

Christ Reformation Church

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The Language of Faith: Sermons On Prayer

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

*“A Prayer that Stopped the Rain
and Raised the Dead”*

July 21, 2013

Sermon Text:

Scripture Reading:

Introduction-

1 Kings 16:29-34 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in

Samaria twenty-two years. (30) And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. (31) And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. (32) He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. (33) And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. (34) In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

We have been looking at some of the great prayers of the Bible: those of Daniel and his deliverance from the lions, and King Hezekiah whose

prayers were answered by the Lord wiping out a huge, fearsome Assyrian army. These prayers were mighty weapons in the battle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God. These kingdoms have been in conflict since the fall in Eden. The battle continues today and we are unwise and foolish if we remain naïve to the reality of this war. We must stop thinking of things in mere earthly, fleshly, human terms.

The church, like this local church, is not a social club of mere human relationships. It is an army of Christ's soldiers fighting against the kingdom of darkness. There is a real enemy set out to destroy us. The lion truly does prowl. This is why our King commands us to-

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

And more –

2 Corinthians 5:16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

2 Corinthians 10:3-11 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, (6) being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (7) Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. (8) For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. (9) I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. (10) For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." (11) Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.

We do not judge by appearances. We judge by identifying what kind of spirit animates a person. We judge whether a person is of the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of light. The Corinthians had failed at this and Paul had to set them straight. By judging

according to outward appearances, they rejected the Apostle Paul and embraced the enemy.

Consider this:

1 Corinthians 5:1-6 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. (2) And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (3) For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. (4) When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (6) Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Have you ever noticed that Paul never NAMES this wicked man? Why? He very specifically named others like Alexander, Hymaeneus, and so on. Why not here? Let me suggest that he is emphasizing what we taught later – that the Corinthians needed to stop evaluating “good old Fred” there among them as “good old Fred,” and

begin to identify the spirit of darkness that animates Fred.

This is the war we are in then. And prayer is one of the chief weapons in our arsenal. Prayer and the Word of God are the offensive weapons issued to every soldier of the Cross.

This is serious business.

This morning then we want to take a look at this battle in action, and especially note how Elijah used the weapon of prayer in his fight against the enemies of the Lord. He lived in a day when evil reigned over the nation, in the person of King Ahab and his wicked queen, Jezebel. It was a classic face off between light and darkness.

Ahab's Wickedness

Ahab set records for evil. As wicked as the kings of Israel were before him, he topped them all. For 22 long years, this evil reigned. One of his chief sins was to marry Jezebel, a pagan and Baal worshipper. Predictably, Ahab also worshipped Baal, even building him a temple. *“Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”*

So that is to say, if you totaled up all of the evil that all of the previous kings of Israel had done, and looked and seen

the total wrath of the Lord aroused from those sins, Ahab's evil was greater and the Lord's wrath against him surpassed the sum total of his wrath toward all those kings.

And thus the Lord raises up and sends this mighty man – Elijah. Here is the Apostle James' challenge to us regarding Elijah's example:

James 5:16-18 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. (18) Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

What is "righteous" here? It is not faking it. It is not being a hypocrite. It is confessing our sins to one another. It is heeding the warning of Peter:

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, **so that your prayers may not be hindered.**

And so Elijah announces what James says Elijah had prayed for:

1 Kings 17:1-7 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." (2) And the word of the LORD came to him: (3) "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. (4) You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." (5) So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. (6) And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (7) And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

Now, let's notice some plain principles as we move through these narratives which are quite true for us today:

While Christ's people are affected by evil – such as Elijah's drought, his brook drying up – the Lord sustains us through it all. Elijah sought righteousness and prayed for the rains to stop for 3 ½ years, and it had

consequences for him. Yet the Lord upheld him and provided for him.

