfulness in prayer.* Week by week we have prayer meetings in our church-life, we have some people who spend hours on their knees seeking the hand and face of God. But twice a year we make a special call on everyone to join us in this critical work of prayer. Our week of prayer begins in eight days. We could call it the Elijah week. It is a week to bring down the binding powers of hell and lift up the name of Jesus and the arms of his servants. It is a week for men and women with a nature like Elijah's to put aside their fears and their lusts and their laziness and earnestly plead for the grace of heaven. Andrew Bonar wrote in 1853, "*God likes to see His people shut up to this, that there is no hope but in prayer. Herein lies the church's power against the world.*"

Elijah then was a man mighty in prayer. He was able to shut up the heavens for 3 and half years. He was able to raise the dead. He was able to call fire from heaven. We all would like to do that but you should see that such power in prayer came from a life devoted to God, from a life lived in great intimacy with the Lord, and from a life sold out to His glory. In James 4:3 it says that one reason we don't get our prayers answered is that we ask with wrong motives. Consider the motives of Elijah. What motivated his praying? I can't read his heart but I can read his prayers. He asked God for a great job. No that wasn't it. He asked for a new car, a nice house, a -- no, no, no. Elijah asked God for a drought. Baseball and picnic season aside has anyone here ever asked God for a drought? Why a drought? What motivated such a request? I am convinced it was this: Elijah described himself in I Kings 19:10 as being very zealous for the Lord. He was a man hungry to see God glorified and when he saw Israel sell its soul to idolatry he wanted something to get their attention. They were looking to Baal to send them rain and Elijah said, "*As long as you do that there will be no rain.*" He said, "We'll all stand in bread lines, if we must but God will get his

glory!" Elijah was praying for the glory of God, and he was praying according to the word of God for in Deuteronomy 11:16 God said thru Moses **16,17** *Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. 17 "Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.* And don't you think this was cruel of God to make such a threat, nor was it cruel of Elijah to make such a seemingly awful request. It is no mercy to prosper in wickedness. (R) Often I have prayed for God to bring disaster on individuals in order to get their attention. I have a dear friend who told me once that he wasn't going to become a Christian because he enjoyed his sin too much - I prayed for years that his sin would backfire and break him. It is good and right to pray for God to make someone miserable in order to humble them and show them the way of eternal life. If I went through this room asking each person, what was the most profitable thing that ever occurred to you – not just some, but most of us would mention some very difficult trial, out of which we discovered the fountain of real joy and real peace. Elijah's prayer came from his love for Israel and his zeal for his God. When you pray with motives like that you may see results like this.

Now finally, I want you to see what God said to Elijah after he confronted Ahab. **17:2,3** *The word of the LORD came to him, saying, 3 "Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.* Elijah bursts on the scene like a comet and then leaves just as quickly. God says, "Hide yourself." Think about how you would receive that if you were in Elijah's place. You have your big coming out party in one verse and the next you're sent packing. Were Elijah prone to follow his instincts he probably would have launched a great preaching tour throughout the nation, or formed a new political party, or written a book called *Rainman* and hit the talk show circuit as "the man who confronted the king and dried up the land." He wanted to be a mover and a shaker and a world changer but God spoils it all by saying, "Go hide." That is tough on the flesh isn't it? Why would God say this? Possibly it was for Elijah's protection. Once Ahab realized that this ragged prophet was really doing what he said Elijah would be in big trouble. Possibly also God's removal of Elijah was another judgment on the nation. They would not only have a drought of rain but also a drought of God's word. When God has plans to punish a people he withdraws his servants. He may dry up the land or dry up their souls. Another reason for this order for Elijah is that God had some more developing of Elijah to accomplish. The prophet was sent away on a personal growth retreat. God was preparing Elijah for even greater

things to come and God's favorite place for molding men appears to be the wilderness, the Bush universities where the distractions are few.

We've seen already the connection between intimate prayer with God and public power or personal boldness. Consider now what that means to you. And consider how this strange order to Elijah fits with your needs. Does God want you to go hide yourself? If not for three years for three weeks, or three days, or even three hours. It concerns me that the modern Christian definition of retreat is to go to a conference with 100s of people and listen to sermons. There's a place for that, but I believe we may be better off to go to some brook all alone. Take your Bible and spend a few days with God. If I could write out a prescription for the health of your soul this would be it for so many of you, "Go hide yourself." Go to the brook or the beach or the mountains but get alone and do business with God. Get away from all those things that compete for your attention. Get away from the voices of criticism and the voices of praise so that you can hear His voice. I know this sounds difficult. You would rather do something more sacrificial and more public. Often, it's easier to obey in public than private but this is what we need. To get out of the rat race. Get away from the job. Get away from the church. Yes, get away from the children. When you come back you'll be a better worker, a better minister, a better parent. There is a good chance you are more of the activist by nature and need some balance, some quiet time to find our power by connecting with the Eternal Spirit in a place of solitude. (pause) Most of you listening to me are thinking, "yea, he's right." Will you be one of the rare ones who actually takes the time? Would you make a commitment to add to your life the disciplines of solitude and private prayer? One of the results will be an increase in that precious and rare quality of holy boldness. Let's speak with the Father....