**Elijah, fleeing to Horeb**. (1 Kings 19: 1-8)

Reading *1Kings 19: 1- 8*

Text *1 Kings 19: 1- 8*

Sing Ps. 36: 1

 Ps. 36: 3

 Ps. 56: 1, 3, 4

 Ps. 56: 5

 Hymn 41: 3

Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ

“Stand up and eat! Because the journey will be too much for you”!

What is this? A word from God that grants us vacations at set times so that His children will not break down from too much stress?

Indeed the fatherly love of God is found here, and His mercy. He knows what He can expect from us; how weak our spirit and how small our strength. It does not escape Him when we reach our limit.

Is God saying this to everyone or to the individual Christian on every occasion? Does He speak this way for every moment of our lives?

You know that people love to make this the “application”. They say that every child of God has a difficult life just like Elijah and that we would collapse if He did not renew our strength and keep us on our feet. Once He gave food and drink to Elijah in the desert because otherwise the journey would become too much for him. And so we all have our ‘journey”. He meets us; He feeds us with spiritual food and drink, with word and sacrament. He, as Father tenderly and lovingly takes care that our way does not become too much for us.

Many understand that this refers to what God provides us with each Sunday in church, that He grants us power according to the inward man. In other words he invites us each Sunday to stand up and eat because the journey will too much for you. Otherwise your life’s pathway will become too hard for you.

This “application” is so popular and well-known that it looks like sacrilege to contest it.

But we have come here to hear the Word of the Lord ‘according to the meaning and intention of the Spirit’, and not according to the taste and tradition of men.

That is why I ask, is it so easy to jump from the cake baked on coals of fire to the soul food of the Word? Is it justified to choose this text as material for a post Lord’s Supper sermon because the cake and the water flask become a stereotypical spiritualization of what Christ does for us with the bread and the cup?

I do not believe it has anything to do with it because while Elijah was lying there sleeping under the broom tree an angel came and shook him awake. What he received was certainly not a sermon but a kind of pancake. And he received a crock of water for a real thirst. There was no spiritual quickening because later in the Horeb he is still just as emotionally despondent. He was not spiritually uplifted. Only his physical energy was restored.

Indeed, and more significantly, is this ongoing comparison between Elijah and us accurate? Is establishing this parallel valid?

Naturally Elijah was a person having same sentiments as us. He was as human as you and I. No one may say: Elijah was more able than us because he towered miles above us normal people. The powers that he unchained can only be brought into action by prayer. And we also can pray, just as well as him and the Father always ties the powers of the coming world to the prayers of the righteous. He was one with us as far as his abilities and capacities were concerned.

Yet this should not let us forget that this person of like feelings as all Israelites, received a very special task from the Lord, a commission that distinguished him from the rest of his people. Therefore the comparison between Elijah as we meet him here and us as we often find ourselves in the difficulties of our lives will not stand.

With him it was not just a low point on his life journey, a distress that was on par with the death of a child, a collapse of business or a nervous breakdown. But for him it was the crisis on his road of office.

In his personal life Elijah also would have known difficulties and worries. Which child of man would ever have known a life without any shadows? In this he was indeed one of us. But whatever sadness befell him in his personal life had a very different character than what came to pass in our text.

Life’s journey, as it is for everyone, is so unique that no two lives are the same. Yet there are still many things that are common to all so that if someone has a story to tell another will immediately start up about a similar experience.

Whoever receives a distinct mandate on an official journey as prophet by the Lord does not have his own little personal life to deal with. He wrestles with the cause of God, for the people of the Lord, for the reformation of the church.

No single Israelite has experienced as peculiar a crisis as Elijah endured at that moment. Yet, because he was the prophet of the Lord, all Israel was affected by his crisis. Wasn’t it the crisis for the LORD and for His people, for His church and for His service. Therefore it also affects us, who are the people of the Lord today.

So we hear the Word and it speaks to us about:

*Elijah, in the crisis of his official duty while fleeing to Horeb.*

We hear; 1) What drove him to his flight

 2) What he sought with his flight

 3) What he found on his flight.

**ONE**

I have just said beloved; that we meet Elijah here in the crisis of his special office and not at some low point in his personal life where difficulties and distress threaten to overwhelm him. It means that in his battle for the LORD, Israel’s God, he had reached a dead end and therefore as prophet there is no prospect left for him.

For years he had totally engaged himself in the struggle for reformation in Israel; he wanted to stir the people to return to the Word of the LORD.

