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1 Kings 16:29—17:6 – *Elijah and God's Word*

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1 Kings 16:29—17:6

²⁹ In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. ³⁰ Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. ³¹ He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. ³² He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. ³³ Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

³⁴ In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun.

17 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

² Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: ³ "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴ You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."

⁵ So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

King Ahab is one bad dude.

But to understand this...

We need to situate ourselves in Israel's history.

We're at a point in Israel's history...

When it's split into 2 kingdoms:

The Northern Kingdom of Israel;
And the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

But it wasn't always divided like this.

King David ruled with a heart committed and faithful to God.

He ruled the United Kingdom of Israel...

Before it was split.

David's son Solomon starts his rule off faithfully—

He basically does everything right.

First, Solomon asks God for wisdom to rule God's people Israel.

Then, Solomon builds an immaculate temple for the Lord.

Solomon walks closely with the Lord and is blessed...

Until he doesn't.

The wealth, fame, and women that Solomon acquires leads his heart astray...

And Solomon turns his heart to follow other gods.

God sees this and says:

“King Solomon, you aren't being faithful to me.”

“You aren't walking according to my decrees...”

“So I'm going to take the kingdom...”

“And I'm going to divide it up.” (1 Kings 11)

This sets off a string of rulers of Israel (North) and Judah (South)...

And what you see is that these kings aren't the godliest of men. (understatement!)

If you picture something like the Olympic podium—

The place where people receive medals—

Think of Israel's kings standing on the podium.

This isn't for high achievement in service/faithfulness to God...

It's the opposite...

Kings who turned away.

Standing in first place—

As king who turned away from God—

Is Solomon, remember.

Not too long after this though...

Solomon gets pushed off the top step by King Jeroboam.

King Jeroboam makes 2 golden calves and puts them before Israel:

“Here are your gods, O Israel...” he says...

“The gods who brought you out of Egypt.” (1 Kings 12:28)

Jeroboam sets up shrines and festivals to offer sacrifices...

Maybe to Yahweh...

But more likely to foreign gods.

There’s a mixing of religions going on.

Jeroboam stands on the top pedestal...

And becomes the gold standard for unfaithful kings.

The next kings that come in the line are also unfaithful—

They do evil in the eyes of the Lord—

Jockeying for first place in this prestigious “competition.”

It doesn’t look like things can get much worse than Jeroboam...

Then Ahab comes on the scene...

One really bad dude.

A new podium is built for Ahab...

A podium that thrusts him hundreds of feet above Jeroboam and all previous kings.

Hands down Ahab takes the prize for most unfaithful king.

The actions of Jeroboam are repeated and then built upon.

Ahab marries princess Jezebel...

A passionate worshiper of Baal.

Jezebel doesn’t say:

“Hey hon, it’s okay if we worship my god and your god...”—

Baal and Yahweh.

She says, “We’re worshipping Baal, and only Baal...”

“And we’re going to get rid of every other god.”

Ahab goes on to serve Baal.

Ahab worships Baal.

He builds a temple for Baal.

One commentator said:

If Jeroboam’s rule over the people is like drinking polluted water—

You know, a little dirty...boil order in effect—

Then Ahab’s rule is like sucking raw sewage.

“Ahab is pumping raw paganism into Israel.” (Dale Davis)

If you’re picturing this as a very dark time in Israel’s history...

You’d be right...

To an extent.

If we were living in those times the sun still came up...

In fact, it wasn’t gloomy in the market place at all.

Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel from Sidon on the coast opened Israel up to world trade markets—

The economy was booming...

People were prospering.

We’re told that Ahab ruled for 22 years...

Which means peace and stability.

There wasn’t the dark threat of foreign invaders or wars...

The kingdom was at peace.

From the outside things looked great...

Peace and prosperity under Ahab.

But a dark cloud is about to settle over Israel as her leaders go against the word of the Lord...

Whether the king and the people of Israel know it or not.

I wonder if that resonates with us today.

When we talk about priorities in life it seems to be comfort/security in first place...

And then everything else.

I want to have my stomach and bank account full—

My spouse and my kids in place...

My career goals met—

And then we'll address the God-piece.

Following God and our commitment to God may fall under that “everything else” category...

We put other things before God.

Bad things *and* good things.

Idols are anything we put before God.

Ahab's marriage to Jezebel looked good politically and economically—

It was going to bring security and prosperity to the land—

Even though it would bring about apostacy...

Turning away from God.

Our close friendships or relationship—

Our business dealings or other desires—

Does it look good from a comfort perspective?

Does it look good from a “fulfilling my life goals” perspective?

Does it look good from a “feels good” and pleasure perspective?

Does it look good from a “financial security” perspective?

Does it look good from a societal and cultural perspective?

Maybe on the outside it looks good...

But maybe it doesn't look too great from an “according to God's Word” perspective?

Ahab's biggest problem—

The thing that exalts him to 1st place in the disobedient kings in Israel's history—

Is that he turns away from God's word.

He turns away from God's clear command to keep God first...

Putting other gods before the true God...

And with it bringing the people of Israel along.

For Israel, God's chosen people—

Chosen to be blessed and to bless the world—

It looks like Baalism has won out...

It looks like Yahweh and his people are pushed to the side for good...

That Satan is on the throne and that evil has the last word. (Dale Davis)

Then, as if out of nowhere, God steps in.

After years and years of deplorable leadership (200 years!)—

In a sudden turn of events—

God says, "Enough."

And by his word, God confronts the evil governing his people.

Onto the scene God sends Elijah.

We don't know much about Elijah.

We're not given Elijah's history:

Where he went to prophecy school...

