

God's Response To Apostasy

Script - James 5:13-18

- A. Background and history - Sometimes people find themselves in kind of a mess. A situation that they are uncomfortable being in. Sometimes it is of their own making and other times it is a combination of many things that have happened to them that were completely out of their control. Our story today is like that, but it didn't just happen to one individual but to a large group of people. You might even say that the majority were headed in the wrong direction. Even though each individual had a choice, about what they would do and how they would act, the truth is that the leaders led the people down the wrong pathway. Maybe not intentionally at first but those that are placed in a position of authority can influence others around them not only by their actions but by their own personal example.
1. The Bible has a lot to say about God giving out a certain number of talents to different individuals and how each one will someday be called to account for the talents we receive. I think there is a parable Jesus told about that somewhere. In last weeks message by Pastor Shane Francis we were reminded that Stewardship is Lordship. **Powerful message!**
 - a. 1 Pet. 4:17 comments on this idea of using the talents given to us and says, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and **if it begins with us first**, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"
 - b. In Eze. 9:3-6 it gives a similar thought when it speaks about people that are held accountable and uses this phrase and says, "Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; 4 and the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." 5 To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. 6 Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; **and begin at My sanctuary.**" **So they began with the elders who were before the temple.**
 2. Our story today starts in the days of King Solomon, who was a powerful ruler. He was blessed by God with great wisdom (1 Ki. 4:29-30). And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. Although Solomon was very wise in many ways, he stumbled in other ways. In his day, the King often took wives of other nations in order to cement alliances between countries and although Solomon loved and worshiped the one and only true God, he faltered in this area and it led not only to the downfall of his kingdom, but to rapid decline of his own household immediately following his death. The united tribes of Israel deteriorated quickly into two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Over about 80 years, one leader after another led the people astray, until most of the people had abandoned their faith in God and were worshiping Baal. Under Ahab, who ruled for 22 years the bible says, "Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him." 1 Kings 16:30-31.
- B. Our scripture reading for today is James 5:16-17. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. What can we tell from the text?

1. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. What does it mean that he was a man with a nature like ours?
 - a. We think of him as the prophet that stood up for God in the midst of corruption on top of Mt. Carmel. It was the great showdown between good and evil, when he faced down 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table (1 Ki. 18:18).
 - b. According to 1 Kings 18:27-29 he mocked the false prophets and their god. It says, "... at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention." Some might say he was bold and outspoken, but that's not me, that not how I am.
 - c. Our text says he had "A nature like ours". Why would it say that? Are there times when he could have been afraid? Not Elijah! According to the Bible he did face discouragement, disappointment and depression). On Mt. Carmel it says **he stood alone** and faced down many different groups, the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 that sat at Jezebel's table; and all the people that had gone astray; and the wicked king and all his officers and soldiers. Remember that the king had been searching for Elijah for 3.5 years; wanting to kill him.
 - d. Right after he was victorious on Mt Carmel, the wicked Queen Jezebel threatened to take Elijah's life, and so he was discouraged and ran away to hide from her. He was so discouraged he said he wanted to die (1 Ki. 19:1-4).
 - e. Then he said "I alone am left" (1 Ki. 19:10). When in reality God told him that there were 7,000 that had remained faithful to God and not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Ki. 19:18). These statements from Elijah show that even though he walked with God, and was used by God in a very powerful way, there were times in his life that he felt alone. It says "He had a nature like ours,". Subject to the stresses that we face from day to day.
 2. The 2nd thing that our text tells us is that things happened when Elijah prayed! It says "He prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years." And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.
 - a. Apparently Elijah had powerful prayers. The text list two different times that he prayed. To stop the rain and then to start it again. Both times God heard and answered his prayers. Powerful prayers! God's answer to Elijah's prayers was to send Elijah to confront Ahab and announce God's judgment was coming. Who did God send? Was Elijah a man with a nature like ours? Yes!
- B. What is the context of our scripture reading for today? It is NOT found in the O. T, but in the N. T. The context of our scripture reading for today is right after it talks about anointing someone for healing. James 5:13-18 Says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. NKJV

1. Is this scripture still apropos for today? Are people around you in need today? Do they need the fellowship of other believers around them today? Is God is still looking for individuals who care about people around them?
2. Elijah was NOT the most eloquent person. It doesn't say he went to the best schools or wore the nicest clothes, but he was willing to be used by God to help others come back to worship the living God.
3. God provided for Elijah and protected him. God fed him with the ravens (1 Ki. 17:2-6). God fed him with the widow of Zarephath. Remember that is the story when the jar of oil did not run dry and the bin of flour never ran out (1 Ki. 17:10-14).

C. Appeal - Is it possible that God needs more people like Elijah today? Ones that may not have a distinguished pedigree' or an outgoing personality. What credentials did he have?

1. When God called Elijah he called someone that was subject to discouragement and depression with a nature like ours.
2. He picked someone that knew how to pray. Apparently Elijah saw the people around him worshiping false gods and going astray so he prayed about it and God heard his prayer. Elijah didn't have to spend a lot of money in order to buy the latest book of prayers so he could say the prayer in just the right way, but he did care about the others around him so he prayed for a change and God answered his prayer and withheld the rain for 3.5 years.
3. Elijah wanted to help the others around him, and bring them back to the place where they would worship the right God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Our NT passage puts that into the context of someone that cares about what happens to others and they sing psalms with them and rejoice when the good happens and they pray with them when things don't go so well (James 5:13-18).
4. The people in Elijah's day had lost sight of their source of power and strength. They let the altar of God slip into ruins and the story of Elijah highlights the fact that Elijah rebuilt God's altar and encouraged people to return to the worship of the living God. I am guessing that most of us today believe in the worshiping the God of creation but we may have slipped away from establishing that altar in our homes. This Corona Virus has lingered on for a lot longer than we all expected and has made it impossible for us to worship together and fellowship at the church each week. Do you have a bible study plan of your own? There are a few that are leading out in Zoom Sabbath schools for the adults and children, and there are a few that attend these zoom meetings, but there are far more that are not attending and may have slipped away from a regular study routine.
5. Besides emphasizing that Elijah had a nature that was like ours, our text stresses Elijah's prayer life. There is a phrase that we find several times connected with Elijah. He was always saying, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand". Apparently Elijah lived and walked continually as if in God's presence. Elijah was translated to heaven w/o seeing death. He walked with God on this earth and then continued that walk when God sent a fiery chariot to pick him up.

At the MPSDA Ch we want you to become all that you can be. God knows your potential much more than we could ever know. We want you to be connected so closely with God that he answers all your prayers and meets all your needs, just like God did for Elijah. We have been trying with different ways to provide meaningful messages and times of fellowship and study so all may be drawn closer to the Savior. We know that this separation has been a strain on all of us. It has taxed our personal resources and limited our fellowship and interaction with each other. We have talked some about starting another program that includes lessons and a video by Tony Moore. I'll be emailing out a survey, that I hope all of you will respond to and tell us how we can best use this tool to increase the study, fellowship and knowledge of his word.