 Scripture is silent about what he did before. It says he came from Tisbe and that is all we know about his past. Perhaps he had a farm in Tisbe, with pastures and cattle. In any case he had lived his life there. But he saw great need in Israel and the tremendous deformation under Ahab. This stirred him up, especially when the Spirit of the LORD come powerfully upon him causing him to bid farewell to his own affairs and from then on he gave himself totally to the service of battling for reformation. He had only one desire: to make a breach against apostasy with the Word of the LORD. From that moment on he would only be an office bearer in the service of the God of Israel. His name was his motto: Elijah! In other words: my God is the LORD.

You know the situation of those days. Centuries ago the LORD had led His people out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. It was deliverance out of sovereign grace. Therefore at Horeb Moses put the chosen people under the law of election so that they would only exist for the LORD and no one else. That was Israel’s only task, its purpose and its destiny; to be the people of the LORD! To live out of grace, to find support on the Word, to do all His commandments!

And when Moses was going to die his last deed was to etch into Israel the requirements of the covenant. In the flat fields of Moab he held his farewell sermon which we still have in the book of Deuteronomy. He worked out all the angles and explained every facet. But it was always the same theme; listen oh Israel the LORD is our God, the LORD alone! There is no other God but Him. You shall serve no one else but Him!

Moses set before Israel all the blessings of the covenant that were for them if they remained with the LORD. However he also proclaimed the curse to Israel if they would forsake the LORD as He had revealed in His Word.

That is how Israel inherited the Promised Land.

They are barely there and decline and disobedience begin. They do not eliminate the inhabitants of the land as the LORD had instructed. Therefore the LORD set them up to be a snare of destruction (Judges 2). Every day they are in contact with these people and their gods; with the Baal’s and the Astarte’s, the powers of nature and the gods of rain and fertility.

The entire Canaanite religion was one piece of nature worship, they called on the powers of creation upon which all life seemed to depend and to which they gave a visible representation with an image. Their whole religious service was set up to control these powers through their rituals. Their sacrifices were not expressions of praise or giving thanks for free grace but an endeavor to attune the favor of the gods and get them to be agreeable to their own purposes. Worship was degraded to a bargaining session, some for you and some for me. It was not faith or grace nor prayer or obedience, nor absolute surrender. No; worship became the art of prying from the forces of nature what ever your heart desires.

Israel, in the time of the judges, was grievously infected with this kind of religion, and the judgments of the LORD were effective for only a little while!

In the days of David and Solomon it went somewhat better. All went thoroughly amiss however after the dividing of the kingdom. Jeroboam set up the golden calves in Bethel and Dan and it was he who, the scriptures repeat in mournful litany, had caused Israel to sin.

You have to see this clearly! It was not just a matter of praying in a different place, or because God was called upon with a different name. But they were really approaching a different God! The young steer was an image of the powers of nature and fertility. The whole matter now was to pay careful attention in order to ascribe to the activities and methods set up by the priests. Via the cult you proscribed for yourself all what gives blessings of life and grants fruitfulness. It did not come by grace alone! It did not come from a life of faith and via the Word! No, if you knew the rituals and the religious artifices, you could guarantee yourself prosperity and fortune, and create an existence according to your own chosen style.

Naturally the LORD, as God of Israel, was not yet put aside completely. Many still served Him. There were many who held superficial honor for the small left over’s of serving God according to Moses all the while combining it with the service of the Baals.

Than Ahab appeared; Ahab had taken a wife from Sidon where the service of Baal was the national religion and any other religion was kept out. I will be short. Ahab is under the thumb and has no way out. It should not surprise us that he built a temple for the Baal of the Sidonian’s and that he was the instrument used by Jezebel to propagate the service of her god. Jezebel was fanatical and exclusive.

Therefore it becomes deadly serious. Elijah complains that Israel has abandoned the covenant, has torn down the altars of the LORD and killed His prophets! It is forced to a climax: no longer Baal beside the LORD according to the usual custom but: Baal instead of the LORD. The service of Israel’s God is banned and deliberately destroyed by a fanaticism that will not be changed by any form of resistance.

Now, at the moment when Ahab misleads all Israel by saying Baal is God, -- at that moment Elijah goes up to meet him and takes his gloves off saying: God is the LORD! Elijah says no from the bottom of his heart to the whole religion imported by Ahab on orders of Jezebel.

My God is the LORD!

That is a totally personal confession, but Elijah does not only say this for himself so that he only serves the LORD in his own village and leaves Israel in Baal’s grip. No, for his zeal has flared up: the zeal for the LORD, whose people and whose service they have stolen.

