

**THE DEATH OF PREACHING**  
**The Elijah Series, part two**  
**July 9, 2017 – I Kings 17: 1-4, 18: 1-2, 18: 17-19**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

The situation is this. Ahab the King of Israel has gone after other false gods. The people of Israel have fallen far away from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The foreign queen, Jezebel, has brought her foreign gods with her and they have built altars to Asherah, Baal and various other offensive gods all over Israel. The King and Queen have murdered many of the prophets of the One True and Living God with whom they disagreed. So Elijah the prophet comes to Ahab and Jezebel with a Word that God has placed in his heart. It is a difficult Word, a challenging Word, a Word that Elijah must know will get him into trouble. But he is compelled to speak the Word, not just because it is truth, not because he wants to, but because he MUST speak it. It is the Word that God has first given him and it is the Word he must then speak. This is preaching 101; this is homiletics in a nutshell. There is the written Word, the Bible. And there is the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is the spiritual Word spoken by God through the Holy Spirit into the heart of the preacher. When those three things converge and are in alignment, then the WORD of GOD speaks. Its not what I am saying. It is what God is saying. It is not a lecture. It is not an English assignment. It is not there to entertain or amuse. It is to speak forth what God has spoken and is speaking. It is forthtelling. It is prophetic. It speaks with power, not of its own self authority, for it speaks in the power of Almighty God.

So Elijah enters into the presence of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He is the prophet and the preacher to the King. His is the highest and most exalted religious position in Israel. Will he speak words only to please his benefactor? Or will he speak the truth, even a hard truth, one that he well knows will not be well-received? Word of God speak. And his full sermon is not recorded in I Kings, only one line of it. “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.” (I Kings 17: 1) Elijah took aim at the false god, Baal, because Baal was the god of rain; people prayed to Baal when they wanted it to rain; people prayed to Baal when they wanted blessing in their life. Elijah was saying, there will be no more rain and no more blessing until you hearken to the Word of God. The dew and the rain will be shut up in heaven until you repent Ahab and Jezebel. And MY God is more powerful than your god, who supposedly controls the rain. And then the Word speaks again to Elijah and says, “Get the heck out of there and run away because Ahab and Jezebel are going to try to kill you for what you have just said!!!” (Or words to that effect!).

This sermon title, “The Death of Preaching”, came from an exchange I had in a previous church that had a lot of Southerners in it. A woman said, “Why Sturet, you’ll be the death of preaching!” Southerners have this ability to say the opposite of what they often mean. If they say to you, “Why you’re just precious, precious.”, that’s not a good thing. It means actually, I just hate what you just did. Or if they say, “Sturet, you’re such a caution.”, they mean you got a major problem, dude. So I was sort of confused by what the woman meant, was it “You’re a good preacher” or was it “You’re such a lousy preacher you’re going to kill all preaching.”? I should have said, “Lady, please speak clearly. I’m from Western PA and we say what we mean and we mean what we say out there in God’s country.” But I didn’t. Fiddle-d-dee, I’m such a “caution”.

Why Elijah, you’re the death of preaching! So he flees from being the preacher to the king and his next congregation is a congregation of ravens. That’s quite a fall. His reward for preaching the Word is to lose his pulpit. And then because the dew and the rain is shut up in heaven, even the brook Cherith dries up and is no more, so Elijah has to flee and go begging to a poor widow and her only son to take her last morsel of food. He goes from having a congregation of ravens to having a congregation of just two. Pretty

sad, the reward for being a prophet. But this is the one man God would choose to bring Israel back to God; this is the man who God would use to pour down the holy fire of the Holy Spirit. This is the man who all the people of Israel one day during his confrontation with the 450 prophets of Baal would declare: "The Lord He is God; the Lord He is God." (I Kings 18: 39) And then the Living waters of Holy Spirit came upon Israel once again. The dew and the rain came from heaven again. The fire fell and the rain fell and Israel returned to its Lord and God. May it be so.

Preaching in the American church is become a lost art. For me as a Presbyterian, I approach preaching as an "almost sacrament"; it is the spiritual moment in my week; it is the time when God must first speak to me and then I share with you what God has said. When I mount up into the pulpit I do so with some fear and trepidation every week. Its not nerves anymore; it's the genuine respect of a Holy God and the knowledge that what I desire to say is only what the Lord has first said to me. I don't want my offering to be filthy rags; I want them to be my utmost for His highest. Today, Preachers subscribe to sermon subscription services and preach sermons someone else wrote. Preachers download their sermons from Youtube and the Internet. Preachers use lectionary aids that give them their sermon illustrations and their sermon titles and even how to interpret the scripture verses to be used. Preachers don't have to have a personal encounter with the Lord God in their study anymore; they feel they don't need to get on their knees and in fear and trembling enter into the presence of God and to ask the Lord, What shall I preach? Preachers don't know their Bible any more. Preachers don't pray in their prayer closets until the Lord speaks into their heart anymore. One hour of prayer and study for every minute in the pulpit. Preachers take their assignment from the lectionary and their illustrations from a weekly email they receive. Why you can even drive around town and see the same sermon title posted on sign boards outside of different churches of different denominations. They all got it from the same place, it's the internet, and it isn't the Lord God Almighty. It's a dirty little secret. And that is why I am sharing what the Lord God Almighty has shared with me, that's why the dew and the rain is locked up in heaven for the American Church. There will be no Living Water preaching of the Living Word until the preachers stop seeing their sermons as English assignments that they pirate from Cliff Notes and start having a living encounter with the Living Word once again. Most preachers are not spiritually prepared in advance to speak the Word of God. Word of God speak!

I rarely re-preach any sermon for precisely that reason. But once I re-preached a sermon entitled, "No More Rhubarb" that was a sermon about members ceasing to have petty disagreements over small, stupid matters. When you take your focus off the Lord you argue about stupid stuff of no eternal significance. "Rhubarb" was a term used in Iowa when people disagreed, as in, "Wow, did you hear all the rhubarb that went on at the school board meeting last night!". So the illustrations were pretty personal to my experience in Iowa and to me. So I made the mistake of re-preaching the sermon in a church that was having a lot of trouble with too much rhubarb going on in it. And someone came up to me after the sermon and accused me of ripping off someone else's sermon that they had heard in their church in Florida! I was accused of stealing my own sermon! So I went to that Florida church website and sure enough there was a sermon titled, "No More Rhubarb" and the only change was that the Florida preacher set the illustration from his former church in Illinois. So I decided I would send that preacher a copy of my Iowa, "No More Rhubarb" sermon as an email attachment to him for his, you know, "edification". Why, Sturet, you're such a caution!

The dew and rain from heaven will be shut up for the American Church until preachers are raised up as Elijahs and have a personal, vital encounter with the Living Word, in study and in prayer, once again. Amen and Amen.

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**IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!**