The Lord Uses a Widow

1 Kings 17:8-16 Then the word of the LORD came to him, (9) "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." (10) So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." (11) And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." (12) And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." (13) And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. (14) For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" (15)

And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. (16) The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Incidentally, this judgment of a drought was not selected at random. The lack of rain was a plain sign to all that God was judging Ahab's sins for breaking the covenant:

Leviticus 26:1-4 "You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the LORD your God. (2) You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. (3) "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, (4) then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

The irony in this account of the widow is intentional. The Lord is going to provide for Elijah by bringing food out of a place where there was no food, and in the process provide for this woman who was also a true daughter of Abraham. Her obedience of faith

resulted in a bottomless jar of flour and a jug of oil that could not be emptied.

A Prayer that Raised the Dead

We now come to still another mighty prayer of Elijah –

1 Kings 17:17-24 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. (18) And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" (19) And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. (20) And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" (21) Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." (22) And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. (23) And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son

lives." (24) And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

Now keep in mind that prayer is the language of faith. This widow is referred to in Hebrews 11 as an example of faith –

Hebrews 11:32-40 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, 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, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

And then came probably the peak of Elijah's ministry. The showdown on Mount Carmel, showing us once more what prayer offered in faith by a righteous person can do:

The Lord vs Baal on Carmel

Here then is the background of the Mt. Carmel battle:

1 Kings 18:1-19 After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." (2) So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. (3) And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly, (4) and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) (5) And Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and

mules alive, and not lose some of the animals." (6) So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.

(7) And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" (8) And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" (9) And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? (10) As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. (11) And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" (12) And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. (13) Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a

cave and fed them with bread and water? (14) And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here"; and he will kill me."

(15) And Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today." (16) So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. (17)

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" (18) And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.

(19) Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

Let's just note another principle here:

Inevitably the wicked will accuse the righteous. It is not Elijah who has caused the drought, but Ahab through his evil. False blame and guilt are favorite tactics of the enemy and we must be constantly on guard against them. Through these false accusations, the wicked strive to lead us to doubt our faith and our obedience to the Lord. Notice that Elijah does NOT do what we have

often found ourselves doing – caving in to such a tactic and apologizing. "Oh, Ahab, perhaps you are right! Maybe I am the one that has brought all of this trouble."

It is one thing to be humble and ready to confess our sin and fault when necessary. But remember: the evil one and his representatives love to accuse the righteous. I have made many apologies that I wish I could go take back! And I suspect that many of you have as well. Elijah did not apologize to Ahab!! Neither must we.

What Elijah DOES additionally is a model for us as well:

1 Kings 18:19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

We can say "the Lord judge between you and me." Because He will! "Bring it on, Ahab!" Not because of what WE are, but because we know that the Lord is with us.

Here then is the great face-off on Mount Carmel. Remember, James tells us that Elijah had *prayed* and the rain stopped. He will soon pray and it will resume. But consider his prayer here at Mt. Carmel. It is not long – in

fact its brevity is in marked contrast to the hours and hours of the pleadings of the prophets of Baal:

1 Kings 18:20-40 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. (21) And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

(22) Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. (23) Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. (24) And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken."

(25) Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." (26) And they took the bull that was given them, and

they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. (27) And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

(28) And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. (29) And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

(30) Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. (31) Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," (32) and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. (33) And he put the

wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." (34) And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. (35) And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

(36) And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, **let it be known this day that you are God in Israel**, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. (37) Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

(38) Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (39) And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." (40) And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook

Kishon and slaughtered them there.

That was another day yet which I would have wanted to see. God, for His glory, answered the prayer of a righteous man. One man. A man just like you and me.

Incidentally, perhaps this is one reason that the Scripture records the weakness of Elijah, and maybe this is the very thing James is referring to when he says that Elijah was just like us –

1 Kings 19:1-8 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. (2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." (3) Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (4) But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." (5) And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." (6)

And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. (7) And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." (8) And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

Finally, through the prayer of Elijah, the Lord brings the rain once more, clearly as a result of the victory of obedience on Mt. Carmel-

1 Kings 18:41-46 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." (42) So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. (43) And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. (44) And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" (45) And in a little while the heavens grew

black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. (46) And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Prayer offered by a righteous person is mighty. It is really the greatest power in the universe because it moves the Greatest Power in the universe. We should never fear, but always pray.

Luke 18:1-7 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (2) He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. (3) And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' (4) For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, (5) yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" (6) And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. (7) And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?"

