

## **Courage Is Doing What God Commands**

1 Kings 17:2-7

June 24, 2018

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What is particularly notable about the courage of those who are lions for the Cause of Jesus Christ is their obedience to the commands of the Lord. There is no biblical courage where there is no obedience to the Lord's commandments. What is there to be courageous about when one who professes Christ is simply following the crowd or being pulled by the world to imitate it and to conform to it? Anyone can follow the crowd and walk the broad road—courage is walking the narrow road. It is only when there is loving obedience to God's good and holy law before family, friends, and co-workers that courage is evidenced.

Where is biblical courage when you follow the world or the majority to please them or follow them to have their approval? Biblical courage is fearing the living God more than you fear any man by obeying Him regardless of the consequences—it is living out what you profess.

Elijah (the lion of the covenant) did not obey the will and commandments of the Lord because it was easy, convenient, or comfortable to him, or because it was pleasing to the king, queen, or the vast majority of those in Israel. He did so because his confidence was not in man, but in the living God. He lived in the presence of God (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah did not know there were 7,000 who yet served Jehovah in Israel (1 Kings 19:18). His faith was evidenced in Almighty God by standing with the Lord and by loving Jehovah God and His truth even if it meant he stood alone. Biblical courage is always revealed in loving and obeying God's commandments. Knowledge is not courage—applying the truth is courage. Cowardice is always revealed in taking the easy and comfortable way out in compromising and disobeying God's commandments.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are: (1) The Command of the Lord to Elijah (1 Kings 17:2-3); (2) The Promise of the Lord to Elijah (1 Kings 17:4); (3) The Provision of the Lord for Elijah (1 Kings 17:5-7).

### **I. The Command of the Lord to Elijah (1 Kings 17:2-3).**

A. Elijah (the lion of the covenant) is introduced in 1 Kings 17:1 with a conjunction "And", as if to say that Elijah was commissioned to prophesy against all that was revealed in 1 Kings 16:30-33.

B. Elijah demonstrated his courage as a man of God by his obedience to God's command. First, in declaring before Ahab there will be no dew or rain for years (1 Kings 17:1). This could have cut his life short immediately. We so fear offending man that we will compromise the truth rather than live it before man. Second, in heeding the command of the Lord to go and hide himself by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:2).

1. Some might be tempted to minimize the obedience of Elijah by saying, "If God spoke to me supernaturally, I would obey Him." But that is just the point. God has spoken supernaturally to you in Scripture. If you will not obey God's commandments found therein, you will not obey even if He spoke in an audible voice. For you see, the issue is not how God chooses to reveal His will (whether by Scripture or by an audible voice), the issue is His absolute authority and your humble submission to God's authority. If you will not acknowledge God's authority in Scripture, the darkness in your mind will simply make an excuse why you need not acknowledge God's authority in an audible voice. The Jewish leaders said to Jesus, "Come down from the cross and we will believe you are the Son of God". And yet when they knew from the soldiers that Jesus was raised from the dead, they made up a lie because they refused to submit to His authority (Luke 16:31).

2. If Elijah had disobeyed and run away from the Lord in fear or in rebellion (as did Jonah), would the Lord have given Elijah a fresh, new word of the Lord? God did not let Jonah off the hook when he disobeyed, but brought him back to the original word to go to Nineveh before Jonah received more insight and

revelation from the Lord. Dear ones, one reason God continues to take you, His beloved children, through the same or similar trying relationships and circumstances in your family or at work is because you have not yet obeyed Him and honored Him in what you are facing. God will move you along at His pace, but first learn to obey Him and learn contentment where He has you. If you want “the word of the LORD” (Scripture or Christ) to abide in your life, you must welcome Him by your loving obedience.

