

Portraits of a Prophet 4

Obadiah: A Holy Man in an Unholy Court

9/24/23

Introduction:

- A. This morning, I want to continue our picture of Elijah in 1 Kings.
 - 1. If you missed the first three sermons, no fret.
 - 2. Not only are they on YouTube, but today's message stands on its own.
 - 3. But I can't leave the portrait of Elijah just yet.
- B. Elijah is God's messenger to sinful Israel.
 - 1. These were supposed to be God's people, yet they found new ways to sin and worship false gods.
 - 2. Because of that, God enacted a famine that lasted three and a half years and devastated Israel and the land to the north called Samaria.
 - 3. **The effects of sin are never localized.**
- C. But, it's never hopeless.
 - 1. No matter how evil or messed up the world or culture seems to be, it isn't hopeless.
 - 2. Not only is it not hopeless, you are never completely alone.
 - a. As we will read in the following verses, Elijah believes he is the only one doing it right.
 - b. We can call this the "lonely prophet" syndrome, which causes us to think that we are the only ones standing for truth, the only ones suffering for the cause, and the only ones doing anything.
 - c. Today's passage and a future passage from 1 Kings 19 tell us this isn't accurate.

D. Today's scripture focuses on a holy person amid an unholy court.

1. This man's name is Obadiah.

2. Let's turn to 1 Kings 18

1 Kings 18:1–19 (CSB)

18 After a long time, the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year: "Go and present yourself to Ahab. I will send rain on the surface of the land." ²So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

The famine was severe in Samaria. ³Ahab called for Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. Obadiah was a man who greatly feared the LORD ⁴and took a hundred prophets and hid them, fifty men to a cave, and provided them with food and water when Jezebel slaughtered the LORD's prophets. ⁵Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go throughout the land to every spring and to every wadi. Perhaps we'll find grass so we can keep the horses and mules alive and not have to destroy any cattle." ⁶They divided the land between them in order to cover it. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went the other way by himself.

⁷While Obadiah was walking along the road, Elijah suddenly met him. When Obadiah recognized him, he fell facedown and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?"

⁸"It is I," he replied. "Go tell your lord, 'Elijah is here!'" "

⁹But Obadiah said, "What sin have I committed, that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to put me to death? ¹⁰As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent someone to search for you. When they said, 'He is not here,' he made that kingdom or nation swear they had not found you.

¹¹"Now you say, 'Go tell your lord, 'Elijah is here!'" ¹²But when I leave you, the Spirit of the LORD may carry you off to some place I don't know. Then when I go report to Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. But I, your servant, have feared the LORD from my youth. ¹³Wasn't it reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel slaughtered the LORD's prophets? I hid a hundred of the prophets of the LORD, fifty men to a cave, and I provided them with food and water. ¹⁴Now you say, 'Go tell your lord, 'Elijah is here!'" ' He will kill me!"

¹⁵Then Elijah said, "As the LORD of Armies lives, in whose presence I stand, today I will present myself to Ahab."

¹⁶Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him. Then Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, the one ruining Israel?"

¹⁸He replied, "I have not ruined Israel, but you and your father's family have, because you have abandoned the LORD's commands and followed the Baals. ¹⁹Now summon all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table."

1. Sin always requires drastic measures.

A. When you read the Old Testament stories of God judging and punishing people, it seems really harsh.

1. And this draught and famine seems especially terrible.
2. Over the three years, the land and people are devastated.
3. The good people die along with the wicked.
4. In fact, some of the wicked actually prosper while good people die.
5. For readers like us, it seems God is too hard on sin.

B. Humanity is acceptable and favorable of sin.

1. We are comfortable with sin, so it rarely shocks us.
2. Even though God has seen it all, He never becomes accepting of sin.
 - a. Sin violates God's nature.
 - b. Therefore He cannot become permissive of sin.

C. Therefore, dealing with sin always requires drastic measures.

1. In the Old Testament, Israel's sin was dealt with by the blood of sacrifices.

- a. But these were always temporary.
- b. The blood of animals also pointed forward to a future day when the Perfect Sacrifice would be made.

2. Even then, if God's people refused to repent and walk in obedience, they brought upon themselves the curses God laid out for them.

3. For us, on this side of the Cross, our sin is either dealt with through the sacrifice of Jesus or we pay the consequences ourselves through eternal death.

4. In 1 Kings, the draught and famine were the fulfillment of God's promises to His people:

- a. If you walk in sin, disobedience, and rebellion, then God will withdraw His blessing and place a curse upon them.
- b. Today, the Spirit of Christ calls out to us that if we do not repent and are saved, we will not enter Eternal life.

In this text, We see several indicators of how sinful the people and leadership had become.

