

1st Kings 20: 26-43; “The Sons of the Prophets” Message # 14 in the series –
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, A Bible Study conducted
by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 29th, 2017,
for those gathered at his home.

The last time that we were together around this passage, I said to you that none of the prophets of the sons of the prophets are mentioned by name in this chapter. I believe that this was done for a reason, and that reason is so that we will look more closely at the office of the prophet itself and not be distracted by the personalities of particular men. This evening I want to set forth to you the important duties of an Old Testament prophet, duties which in certain ways carry over into the New Testament and are still the duties of a New Testament pastor-teacher. This study will be of benefit to the people of God who should support their pastor in regard to the truths that he preaches, and be able to recognize a faithful man in the ministry when he is exercising his office and gift in the way that God would have him to do it. What are the doctrines which the God of Israel would have the sons of the prophets preach, so that both kings and other prophets of the Lord would know what the will of their God was, and be wise? Well, 1st of all – God would have those who preach on His behalf to correct all men’s false notions of Himself. (verses 26-30) 2nd – God would have those who preach on His behalf to declare to all men a right doctrine of the brotherhood of man. (verses 31-34) And 3rd – God would have those who preach on His behalf to speak plainly about Justice and Judgment. (verses 35-43)

1st of all – God would have those who preach on His behalf to correct all men’s false notions of Himself. (verses 26-30)

“Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘Because the Syrians have said, ‘The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys,’ therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” The first false notion that needed to be corrected was that God is not omnipresent in all places. This was the second time that Ben-Hadad and the Syrians decided to fight with Israel. They had been slaughtered by the king of Israel and the young leaders of the provinces which went out of the city with the army which followed them, it says in verse 19. But, as we read in verse 22, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, ‘Go strengthen yourself; take note and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you. And why would they do this, after they had been slaughtered already? Verse 23 tells us. “then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, “Their gods are gods of the hills.” “Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, then surely we will be stronger than they.”

After giving Ahab more good counsel from the Lord in verses 24-26 on how he should take away his tributary kings (32 of them) away; those who had been his chief commanders in his former army in the first victory, and put in their place his own captains who would be able to fight better in the battle that was coming, he is told by a man of God in verse 28 that because the Syrians had said –“The Lord God is God of the hills and not God of the valleys”, therefore, “I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” Now we should ask ourselves a question here. Can God prove Himself to believers in the great battles of their life? He most certainly can. I think that oftentimes we think that the outcomes of wars are a matter of men striving with men. But that is not the case at all. If a nation wins a war it is of the Lord. If a nation loses a war it is of the Lord. But for Christians there is always something to learn from the providence of God. We need to see that God is integrally involved in the outcome.

This is what men of God, even pastor-teachers in the New Testament are to declare to both unbelievers and believers alike on God’s behalf – You are unworthy of salvation and of being delivered from your sins which you have loved, but I am willing to deliver you from this multitude

of sins; not only for your sake, but for the sake of My great name. That is the way that people need to think when they hear the gospel. It doesn't matter how many sins that you may be guilty of, or how long you have continued in them, if you will repent of those sins, and turn to God and have faith in the promise of Christ; that is Christ having died for your sins, and risen again from the dead on your behalf, then you shall be saved. It is not a maybe; it is a definite certainty. So, all men should realize that our God is not simply one among many true Gods, but that He is the only true and living God who alone is all-powerful and present in every place to behold the evil and the good. These truths must be proclaimed by every man who would be faithful to his calling as a pastor and all the Christian people in that congregation. It is a mighty witness to unbelieving sinful people when these truths are declared, and the enemies of the Lord among men; those who hold to false gods, are and will be, very practically overthrown in their thinking, by God's delivering His people. These deliverances are wrought on behalf of His people, those who will trust in His promises and power.

Further, it is a mighty witness also to weak and vacillating men like Ahab, that they should repent of their sins when they see the mighty power of God demonstrated on their behalf. Ahab had no excuse for not repenting of his unbelief, and his sins in worshipping other gods besides Jehovah. This was the second defeat of Syrians in battle. God had simply given it him; this wicked man. This is the same reason God shows His goodness to wicked men. It is so that they would repent. (Romans 2: 4-10) Ahab saw it all unfold, and knew God's part in it. When the battle was joined, the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day," it says in verse 29. What is even more astounding is what it says in verse 30: "But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left." "And Ben-Hadad fled into an inner chamber."

