

CWA Old Testament Lesson - Pentecost 12 - August 31, 2014 - Kieth Bernard Kuschel

Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church - 377 E Lincoln Trail Blvd— Radcliff, KY 40160

I Kings 19:9-18

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

15 The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

Feeling all alone?

What makes us feel that way?

Are we really?

Three Only's

I. I am only a Christian

A. Elijah's situation

1. Jezebel's Baal worship
2. God's response
3. No change

B. Elijah's action

1. His work was worthless
2. Quit

C. Us

1. Can't fix morality
2. Can't fix opposition to God
3. Can't change laws

II. I am the only Christian around

A. Elijah

1. Only one left
2. Discouraged

B. God's response

1. 7,000 believers
2. Not obvious

C. Us

1. "Nobody....left
2. Discouragement Paul, Jesus
3. Joy over believers
4. Holy spirit leads people to believe

III. I only as a Christian can do this

A. God's orders

1. Don't quit (audio visual)
2. Spelled out
3. Preach Law
4. Preach Gospel

B. Us

1. Preach Law and Gospel
2. We have to do this
3. Nobody else can
4. Lose/make friends

IA1 Elijah was a prophet when Ahab was king. Ahab's wife Jezebel, whose father was a priest of the false god Baal, introduced Baal worship into Israel. She appointed priests and prophets of Baal. She set up temples and idols of Baal everywhere. She persecuted and killed the priests and prophets of the true God. Many Israelites worshiped Baal just to stay alive, not because they had abandoned the true God.

2 God responded by having His prophet Elijah announce that there would be no rain in Israel because Israel had rejected the LORD, the provider of everything, including rain and crops. Elijah hid from Jezebel during the 3 ½ yr drought. Then he came back and challenged the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The LORD sent fire to eat up Elijah's sacrifice, the stones, wood, water and dirt. Baal didn't do anything because he doesn't exist. The prophets of Baal, proven to be promoters of a nobody, were killed.

3 Since this incident proved that the LORD was true, and therefore, Israel should all be worshiping the LORD again, Elijah announced that there would be rain again. Jezebel got so angry that she immediately began to hunt down Elijah. Elijah fled. That's where verse nine picks up.

B1 And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." Elijah was here because he had concluded that all of his work as a prophet had accomplished nothing. He had preached against idolatry. Jezebel the queen overrode him with her power. He announced the drought. It came. The people didn't notice. He won the challenge on Mt. Carmel. His life was in jeopardy.

2 He decided to quit. If nothing changes people's sinful actions, why try? Why not go into exile and isolation. After all, what could he do against the queen? He was only a believer.

C1 That is an easy attitude to fall into, isn't it. When we get overwhelmed by the sinful actions and attitudes all around us, we all say, "What can I do? I'm only a Christian." When our society insists that there are no moral absolutes, when everybody decides for him or herself what is right and wrong, what can I do in view of overwhelming opposition from the majority? After all, I am not one of the leading lights in society. I am not a modern day philosopher. I am only a Christian.

2 When our society's educational philosophy leaves God out of the picture, when we are told humans, not God, are the pinnacle of the development of existing beings, what can I do in view of overwhelming opposition from the majority? After all, I am not an expert in education. I am not a developmental scientist. I am only a Christian.

3 When the laws of our land are reflecting the will of God less and less, and when individual freedoms are exercised in the name of liberty, what can I do in view of overwhelming opposition from the majority? After all, I am not a Supreme court lawyer. I am not a civil rights lawyer. I am only a Christian. We all know how Elijah felt.

IIA1 Elijah also concluded: “I am the only one left.” Why did he think he was the only believer left? The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword.

2 On the basis of that Elijah had concluded that everybody else in society was an unbeliever. That made him very discouraged. Why continue to live if there were no more believers to serve anyway?

B1 God told Elijah that his conclusions were wrong. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.” These people had not abandoned the true God.

2 Elijah could not tell that, however. Because of their fear of Jezebel they were keeping their faith private. They were quietly worshiping the Lord at home. They were secretly teaching their children the truth about God. In unassuming ways they were insuring that the truth would not be destroyed by Jezebel.

C1 Try these quotes on for size. “Nobody believes in Jesus anymore. Nobody goes to church anymore. Nobody lives godly lives anymore. Nobody thinks he is a sinner anymore. Nobody believes in hell anymore. Nobody believes God punishes people anymore. I think I am the only believer left.” Who is talking here? Elijah or you.