His call into vocational prophecy...

Or how he knew to go to Ahab.

We're not told anything significant about him...

All we have is this abrupt confrontation...

Elijah standing before the king.

But in Elijah, we see everything that Ahab is not.

Elijah's name in Hebrew means, "My God is Jehovah."

Ahab is carrying on with the gods of Canaan and Phoenicia—

Baal and Asherah—

And in steps this man whose very name calls out Ahab's sin:

“Ahab, King of Israel, you worship Baal...”

“Well, my God is the Lord.”

And it’s not just lip service either.

Elijah actually lives by God’s word.

Not only does he follow the Lord, boldly confronting the ruler of the land...

Elijah withdraws to a remote area in obedience to God’s word.

Maybe God is trying to protect his prophet—

Saving him for another day rather than having Ahab and Jezebel kill him—

But more than that it is God saying:

Ahab, “I’m withdrawing from you.”

“Any help, provision, sustenance, or word you’ve been receiving from me...”

“It’s gone.”

“You’re going to have to depend on your gods to provide for you now.”

Ahab has been depending on the economy, his political alliances, and fortifying Israel’s borders...(16:34)

He’s been turning to Baal and Asherah for help...

Depending on and turning to everything *but* God and God’s word.

Elijah on the other hand is now dependent on God to provide for him in a desolate land...

Which God does through ravens.

Ahab has broken the covenant Israel had with God—

He has been worshiping and serving other gods—

And now he’s going to be punished.

God is going to put an end to the reign of evil...

And just so Ahab knows that it’s God...

He has Elijah tell Ahab how it’s going to come about.

Following the covenant curses for breaking God’s covenant in Deuteronomy...

Elijah predicts a drought.

God is not indecisive or soft on sin.

He may be exceedingly patient—

He allows Israel to experience 200 years of negligent leadership—

But God does not let evil slide.

Those things and people that cause pain;

Those things and people that cause suffering;

Those things and people that pull us away from God...

They *will* be confronted...

They *will* be dealt with.

God confronts evil.

It's in his plan and in his promise to gain complete victory over sin and evil.

It's in God's plan to destroy evil and redeem those things of his that are broken.

We see this in Elijah in our passage...

But we see this most fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

Just as God sent Elijah with his word to confront Ahab...

God sends the Word made flesh to confront the powers that oppose him...

The powers that hold us in bondage.

And it's in the cross of Christ where a fatal blow to evil is delivered.

The evil powers working through the religious leaders and people...

Send Jesus to a death by crucifixion.

He is laid in a tomb and left to rot.

But God's power works through Christ...

And Jesus raised back to life on the 3rd day.

Because he is raised from the dead it means that:

Jesus defeated death;

He defeated the powers of sin that put him there;

And he defeated the power of evil.

Christ is victorious.

Christ has triumphed over evil—

Not just in *his* day and age—

But for all time!

The Word made flesh goes to battle with the principalities and powers of evil...

And he comes out on top.

So, what can we take away from this reading and its link to Christ?

Where does this meet us in our lives today?

First, I think it calls us to examine our relationship to God's Word.

Ahab's problem was that he distanced himself from God's Word—

He wasn't following God's will for his life—

So God distanced himself from Ahab.

God's Word to us has never been more accessible.

We have a couple copies on our shelves at home...

And of course, we have it on our phones and computers.

It has never been more accessible...

But it has never been easier to dismiss.

We are busy and have trouble setting aside time for a slow thoughtful reading of God's word.

I encourage you to take 10 minutes a day...

Find your favorite, most comfortable chair...

And grab a Bible.

Read a passage from a book you're familiar with—

Philippians, John, a story from the OT.

This is God's ordinary means of speaking to his people.

God uses his word to tell us about who he is;

He uses his word to tell us who we are to him;

His word comforts us and gives us strength...

But it also corrects and challenges us...

It guides our steps.

We spend time in God's word because this is a way of spending time with *the* Word.

This is a way of intentionally connecting with Christ...

The reason that we have our existence...

The one who provides for our peace and life.

So, take time this week to ask yourself about your relationship to God's word...

The Bible and Jesus Christ.

This passage also gives us hope.

Picture yourself as one of God's faithful during the reign of Ahab.

Your whole life there have been evil kings on the throne—

And you thought things couldn't get worse—

But Ahab has proved you wrong.

Wouldn't the appearance of God's prophet encourage you?

Wouldn't it give you hope that God sees and knows your situation? (Dale Davis)

When you heard that Elijah confronted the king...

Wouldn't your faith be strengthened knowing that God confronts evil.

It's the same today.

It doesn't feel like things can get much worse—

With the pandemic, economy, natural disasters, and sickness—

But they probably can...

And they might.

But even if they do...

We can have hope knowing that God sees.

God knows the position that his people are in...

And God cares.

God is not soft on evil.

He may be patient...

But he is not soft.

God will deal with things in his timing...

So find hope in that.

Finally, maybe you're like Ahab...

And you've given yourself over to things that are against God's will.

Maybe you're in bondage to sin and cannot break the chains.

Know that in Jesus Christ there is power.

In myself there is weakness and a tendency to submit to sin.

But in Christ there is power.

He is the one who is victorious.

He has already conquered sin and death.

And he says come to me!

Don't try to come to me fixed and healed...

It'll never happen...

Only I can do that.

Come to me broken and needy.

Turn to me and I'll forgive your sins...

I'll give you my strength and my life...

I'll put my Spirit inside of you.

And that's what we do in this meal.

We come to him.

We remember and participate in *his* strength...

We experience Christ's presence with us in a spiritual way.

[LORD'S SUPPER]