

“Fearful Courage”  
1 Kings 18:1-15  
(Preached at Trinity, July 18, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the previous chapter Elijah arrives on the scene to announce God’s judgment upon Ahab for introducing the idolatry of Baal into Israel. Ahab had married Jezebel who was determined to exterminate every last trace of Yahweh from the land. It would turn out to be a fools errand.
2. **Chapter 18** begins, “Now it happened after many days. . .”  
It lets us know the condition of those experiencing the drought. It lasted over three years but it was counted in days—day after day.  
While Israel suffered under God’s hand of judgment, God provided for Elijah through His providential superintendence.
3. By the time we enter **Chapter 18** the situation in Israel had become desperate. It is described by a single sentence: “**Now the famine was severe in Samaria.**”
  - A. The ground was parched. In place of green grass there was nothing but dry stubble. The ribs of the livestock protruded from lack of nourishment. Most likely, many Israelites perished from lack of food.
  - B. To testify to its severity, even the King of Israel was reduced to foraging for straw. Ahab called Obadiah, his household steward, and the two of them divided the land and went searching to see if they might find even a small amount of grass to feed the livestock.
  - C. We should note that Ahab gave greater attention to saving his livestock from the drought than he gave to saving God’s prophets from Jezebel.
4. In **Verse 3** we are introduced to Obadiah.  
“**Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly**” – the word for “greatly” is a superlative meaning, “abundantly, exceedingly.”
  - A. Obadiah is described as a pious, God fearing man. He is not to be confused with the prophet many years later responsible for the Book of Obadiah. We’ll hear nothing else about this man after **Verse 16**. But he stands as a hero. His name means “Servant of Yahweh” and he lived up to his name. In a land given over to idolatry, God maintained his faithful remnant.
  - B. Some have suggested that Obadiah was given over to compromise, giving allegiance to Ahab and his wicked reign. This isn’t necessarily true. God’s people can serve the civil authorities without being complicit in the evil of the government. What is better than a Godly statesman standing as light in the midst of darkness? Obadiah served Ahab but was not involved in the evil of Ahab.
  - C. The author makes it clear that Obadiah was a God-fearing man. Although he lived in this world he lives as God’s people live. We seek to be a savor of grace and goodness in a world of sin. One hundred of God’s prophets owed their life to Obadiah.

- D. Paul tells us to serve our earthly masters with an eye upon our heavenly master. **Colossians 3:22-23 NAU** - "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,"
5. We've known little about Jezebel up to this point except that she was the daughter of the king of Sidon and that she was a worshipper of Baal. Now we find out that during the three-year drought she had been busy. Baal was proving impotent to bring rain and the end of the drought. Jezebel had become furious with God and determined to destroy all of His prophets.
- We are given very little information. We are merely told that Jezebel murdered God's prophets. The various translations describe her fierce actions:
- NASB - "for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD"
- NKJV - "Jezebel massacred the prophets of the LORD"
- CSV - "Jezebel slaughtered the LORD's prophets."
- Since we are told Obadiah rescued 100 prophets we have to assume there must have been several hundred faithful prophets serving God.
6. During the slaughter of God's prophets Obadiah gathered 100 endangered prophets and hid them in a cave. It was a bold act that you would expect from a mighty man, a warrior. This is where we expect to find such courage.
- But Obadiah was not a warrior. He wasn't trained in combat. He was a simple household steward. When it came time for him to stand up to protect God's prophets he acted with courage.
- I. Courage presupposes fear
- A. It doesn't take courage to face a non-fearful situation
1. It doesn't take courage to swim in a lake on a summer afternoon – but it takes courage to leap into raging waters in the midst of a storm in order to rescue a drowning child.
  2. It doesn't take courage to enter a house – unless that house is on fire, and you hear screams coming from the inside.
  3. It doesn't take courage to profess Christ, unless doing so will cost you. Many have died courageously holding to Christ.
  4. Obadiah's decision to hide the prophets was a life-threatening decision. If Jezebel would have discovered his actions he as well as the one hundred prophets would have been swiftly put to death.
  5. It reminds us of the faithful Christians who hid Jews during WWII.
- B. Over and over we are reminded that with God we can take courage
1. King Asa was told to trust God with boldness and courage  
**2 Chronicles 15:1-2 NAU** - "Now the Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded, <sup>2</sup> and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."  
**2 Chronicles 15:7-8 NAU** - "But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work." <sup>8</sup> Now when Asa heard these words and the prophecy which Azariah the son of Oded the prophet spoke, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin"