Ahab knew all of this, and yet he does not see the truth of the sovereignty of God; His righteous rule over all men to do with them, for them, or to them, what He wants to do. This, however, a faithful pastor will declare, and not let people come to false conclusions about this important subject. If God is God, then all things are possible with Him both in terms of the destruction of men, and the salvation of men. Ahab should have fallen on his face and confessed that the Lord was his God, many times. But he was senseless and dead to these mighty and wonderful truths. In his fallen, sinful heart there was no praise or thanksgiving of God. In his heart, there was no alarm that he might be doing something dreadfully wrong by not openly acknowledging God as His God and repenting of the idolatries of his heart. But the sons of the prophets were faithful in respect to their ministry to him.

2nd – God would have those who preach on His behalf to declare to all men a right doctrine of the brotherhood of man. (verses 31-34)

"And Ben-Hadad's servants said to him, 'Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.' "Please, let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads, and go out to the king of Israel perhaps he will spare your life." "So they wore sackcloth around their waists and put ropes around their heads, and they came to the king of Israel and said, 'Your servant Ben-Hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" "And Ahab said to them, "Is he still alive?" "He is my brother." Now this would appear at first sight to have been a good thing that Ahab did; showing mercy to his enemy in the way that he did. Does not Christ say, "Love your enemies", and "pray for those who spitefully use you"? Does he not enjoin upon all of His followers the commands to show mercy and kindness in relation to all men? Matthew 5: 43-45 – "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust." Why shouldn't have Ahab shown mercy to these men in the way that he did?

Well, the reason that he should not have is because they Ben-Hadad was the declared enemy of God, a man who blasphemed God's name, and whom God had devoted to destruction, even as He had Agag, the king of the Amalekites. You remember how king Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and he was unwilling to utterly destroy them. "But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed". Why? Because Saul was more concerned to listen to the people than he was to listen to God's express commandments. In Saul's case, he "turned back from following God". In Ahab's case, he only did the Lord's will when it was politically expedient for him. He thought that it would be personally and politically advantageous to him to use Ben-Hadad's present position of weakness to make himself look better. He thought that showing mercy to Ben-Hadad, and calling him brother would win him to his side in matters of trade and politics. In other words, he did not care about God's will or His commandments and expectations. But he did not understand that this was not a personal matter; it was a public matter of justice in the sight of God.

Some people have a wrong view of the brotherhood of man. They believe more in the philosophic Declaration of Independence than they do in any word from the Bible. The Declaration of Independence says this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Let us ask the question whether this statement is true Biblically. We need to understand that God did not create all men equal in their natural endowments. Some are simple, others are more intelligent. Some have skills and abilities which others do not possess. But the statement is true in this respect, that God has endowed all with the desire which is seen by many as a right; that they should be able to pursue Life, Liberty, and Happiness. And all thinking people want government to establish and protect these important pursuits and qualities of life. But people can hold these truths to be self-evident and not want to do God's will as it is laid out in the Bible. What is not generally acknowledged is that all men come into the world as sinners because of Adam's sin. All men are equal before God in justice. All men are guilty of many sins before God, but God does not, and cannot coddle sin in any person. Nor does He choose to save all people from their sins. Sinful man believes that if God shows mercy to some, that He should mercy to all. Sinful man further believes that every other man is his brother, and in one way, he is right. We are all descended from Adam, and in the natural realm we are brothers.

Cain said – "Am I my brother's keeper?" And yet, he was covering up for his sin of murder that he committed in murdering his brother Abel. Ahab called Ben-Hadad his brother, but he had ulterior motives of selfish control and a sinfully independent spirit which would manipulate Ben-Hadad and the Syrians to his own supposed advantage. But God could not bless it. There is such a thing as a false concept of human brotherhood, where everyone is forced to accept sin as equal with righteousness, and selfishness as equal with generosity. The only place where true righteous brotherhood exists is among the elect people of God, both Old Testament and New. And the reason for this is that it is only God who can establish such righteous brotherhood by and through His Son, Jesus Christ. True unity and brotherhood are brought about by the Spirit of God in relation to each man's faith in God's promise of salvation and His redemptive plans for His people. Even though Ahab was the king of Israel, he was not one of the true people of God, and therefore he calls Ben-Hadad his brother. But both of them were sinners in the sight of God. Neither had any desire to know God's ways.