C. God’s commands to Elijah are stated in 1 Kings 17:3.

1. “Get thee hence.” Elijah’s ministry was just beginning—he had prophesied before the king. God could have blessed that word from Elijah to Ahab’s repentance (as God did with the prophecy of Jonah before the king in Nineveh). But here we see how the Lord does not usually take His servants to the top immediately. There are delays and detours that God introduces in order to build your trust in Him, to humble your pride, to sanctify your love for Him and obedience to Him above all that is in this world (John 14:15). The delays and detours are designed by God. Do not grow weary under them or listen to the lie of the enemy that God has forgotten you or forsaken you. Before you can lead you must follow. Before you can govern, you must submit. Before you can teach, you must learn. Before you reign with Christ, you must suffer with Christ. This is the ordinary pattern of the Lord. Ordinarily there are no shortcuts. This is the way of service in Christ’s kingdom.

2. “And turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.” Cherith (which means “a cutting off”) was a stream in some isolated place that emptied into the Jordan River.

a. Not only was this a delay and a detour, but this was isolation—there was no one to whom he could minister and no earthly fellowship of family, friends, or brethren. Although God’s servants do not prefer to be alone in isolation or in the wilderness, the Lord uses such experiences that you may learn and re-learn who is your first love above all others—Jesus Christ. Elijah may have been by Cherith for as long as one year or longer (“and it came to pass after a while”—these words in Hebrew may mean a long period of time). Joseph knew the separation from family in standing for the truth when he was sold into slavery and imprisoned. Jeremiah knew what it was to be isolated because he would not be moved from the truth of the Lord (Jeremiah 15:19).

b. From what was Elijah to hide himself? Perhaps he was to hide himself from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel because he declared Jehovah’s authority over Baal and the king and queen. But perhaps Elijah was to hide himself as an indication of God’s judgment that Israel was cut off from the words of a prophet for the next 3 ½ years. Israel would not hear God speak again until God’s words through Elijah were fulfilled (“but according to my word” 1 Kings 17:1). God was saying that Israel was cut off from the Lord. The worst type of drought and famine that can fall upon a land (especially a covenanted nation) is not a drought of rain that destroys crops and beasts and dries up wells, but is a drought of God’s Word that destroys and dries up the souls of men, women, and children (Deuteronomy 32:2; Amos 8:11-12; 1 Kings 18:4). There is not a more catastrophic drought than for a nation or a church to be cut off from the faithful preaching of God’s Word and for that Word to be mocked, hated, despised by leaders and the people; for it is at such a time that rampant destruction spreads like a pestilence in false religion, blasphemy, idolatry, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, anarchy, violence, murder of the unborn, immorality and the destruction of marriage, theft, lying, and covetousness. That is what we are seeing in this nation as in Israel of old.

c. The root of the Hebrew word, Cherith, is the same as that used to make a covenant (to cut a covenant—*karath berith*). God having cut a covenant with Abraham and Israel at Mt. Sinai and having signified and sealed that covenant by circumcision (a cutting of the flesh), God’s people were now suffering a cutting off for having cast off and having forgotten the covenant God that cut with them and which was cut into their flesh. This is precisely what this nation is experiencing as well. Where must we start? We must begin with repentance for having forsaken the gospel, the commandments of God, and the *Solemn League and Covenant*. That is where we all must begin in our backsliding who have professed faith or have

been baptized—that covenant binds us.

## II. The Promise of the Lord to Elijah (1 Kings 17:4).

A. Though the Lord is judging Israel and separating Elijah from a covenant-breaking people, Elijah is promised that God's tender mercies will follow him even in his isolation. The Lord will not abandon Elijah, but will provide for all of his needs. Notice I said "needs". For the Lord did not promise a royal meal fit for a king, but promised him bread, meat, and water (1 Timothy 6:5-8). Contentment is learned (Philippians 4:11) and can only come as your joy is anchored not in the people or things of this world which are constantly changing. There is only contentment when the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10; Philippians 1:21). We read not concerning Elijah that he complained about these meager provisions or about being in isolation. God was teaching Elijah that everything he receives (and even how he receives it—by ravens) comes from the merciful hand of God his Savior.