2. After the Assyrians saw Hezekiah faithfully serving God, they invaded Judah. Hezekiah responded to the danger with great courage trusting God and encouraged Judah to be courageous.  
**2 Chronicles 32:7-8 NAU** - "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. <sup>8</sup> "With him is *only* an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people relied on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah."
3. This is the battle cry of God's people. In the face of every danger, every fearful situation we are commanded, "Be courageous."  
**Psalms 31:24 NAU** - "Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who hope in the LORD."  
**Joshua 1:9 NAU** - "Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

## II. God demands courage from common men

### A. Obadiah was a man like us all

1. When Elijah told Obadiah to go to Ahab and announce his coming Obadiah trembled.  
**1 Kings 18:9 NAU** - "What sin have I committed, that you are giving your servant into the hand of Ahab to put me to death?"  
**1 Kings 18:12 NAU** - "It will come about when I leave you that the Spirit of the LORD will carry you where I do not know; so when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although / your servant have feared the LORD from my youth."
2. At the command of Elijah, however, Obadiah did his duty  
**1 Kings 18:16 NAU** - "So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah."

### B. Obadiah was a man who knew God.

1. He is described as a God-fearing man  
**1 Kings 18:3 NAU** - "Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly"
2. Obadiah confessed this himself  
**1 Kings 18:12 NAU** - "/ your servant have feared the LORD from my youth."
  - a. To fear God is to hold Him in holy reverence.
  - b. This fear is not the same as the fear of God's actions.
    - The lost man lives in fear, always dreading what will happen next. And he fears the thought of standing before God.  
**Hebrews 10:31 NAU** - "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
    - This is the fear that is consistent with our fallen condition  
**Revelation 21:8 NAU** - "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

- c. Godly fear is to hold God as infinitely holy, full of majesty and glory and worthy of service. It leads a man to trust Him even in the most fearful of situations.
- 3. Obadiah lived “Coram Deo” – before God. He was always mindful of God’s presence. And yet, there were times when he trembled in fear.
- 4. There are times when God uses the forcefulness of an Elijah. But there are other times when He uses an Obadiah who quietly works behind-the-scene.
- 5. Obadiah had fears, but his fear did not keep him from serving God in faithfulness.

Faithfulness to God is never void of action.

- a. He was the head of Ahab’s household. Some call him the governor of the household. He would have known the actions of the royal family. He watched in dismay as Jezebel systematically butchered God’s prophets.
- b. The safe thing would have been to look the other way. After all, what could one man do to resist this powerful queen? To even voice his disapproval could result in his execution. Living under the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel was to live in continual danger. We can see this with Obadiah’s fear of falsely announcing the arrival of Elijah.
- c. Despite the danger he did not stand by and do nothing. He quietly gathered the remaining prophets and hid them in a cave and provided them with life-sustaining bread and water.
- d. The text is void of the details of his amazing service. Hiding away 100 men in a cave was no small feat. And we must remember, he did this during the drought and famine when there was little bread and water to be found. Obtaining enough bread and water for their daily sustenance would have taken great care and courage.

- III. To live in a world that hates Christ demands courage
- A. We are always being pressured to compromise
1. Lost family members can put pressure on you
  2. Maintaining your integrity in the workplace can be challenging
  3. We must resolve to follow Christ no matter what.
  4. It demands great courage
- B. Living courageously is not merely an act of willpower.
1. Courage demands the Holy Spirit's abiding presence
  2. The Holy Spirit strengthens and sustains
  3. Paul's prayer for the Church of Ephesus  
**Ephesians 3:14-21 NAU** - "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

#### Conclusion:

1. Obadiah faced a faith-testing crisis. It was one of those moments when faith and fear collide. Fear reminds us of all the possible dangers. Faith tells us God is sufficient. Yes, Obadiah would have been terrified of Jezebel. But his reverence for God far exceeded his fear.
2. This is how we must live. Our faith must be greater than our fear. And our faith is strengthened by the power of God.  
 God doesn't hold us accountable for the greatness of our work, only that we be faithful. Dale Ralph Davis: "You are not called to great works but to good works, not to flamboyant ministry but to faithful ministry, not to be a dashing but only a devoted servant."<sup>1</sup>
3. And we must not fail to notice there were 101 prophets that God spared during the famine. He provided for Elijah supernaturally through the raven. But for the 100 God used the ordinary means of a faithful servant. God will use you as His means to accomplish His purpose. You must be willing to follow Him courageously. Obadiah did the right thing, even when it was the fearful thing to do. And so must we.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 231.