2. How sinful had the people become?

A. The righteous are persecuted, while the sinful are promoted.

³Ahab called for Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. Obadiah was a man who greatly feared the LORD ⁴and took a hundred prophets and hid them, fifty men to a cave, and provided them with food and water when Jezebel slaughtered the LORD's prophets.

1. The text does not say how many of the Lord's prophets were killed.
2. Yet, while God sheltered Elijah, other prophets of the Lord had been martyred.
3. Obadiah saves 100 prophets, but an untold number are killed.

- a. This is a biblical reality.
- b. In the Book of Acts, James is beheaded, but Peter is miraculously delivered from prison. Acts 12
- c. Stephen is stoned to death, while a crowd stones the Apostle Paul and he lives. Acts 14
- d. John the Beloved dies a natural death; all the others are martyred.
- e. It's hard to understand why some of God's servants are saved while others are murdered.

1. Before you wonder if it was because of a lack of faith, Hebrews 11 declares that the victorious and the martyred were people of faith.

2. ³² *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—* ³³ *who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* ³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.* ³⁶ *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.* ³⁷ *They were stoned, they were sawn in two,^[a] they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—* ³⁸ *of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

³⁹ *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,*

4. What is clear in 1 Kings is that in times of moral degradation, the righteous are persecuted while sin is promoted.

- a. Right is wrong, wrong is right.
- b. This is nothing new.
- c. Yet our society reflects these same values.
- d. Good people are prosecuted while sinful people are promoted.
- e. What is good and wholesome is mocked, and what is perverted becomes valued.

B. Animals and property are more valued than people.

⁵Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go throughout the land to every spring and to every wadi. Perhaps we'll find grass so we can keep the horses and mules alive and not have to destroy any cattle." ⁶They divided the land between them in order to cover it. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went the other way by himself.

1. The king sends his official and himself to find food for whom?
 - a. A righteous leader takes care of his people.
 - b. Sinful leaders value property over people.
2. I cannot help but see America's condition in this statement.
 - a. Are not animals more valued than people?
 - b. Is not creation elevated over the rights of people?
 - c. Do we not worship the created while denying the Creator?
3. What we see in the World today is not new.
 - a. Instead, it is evidence of our fallenness, sinfulness, and our worship of other gods.

- b. The more sinful the society, the less value humans have.
- c. Whether it is abortion, euthanasia, or genocide, sin devalues the Image of God in persons.

C. How sinful had the people become? Righteous voices are outnumbered.

1. Verse 19 tells us that 850 prophets are specifically protected and provided for by the Queen.
2. Elijah knew the exact number of Jezebel's prophets he was up against.
 - a. Either Elijah had supernatural insight, or Jezebel's patronage of these prophets was so well known that even a man who had been out of the country for three years knew how many there were.
 - b. What she is doing, she is not doing in secret but is proudly flaunting her power and provision while the righteous prophets struggle or are killed.
3. **We shouldn't be surprised when righteous voices are outnumbered by the wicked.**

1. Except for rare moments of revival, the world's voice has always been louder than the voice of the Godly.
2. But we must not assume that God is not speaking.
3. I believe that even today, God is still speaking.
 - a. Even today, the blood of Jesus is still declaring a better word. Hebrews 12:24
 - b. Even today, you can hear the voice of the Spirit speaking to you if you will stop and be still among all the distractions.
 - c. Even today, God is calling people and nations to righteousness, forgiveness, and repentance.

4. Even though Jezebels, Ahab's, King Herod's, and other evil people may try to silence the voice of God by killing the prophets, God will continue speaking.

- a. Jezebel believed by killing the prophets that she could win.
- b. If the prophets were dead, then God could not speak.
- c. But that is not the case, as God always protects His Word.

D. Sinful people blame a Holy God for their destruction.

¹⁶Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him. Then Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, the one ruining Israel?"

¹⁸He replied, "I have not ruined Israel, but you and your father's family have, because you have abandoned the LORD's commands and followed the Baals.

1. The human tendency is to blame God for the consequences of their own sin.

2. In fact, we see that this fundamental human tendency continues into eternity.

a. When we read the New Testament depictions of eternal death, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, the gnashing of teeth expresses anger amid pain.

b. In Revelation 16, as God pours out His wrath upon sinful humanity, Revelation 16:10-11 (CSB)

¹⁰The fifth (angel) poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues because of their pain ¹¹and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they did not repent of their works.

c. Can you imagine people being angry because of their own mistakes?

1. In an age of no personal responsibility, people often blame God for the consequences of their own sin.
2. Instead of the consequences leading to change, people blame everyone except themselves.
3. Sin blinds us to our guilt.
 - a. Jesus illustrated this when he spoke concerning the speck in our neighbor's eye and the log in our own.
 - b. Sin blinds us to the real problem and convinces us to blame God.