B. The Lord Jesus shed His precious blood to ratify your inheritance as God's children, so that when He died all the promises of God in Christ Jesus are yours by way of inheritance (confirmed by your baptism and realized by faith). What do you need? God will supply all your needs according to His riches by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

## III. The Provision of the Lord for Elijah (1 Kings 17:5-7).

A. God promised and Elijah received what was promised as he trusted the Lord and obeyed the word of the Lord. Those promises are our inheritance in Christ Jesus, but they are received by faith—not necessarily a strong faith, but by faith. It is not the size of your faith that receives and applies the promises of God, but the omnipotent and gracious God in whom that faith is placed. Our faith is weak at times, but that weak faith yet lays hold of an omnipotent God no less than does a strong faith. Listen to the words of the godly and learned Samuel Rutherford on this point.

It shall be to you according to your faith, but your small, short hand and poor fingers of faith shall not be the measure. It is a little faith, but is no little Christ that your faith lays hold on....

The promise is made to a weak faith, no less than to a strong faith. Were there a little and a small Christ promised to a weak faith, and a great and infinite Christ promised to a strong faith, the weak believer might smite on his thigh and wring his hands and say, 'Woe is me, for I am undone.' But the promise is made to faith as faith, and not as great faith or as strong faith. Heaven and glory is due by promise to the child that can but creep [crawl--GLP], to Christ's sucking infants, as well as to aged men and fathers. There will be many weak citizens and many of the refuse of the flock and many tender lambs in Heaven, who may thank Christ's tender bosom that did bear them as well as strong Abraham; poor creeping [crawling--GLP] Christians of England and Scotland set beside Moses, the greatest of the prophets, and David, the greatest of the kingly prophets, who had a king's faith. This argues the transactions of the Gospel to be of mere grace" (Samuel Rutherford, *The Power of Faith and Prayer*, Reformation Press, pp.79,80).

B. Let us not quickly pass over the means God used to supply Elijah's needs: ravens. Ravens were an unclean fowl and prohibited to be eaten (Leviticus 11:15). The raven was a scavenger and fed often upon that which had died. And yet the Lord (Elijah's Provider) appointed by His sovereign power ravens to bring bread and cooked meat from some location to feed Elijah.

1. Dear ones, it is not your employer, or client, or inheritance, or pension, or bank account,

or savings account, or the government, or the economy that is your provider. Those may be means that God employs (like the ravens) to provide for you, but it is always God that is taking care of you, loving you, and providing for you. When this is forgotten, there will always be a trusting in man, in the arm of flesh, in that which can be seen, rather than trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to supply all your needs (whether food, clothing, home, work, wisdom, safety and protection, health, patience, perseverance, hope etc.).

2. The Lord used many different and strange means to bring about His purposes and promises in Scripture: Joseph became ruler in Egypt and saved his family by being sold into slavery and imprisoned; Naaman, the Syrian captain, was healed by washing in the dirty Jordan River; Jesus healed a blind and mute man by putting his fingers in his ears and spitting on his tongue (Mark 7:33); God uses the suffering of Christians to bring the elect to salvation through faith in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10). God is sovereign and uses many means (or at times no means) to heal, many means to draw you to Him, to provide, but it is always the same God who works and who receives all of the glory.

3. It was likely a temptation with Elijah to look at the dwindling supply of water that was gradually drying up over the course of those weeks and months. “Lord, the water is running out. It is getting less and less. What shall I do?” He was a man of like passion, feelings, and temptations with us (James 5:17). This is your temptation and mine as well. Dear ones, God never promises to make us as comfortable as possible, but promises to be with us every step of the way—even like the priests that carried the Ark of the Covenant and approached the Jordan River (Joshua 3:14-17). When the Lord waits until the very last step to roll back the Jordan River, He is testing your faith—is your faith in what you can see or in the promise of God? Is your faith in the sacraments or in the gospel? Is your faith in your own works or in the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Is your faith a thankful faith (joy) for all His innumerable mercies and provisions for you or a forgetful faith (misery, doom, and gloom)?

4. God commands, and you are to obey Him. God promises, and you are to hope in Him. God provides, and you are to praise Him. That is the message of Elijah from his time of isolation at Cherith.

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