**GOD’S MESSENGERS; 1 KINGS 17:1-24, 18:15-39, MARCH 2/14**

Last week we saw all God had done for His Chosen People to make them into a great nation. Time & time again they failed to obey His instruction, complained bitterly, & blamed their leaders for their problems—which was really blaming God, because He had appointed those leaders. They repeatedly fell into idol worship. They wanted a king, just like other nations, not a nation led by God, though they were the recipients of His unending grace, mercy & love.

 We saw the gift of wisdom God gave Solomon, noting that all wisdom is from God:“from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” By starting with God’s wisdom we set ourselves up to receive right instruction, deep insight into life & do what is just, right & fair. The world without Christ cannot see or understand this. With Christ as the compass of your life you’ll never lose the way. You can keep foolishness away by keeping Christ in the centre of your life.

 Foolishness was evident in Rehoboam, Solomon’s son who became king after him. A delegation came to him, saying they’d serve him as king if he lightened the tax burden & conscripted labour Solomon had laid on them. Rehoboam didn’t listen to his elders, not only ignoring these requests, but promising to add to the people’s burdens. A divided kingdom resulted, with Rehoboam as king of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) & Jeroboam as king of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Both kingdoms fell into idol worship. Jeroboam even made 2 golden calves.

 Though warned by a man of God that he was going the wrong way—confirmed by his hand becoming instantly leprous & only returning to normal when the man of God prayed that Jeroboam’s hand would be restored—Jeroboam continued the wrong way. People are like that. God was angry & the 1st prophecy about Israel’s coming exile to Babylon was given.

 There was a brief reprieve when Asa became king of Judah, who, after many kings did evil in God’s sight, did what was right in God’s sight, getting rid of the idol worship. His heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life. Yet civil war continued between the north & south.

 Our question was: “Are we putting anything in a higher place in our lives than God? If so, that’s what worship. God’s given everything for us. It cost the life of His Son. We need to be sure we don’t fritter away God’s gift of grace, to act wisely not ignore God’s direction.

 Today we begin looking at the section of the Bible known as “the Prophets”. Elijah is a spiritual giant in the OT. At the Transfiguration on the mountain with Jesus, it’s Elijah who app-ears with Moses. When people ask who John the Baptist is, they ask, “Are you Elijah or one of the prophets?” because God said through Malachi, “I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great & dreadful day of the Lord comes.” And when Jesus called out from the cross, *Eloi, Eloi*, people thought He was calling Elijah (rather than “My God, My God”). So Elijah was huge.

 After telling Ahab, king of Israel, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I (Elijah) serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.” God told El-ijah to hide in the Kerith Ravine, from which he could drink. God directed the ravens to supply him with food. They brought him bread & meat each morning & evening. That sets Elijah apart!

 2 years later God told Elijah to meet Ahab & tell him God would send rain on the land. Ahab wasn’t welcoming: “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?” Elijah set him straight in a hurry, saying it was Ahab & his father’s family who had made trouble, because “You’ve abandoned the Lord’s commands & followed the Baals.” Isn’t that often the way? The person causing the trou-ble accuses you of being the 1 to make trouble. Someone cuts in on you when you’re driving & they flip you the bird, like it’s your fault. Elijah told Ahab to assemble all of Israel’s 450 prophets on Mount Carmel. And he lays it on the line with them: “How long will you waver between 2 opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

A great question! Which God are you following—the 1 true & living God; Almighty God (Jehovah Jirah; El Shaddai), the Triune God of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, or are you following some god of your own creation, where you decide what parts of God’s expectations you want to fulfil or what parts you will ignore. I’m always amazed when I talk to people & they decide what God is & what He wants. “Oh, I don’t like that” or “I don’t believe that” & they make God to be what they want Him to be. It’s making God in your own image, not the other way around. We define God. Watch out for that! Well the people said nothing when Elijah asked it.

Elijah said he was the only 1 of the Lord’s prophets left; the 450 prophets of Israel all belonged to Baal. Isn’t that a startling statement? Among God’s Chosen People, all had deserted God & gone to Baal except Elijah! Have you ever felt like Elijah? You see things going on you know God doesn’t approve of, but no one seems to notice or care. You feel discomfort in your spiritual gut because of something that isn’t right, but you’re alone, wanting to stand with God. It’s a lonely place to be. But you’re never alone. Christ & the Holy Spirit intercede for you.

Elijah challenged them: get 2 bulls to sacrifice; choose which 1 you want & give me the

other. Put it on wood on the altar & pray to Baal to burn the offering. They prayed & prayed & danced around the altar & cut themselves to have blood flowing & prophesied frantically, but to no avail. Elijah soaked the altar 3 times until water was filling the trough around the altar. He prayed that God would show Elijah was His servant & would answer his prayer so people would know that He’s God & turn their hearts back again. Why do you pray? Do you desire that the true God will be revealed, that He’ll be honoured & people will turn to or back to Him? That’s important prayer. It’s not about us; it’s about Him. God’s answer? He blew them out of the water. The sacrifice was burned up, the wood was burned up, the stones were burned, even the water in the trench was burned up! A pretty convincing answer to prayer & demonstration of God’s presence, no? God delights in answering prayer that is honest & honours Him.

