

The Old Hickory

Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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A Godly Man in Wicked Surroundings

Elijah was a man who reached true greatness in the Lord's service. He was always ready to go where God would send him (I Kings 18:1; 19:15); to pray whenever prayer was needed (I Kings 17:20, 21; 18:36, 37), and to confront evil whenever confrontation was necessary (I Kings 18:17-24; 21:17-19). He was translated without seeing death, and he, along with Moses, was chosen to appear with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration.

The remarkable thing about Elijah is that he attained this greatness while living in a wicked and hostile environment. Had he lived in Judah during the righteous reign of Hezekiah or Josiah, we might not be surprised at Elijah's attainments. But he lived instead in Israel during the wicked reign of Ahab. He was subjected to the cruel intents of Jezebel. He was under constant harassment and threat of death. He became so discouraged at one point that he asked to die, but he never denied his God.

In this wicked environment Elijah was able to influence others. The widow of Zarephath was blessed through Elijah (I Kings 17:8-24). The multitudes on Mount Carmel were led to cry, "The Lord, He is God!" through his courageous efforts (I Kings 18:39). Elisha, his successor, must have been greatly influenced by him. And even Ahab was brought to humility on one occasion, clothing himself in sackcloth as a result of Elijah's rebuke (I Kings 21:27-29). The message of Elijah is clear. You can live a godly life and influence others for good in a wicked and hostile environment.

When one hears the excuses people make today, it is obvious that Elijah's message is badly needed in this generation. People excuse their failure to teach others the gospel with, "People are so prejudiced around here they just won't listen"; when the truth is, little effort has been made. If they are approached about their ungodly conduct, they explain that "You just don't know how terrible the people are that I have to work around every day". If their children go astray their explanation is, "Our children are faced with pressures that we didn't have growing up". Such statements, repeated often enough, become to many a "license" to do wrong and a salve to soothe their troubled consciences.

We must throw aside our excuses and make up our minds to do right. Elijah could serve God in wicked surroundings. And so can we.

- by Bill Hall

When Our Friends Become Our Enemies

King David of Israel had many enemies throughout his reign, and these were a bother. But in several of the Psalms he wrote about the ones who really tormented him. *"For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng"* (Psalm 44:12-14). One doesn't have to strain to hear the distress in David's voice. They are the words of a man who is hurting. In the 31st Psalm he lamented, *"I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors, and am repulsive to my acquaintances"* (v. 11). *"All who hate me whisper against me,"* he wrote in the 41st Psalm, but as well *"even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me"* (vss. 7,9).

Each of us would hope that our friends and family remain friendly and loyal to us. But alas, sometimes those dearest to us can be our biggest disappointment, perhaps even enemies.

Can we survive such distressing times? If so, how? Consider these Biblical points...

Others Have Suffered Likewise

Let no one imagine that they are the first to experience such agony. David, obviously, illustrates this point. Did he pen these psalms about his former friend, Saul, who had on

more than one occasion sought his life? Or perhaps he spoke of his former counselor, Ahithophel, who had joined the forces of his son Absalom in a coup attempt? Very likely he wrote some of these words about Absalom himself. We don't know for sure, but these psalms came from a man who had experienced a lot of woe and misery in this area.

Let us remember others as well. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Job's "*close friends abhorred*" and "*turned against*" him (19:19). Paul the apostle was forsaken by his friend Demas. In fact Paul wrote of a time when "*all those in Asia have turned away from me*" (2 Timothy 1:15; 4:10). Our Lord Jesus had many disciples who left Him -- one of His apostles even betrayed Him (John 6:66; Luke 22:48).

We don't intend to presume that the experiences of these forerunners will take all the sting out of one's own experience, but we are saying that none should become disillusioned by the treachery of friends and family. Jesus indicated this was a mark of discipleship, warning that "*a man's enemies will be those of his own household*" (Matthew 10:36).

A Time For Reflection

When David was being 'knifed in the back' by Absalom and had to, consequently, flee Jerusalem, a man named Shimei stood on the hillside and cursed David. When some would have executed the man, David said, "*let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David'*" (2 Samuel 16:10).

Was David being punished for his sin with Bathsheba and especially for his sin against Uriah, his **friend** he had murdered years before? David apparently thought so, and his suffering at the hands of his traitorous son provided a moment for reflection.

When others fail us, we would do well to think about times we ourselves have failed others. It should be a humbling experience. 'Getting a taste of our own medicine' ought to impact us. "But I've never treated anyone like this before!" you say. Better think again, brother. Have you not treated the Lord as an enemy many times over? No, such moments are good times for introspection, leading to humility. The same psalm that had David crying out about the mutiny of his "*familiar friend*" had him also begging God for mercy, saying, "*Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You*" (41:4).

Lean On The LORD

Listen to David in each of the aforementioned psalms: "*As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me... Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you*" (55:16,22). "*But you, O Lord, be merciful to me, and raise me up...*" (41:10). "*But as*

for me, I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand" (31:14,15). A person would have to be blind to miss where David put his trust. He saw the Lord as THE unfailing One to lean on, even when it seemed that all others were failing him.

And truly, the Lord is always there for you, the "everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5). "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me" (Psalm 27:10).

--Mike Noble

There's a little wide-eyed fellow,
Who believes you're always right,
And his ears are always open,
And he watches day and night.
You are setting an example,
Everyday in all you do;
For the little boy who's waiting,
To grow up to be like you.

> *"Being at the right place at the right time can only happen when you keep moving toward the next opportunity."*

> *"Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." -- Thomas A. Edison*

> *"When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on."*

SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "Mission For The King!" (text: Matt. 28:18-20); Sunday evening: Jesus Christ: A Closer Look – *Listeners Draw False Conclusions!* (Mark 3:20-35).