2 When we start thinking that way, it can only lead to discouragement as it did for Elijah. What would have happened if St. Paul would have thought that way? After a few and then a lot rejected what he was teaching, he would have quit. He would not have continued to travel around the Mediterranean world and founded all those churches. What if Jesus would have thought that way? After so many people rejected His claim to be the Messiah, he would have quit.

3 Instead of judging hearts, which we can't do anyway, and instead of complaining that there are so few Christians around, how about rejoicing about the 7,000? Isn't it amazing that anyone is a Christian? Isn't it amazing that people have been led by the Holy Spirit to believe things that people ordinarily wouldn't believe. A God who demands perfection from people who can't produce it. That's unfair. A God who sends sinners to hell because they do what comes naturally. He must be a bully. A God who gives forgiveness with no strings attached. There has to be a catch somewhere. A man who is also God. That makes no sense. A God who gives holiness and eternal life as a gift. Not the way things are ordinarily done. That's what we all think on our own

4 But the Holy Spirit has conquered our minds and made us realize that God's foolishness is eternal truth. We believe the Law and the Gospel to be God's message to us. We believe we are sinners. We believe we deserve hell. We believe Jesus' blood washes away our sins. We believe death and hell no longer threaten us. We believe that we are covered with Jesus' holiness. We believe we are going to live forever because of Jesus' resurrection. Many others have been led by the same Holy Spirit to believe the same thing. When it seems as if we are the only believers around, and we are tempted to want to give up, we need to come to a section of the Bible like this one and be reminded by the Lord, that it is not so.

III A1 God's answer to Elijah was: "Go back. Don't give up. Don't quit. Don't ever think your work as a believer isn't accomplishing anything. Don't ever think you are the only believer left." But, God didn't put that answer into words. He put that answer into an audio-visual display. He let Elijah see the destruction caused by a great wind and an earthquake and fire. Then He let Elijah hear a gentle whisper.

2 Elijah didn't get it. That is obvious because he gave the same answer to God's question which he had given before. So God spelled out for Elijah what He wanted him to do. He wanted Elijah to anoint Hazael King of Syria. God would use Hazael to punish wicked Israel. He wanted Elijah to anoint Jehu King over Israel. God would use Jehu to destroy the godless house of Ahab and Jezebel. God wanted Elijah to anoint Elisha to be the next prophet in Israel. His main task would be to announce God's judgment against Israel.

3 God's judgment and His threatened punishment against sin had been Elijah's message as a prophet of God. The wind, the earthquake and the fire in the audio visual display were symbols of this destruction that results from God's anger against sin. God was saying to Elijah: "Continue to preach the Law. Continue to threaten destruction. Continue to point out wickedness. Continue to point out Israel's rejection of the truth. Do this again and again even though it seems to do not good." This was important work. God was sending Elijah because only a believer could do it.

4 What about the 7,000? What was Elijah to bring to these believers? Was he to blow, shake and burn them with the Law too? No. God was in the still small voice. Elijah knew it. Elijah was also to speak the gentle, soft whisper of the Gospel. He was to comfort the faithful with the words and promises of God. He was to point out that their sins were forgiven through the Promised One. That all the problems of persecution by the ungodly leaders of their country would be relieved by the Lord. If not before, at least when He would take them into His presence forever. God was sending him back because that message of comfort is such an important message. God was sending Elijah because only a believer could do this.

B1 Every one of us has been given the same mandate by God that He gave to Elijah. We are destroy people's spiritual self-orientation based on their pride, opposition to God, and sinful inclinations with the blowing, shaking, and burning of the Law. We are to comfort crushed sinners with the gentle whisper of the Good News that Jesus' blood washes away sin, His death rescues us from punishment, His life covers us with holiness, and His resurrection gives us eternal life.

2 What if it does no good? What if they continue to live in sin? What if they continue to say that the life, death and resurrection of someone 2,000 years ago is not relative to their present existence. If we become discouraged and give up, nothing will be accomplished, because this is something that only believers can do.

3 In spite of being regarded as troublemakers, naggers, holier than thou people, we must repeat the will of God again and again. In spite of intellectual and active persecution, our job doesn't change. We bring God's truth to people. We apply it to situations in life. Since God's people are the only ones who know God's truth, this job can only be done by Christians.

4 It is true that sometimes we run the risk of losing friends by applying God's truth in an active way. It is also true that those who will have been driven to Jesus the Christ as their Savior for the forgiveness, holiness and eternal life that He wants them to have will be our friends forever. That is joy that only believers will have because we did a task that only we can do. Lord Jesus, when I feel as if I am only a Christian, or the only Christian, motivate me to keep doing what only I as a Christian can do.