Immediately following this, Jezebel promised to kill Elijah, as he’d done to the 450 prophets of Baal. In spite of this great show of power by God, Elijah was scared & ran to the desert. Exhausted, he sat under a broom tree & prayed to die. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Have you ever felt like that? There’s just no more fight left in you, no hope in front of you, no apparent purpose in your life. Whatever you touch turns bad. It’s just too difficult to go on. As he slept an angel touched him, told him to get up & eat. By his head was hot bread & a jar of water—more reason to think about God’s loving care and provision for us! He went back to sleep. T**he angel of the Lord** (Jesus) came back a 2nd time, again telling Elijah to “get up & eat, for the journey’s too much for you.” God knows your condition, your frame; your limit.

On that nourishment Elijah traveled for 40 days. Please find that recipe for me! He reached Mount Horeb, the mountain of God, & went into a cave where he spent the night. The word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah? Did you ever question if God knows you by name or if He knows where you are? Put those doubts aside. Elijah responded he’d been very zealous for God but the Israelites had rejected God’s covenant & killed God’s prophets. Elijah believed he was the only 1 left & they were now trying to kill him too. It sounds like our day & time. More Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than all theprevious centuries combined. In the safe cocoon of North America, we wouldn’t sense that but it’s true. It was a desperate time for Elijah & it’s a desperate time for Christians today too.

So what did Elijah do? Nothing. God came to him. You don’t have to chase God. A powerful wind tore the mountains apart & shattered the rocks, but the Lord wasn’t in the wind. An earthquake occurred, but the Lord wasn’t in it either. Then came fire; again, the Lord was not in it. God’s over all nature & not answerable to it. He created it & can rule it. The Lord came to Elijah in a gentle whisper. Have you heard His quiet still voice speaking to you? Listen attentively!

God encouraged Elijah. He was not alone in his faith walk; God had reserved 7,000 in Israel who hadn’t bent their knee to Baal. We may feel alone, but God brings others alongside us to help & encourage us. Look for his helpers; He will lead you to them & bring you together.

Part of God’s plan was to prepare a successor for Elijah. We should always be preparing for what’s next. Who should be made ready to participate in some way in the Church that will grow them. It’s important to do this, even when you can do the job better than the person being groomed. As you step back, you enable others to grow so the torch can be passed along; otherwise, the Church is always 1 generation from extinction. Who’s going to lead this congregation tomorrow & beyond? One of the greatest things we can do is mentor someone along in their spiritual growth. Here’s what I’ve learned, here’s what I still don’t understand, here’s what I’m still wrestling with, here are some of the things to watch out for, here’s how I can help you.

And that’s the role that Elijah took with his successor, Elisha. In front of 50 prophets, Elijah & Elisha stopped at the Jordan River. Elisha rolled up his cloak & struck the water with it. The water divided & they crossed on dry ground. Once they’d crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “**Tell me what I can do for you.” This is as important a question as we can ask another person**. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. He was saying, **“**Help me be as good as you even better.” What a great request! It’s our hope that our children will learn from us, not make the mistakes we made, that they’ll be better than we are, accomplish more. If we want the Church of tomorrow to be better than today, we need to nurture it—1 person at a time, 1 act of service at a time, 1 kindness at a time, 1 visit made, 1 prayer uttered, 1 helping hand lifting. Encourage!

God honoured Elisha’s request. Elijah was taken up to heaven. As the 2 walked along, suddenly a chariot & horses of fire separated them & Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah & Enoch are the only 2 people we know of who went to heaven without 1st dying. Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak that had fallen from him, returned to the Jordan River & struck the water with it, just as Elijah had done to cross with Elisha. Listen to Elisha: “Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” How often have you asked where God is? Elisha was no different. God was there as He is here. The river divided & Elisha crossed over, a sure sign to the prophets who were watching & to Elisha that God’s spirit was resting on him, just as it had with Elijah!

Mentoring wasn’t Elijah’s idea. It was God’s. Jesus mentored His disciples to carry on His work after He ascended. 11 of them changed the world. The world’s not been the same since. Mentor others in God’s way; encourage them to trust God & grow large with Him. “Go big or go home.” God’s variation on that is: “Grow big, then **come home!”** Live large for Christ this week, helping others to be better or grow better, honoring God 1st in all you say & do. Ask others, “What can I do for you?” Ask God, “What can I do for you?” Listen carefully & then do it.