3rd – God would have those who preach on His behalf to speak plainly about Justice and Judgment. (verses 35-43)

"Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor by the word of the Lord, 'Strike me, please.' "And the man refused to strike him." "Then he said to him, 'Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, surely, as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you.'" "And

as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him.” “And he found another man, and said, ‘Strike me, please.’” “So the man struck him, inflicting a wound.” “Then the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the road, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.” Now, what was not taken notice of by Ahab, was immediately revealed to this “certain prophet”. And having the word of the Lord given to him, he did not delay to do what he knew the Lord wanted him to do. He said to one of his neighbor prophets by the word of the Lord, “Strike me, please.” And the man refused to do it, and as an immediate consequence, the word of the Lord came to the first prophet to give to the second prophet this word; that because he had not obeyed the voice of the Lord, surely as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you.”

Now why did all this take place? Because there was a faithful prophet who was not going to turn back from preaching God’s word to Ahab and there was an unfaithful prophet who would not obey what God had shown him he should do. The faithful prophet would show Ahab what God wanted him to show to Ahab; that Ben-Hadad deserved because of his great sins to be struck down. And yet the second prophet would not strike the first prophet to give him the wound that Ahab would see when he came to him. And so, he himself would be eaten by a lion. See how it is that men can pity other men in their sins when they should be willing to help show them their faults and sins. They can preach – love your neighbor, but they will overlook righteousness and justice and the judgment of God. They will love the sinner by accepting his sin. But they will not be able to faithfully preach the gospel. See how they would act like Peter did with Jesus, when Jesus told him that He (Jesus) must go to the cross. Peter took the Lord aside and rebuked him and said to him – “Far be it from You, Lord,” to do this thing. But Jesus had to turn and rebuke him and say – “Get behind Me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on heavenly things, but on earthly things.” (the interests of men) People with this mindset need to be corrected because they do not want to see any preacher suffer for the sake of righteousness, and so they will not join in his attempts to support his ministry in a way that would help bring conviction of sin to the ungodly.

This first prophet’s obedience may be compared to Christ, who was willing to be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. A true man of God will show others good illustrations of what sinful men ought to do in obedience to God’s word. He will show them how he is willing to suffer in order that others may know where they have fallen short. He will preach of justice and judgment plainly. But it will begin with himself. He will pray the prayer of Psalm 141: 5 – “Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness.” “And let him reprove me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it.” “For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.” And so we see that the righteous 3rd prophet did strike the first prophet, inflicting a wound. The wise man of God realizes that it was his sins which caused Jesus to go to the cross for him, and so he is willing to suffer, if necessary, in order to bring the word of God to those whom he is sent to.

The first prophet went to confront Ahab, wounded, having disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. And as the king passed by, he cried out to the king confronting him with a message of himself as a man entrusted with guard duty over an enemy soldier. However he confess that as he was busy here and there, the man escaped and was gone. The king told him that his judgment would be just according to his unfaithfulness in the line of duty. And the prophet took the bandage from his eyes and the king recognized him as one of the prophets. And the prophet said to him, “Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.” “So,” it says, “the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria.” No repentance, no conviction of sin, no opening of his eyes to his awful plight, but the prophet was faithful in his preaching to him God’s justice and judgment.

I will close by reminding you that even though Ben-Hadad was a wicked man, yet he and his servants knew the language of human repentance. They came to the place where they desperately wanted Ahab to show them mercy. They are a good example to all penitent sinners. His servants said to him in verse 31 – Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful

kings.” Even so, God is merciful to sinners in Jesus Christ who is the King of Glory. So they wore sackcloth around their waists and put ropes around their heads and went to the king of Israel. Even so, if sinners will acknowledge their sins and come to Christ, the true King of Israel, they will find mercy. They prayed the prayer that sinners ought to pray for salvation – “Please let us live”. And although Ahab was wrong to show them mercy, Jesus Christ’s having suffered and died is the basis of every penitent sinner receiving mercy and grace. He will according to the will and purpose of God say to all such: “Is he still alive?” That is – “Has he been made alive by my grace?” “Then he is My brother.” And Christ will take you up into His chariot and restore all that was lost to you by your unfaithfulness. And you will be forever grateful to the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. Poor Ahab could only show pity for selfish reasons. But Jesus shows pity because He was struck and wounded so that you could see and live.