3. What are the righteous to do?

A. Obadiah serves as a great example.

1. While Elijah is waiting upon the word from God, Obadiah is back in Israel with King Ahab.
2. While Elijah was being cared for by ravens and widows, Obadiah was caring for the remaining prophets.
 - a. God's provision does not always happen in the same ways.
 - b. God's provision for you may look miraculous, or it may look mundane.
3. While Elijah prayed in the widow's home, Obadiah served in the evil king's court.
4. How do we serve a holy God in an unholy court?

B. **Fear the Lord.**

1. This fear is a reverential respect.
2. But there is a healthy understanding that God IS all-powerful and can do as He sees fit.
 - a. Just as our local judges expect people to be respectful in their court, and punish those who are not, God does

expect humanity to show Him the respect and awe He deserves.

b. Thus, we have the “fear of the Lord.”

3. Perhaps it is time we recapture some of that fear and respect again.

a. **We don't need to dread God, but we do need to respect and revere Him.**

b. We cannot worship someone we don't respect.

C. Work in the world, serve the Lord.

1. You may not always have a Christian boss or work for a Christian company.

a. You cannot always choose your clients, bosses, or corporate policies.

b. But you CAN choose who you worship.

c. Even though Obadiah worked for Ahab, he served the Lord.

2. **Obadiah did not allow his employment to keep him from fearing and obeying God.**

a. Perhaps God has placed you in the unholy place to be that something righteous.

b. What if you are on that team to be the voice of righteousness?

3. Not everyone is called to be an Elijah, toppling kings and killing false prophets.

a. Sometimes we are called to be Obadiah's: faithful men and women in unfaithful and unholy places.

b. Even though it may seem like your work is too hidden, too small, or too late, God has use for faithful people.

4. Obadiah and a difficult ask.

A. Obadiah has served faithfully.

1. It is evident that he is a faithful, obedient, godly man.
2. Even though he is serving in an unholy place, he has led with integrity and honor.
3. But when he meets Elijah, there is an uncomfortable ask.

B. Go and tell Ahab that Elijah is here.

1. Obadiah pauses and then questions.
2. Ahab hates Elijah and may take his anger out on Obadiah.
3. Obadiah also fears the Lord and believes that the Spirit of God would take Elijah away at any time.
4. But Elijah assures Obadiah of the faithfulness of his word.

C. Has God been making a hard ask?

1. Is He asking you to take a step of faith or obedience that is scary, risky, and may be dangerous?
2. Is He leading you to places that are uncomfortable and uncertain?
3. Are you concerned about what saying "YES" to Jesus will cost you?

Apply: What are we to do in light of this passage?

#1. Don't grow weary in waiting.

- a. Remember how this chapter starts: "After a long time, the word of the Lord came to Elijah."
- b. Waiting is one of God's favorite tools, and He uses it often.
- c. Perhaps you have been waiting a long time for God to speak, to make clear His plans, or to release you.

1. In the meantime, you have been praying, worshipping, and living by faith just like Elijah had.
2. If you have been waiting for what seems like forever for God to move, I want to encourage you not to give up.
3. **In the waiting, God is working on you and the situation.**
4. 2 Peter 3:9 says God is not "slack" concerning His promise...

d. My friend, please do not give up yet.

1. Don't walk away.
2. In the waiting, God may very well be preparing you for the coming conflict and battle.

#2. Be faithful.

- a. **Faithfulness is not a passive attribute.**
 1. Faithfulness requires internal effort.
 2. To be faithful, like the example of Obadiah, you must constantly choose Jesus over and against other options.
- b. There will always be other options: choose Jesus.
 1. You may not always be able to choose your situation, but you can always choose Jesus.
 2. You can always determine to place the voice of God over and against your personal desires.

#3. Don't fear the uncomfortable.

- a. God's Word to Elijah and Obadiah were both dangerous.
- b. God told Elijah to present himself to King Ahab, the man who wanted nothing more than to kill him.
- c. God's word to Obadiah through Elijah put Obadiah in danger of Ahab's wrath.

d. Rarely does God call us to comfortable people, comfortable places, and comfortable situations.

Prayer: Today, my prayer for this congregation is “Lord, help us to be faithful.”

A. Through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to be faithful wherever God has placed us.

1. Being a person of integrity and character is possible even when everyone around us isn't.
2. Today, I want to pray for strength.

B. That all begins by saying, “Yes to Jesus.”

1. If you haven't said YES to Jesus yet by declaring Him your Lord and Savior and repenting of your sin, that is where you must begin.
2. Then, we pray for Jesus to empower us to be faithful:
 - a. Faithful at home
 - b. Faithful at work
 - c. Faithful in all situations and occasions.