That is why Elijah walks into the spotlight and publicly declares: now it will be decided who is God in Israel, Baal or the LORD! I swear in the name of the LORD: no dew or rain will come except by my word. The Word of the LORD departs from Israel!

It will have to be proved now what Baal is capable of. They can bring as many sacrifices as they want, they can engage all the rituals to put all the powers of fruitfulness into motion. The word of Elijah, in other words the Word of the LORD, shuts the heavens from this day on. The LORD binds up the clouds and stops the dew. Let Baal prove his might now!

It becomes deadly and oppressive. The Word that proclaims its power of shutting out makes Israel sigh for three years while Baal is proved powerless.

Then comes the remarkable day at Carmel, Elijah has reappeared after many years and it has become a time of decision. The priests of Baal cane themselves in vain, their sacrifice is not accepted and their self chastisement finds no hearing with their god. But Elijah prophecies and he prays. The Word comes into action after three and a half years and the fulfilling of that Word is accomplished by the answer of that prayer. And the streams of rain pour down.

The people are beside themselves: the LORD is God! Even the king is deeply impressed. He does not object when the priests of Baal are finished off.

Elijah rejoices! This day means the decisive return of Israel toward the LORD: wasn’t his God victorious? And when Ahab rides to Jezreel ahead of the approaching storm, the hand of the Lord comes upon Elijah. He runs ahead of Ahab’s chariot faster than any human has ever run before. For this is a symbol. The rain returns because the Word of the LORD returns and for that reason only. The prophet is back and the king and the people again have a future only because of him!

You understand that Elijah then dreamed of repentance! The Word of the LORD will be decisive again from now on and Israel will be what it must be. The nation of the only God, the nation of faith and prayer, of obedience and good works, a people which ultimately obtains the blessing not by itself but by living out of free grace! Not a people who make a god according to their own heart but a nation that serves the LORD according to His Word!

But was it really a victory of the LORD and His Word? Was a decision truly reached in Israel and for good? Elijah soon became aware otherwise. *Jezebel is still here*!

Understand that when Ahab returned home he would have told his wife everything: the powerlessness of Baal’s prophets and the majesty of the prophet of the LORD; the terrible end of Jezebel’s priests and the glorious return of the man of God. It had made a deep impression on him so he tells all in great detail.

Deep down Ahab may have been brought low but not Jezebel in the least. Her nature was far different then his.

You see it written many times. Ahab waffles, Jezebel not for one second. Ahab has periods of indecision; Jezebel simply doesn’t know what that is. He can be brought to think differently, but she is hard as a rock: proud, inexorable, and unmovable. Later when Jehu murders the royal family she remains unbowed and haughty. She dressed up as a queen and insults the king’s murderer to his face. When Ahab, out of vexation in the matter of Naboth’s vineyard, lies in his bed sulking like a child and as indecisive, because he doesn’t get his way --- Jezebel deals with it! You can notice the annoyance in her voice; are you a king? Are you sick when faced with opposition and become totally out of sorts? Would she move aside for such an insignificant man?

Note too, she immediately recognizes that Ahab may have first introduced the Baal worship but he is so impressed by what happened that day that he became silent before Elijah. He might even change the helm of the state and make Elijah a captain. But Jezebel is not put off for a second. Would she give that prophet a leadership position and abolish the Baal service because of Carmel?

Never! She swears as heartily and with as much conviction as she can. On the contrary, she will silence that prophet for good. She sends him a message with the announcement that he will be a corpse within twenty four hours; the queen has sworn with the coarsest self imprecating oath!

You might think it was dumb of her to let him be warned! Now Elijah could disappear and find a safe place. If she had been sensible she could have had him killed while he was still present.

But then you don’t understand Jezebel. The great irritant is not that Elijah lives! Ultimately that it is not what rankles, whether someone is alive or dead does not interest her. It is that he came there at all, and in such a manner, that put her off! He can go ahead and find a place where he could live safely as long as he withdraws from the political scene! Instead he had publically entered the city in front of Ahab’s chariot!

Jezebel understood that a relationship was headlined there: the prophet leading and the king in second place. The Word came first and then politics. Ahab had swallowed it but she never would.

The rude prophet has forced her and her husband to reveal their second scheme publically. This humiliation she will never bear.

If prophets want to be around, fine! As long as they know their place! As long as they remember that Ahab is king and she is queen. The prophet will not dictate to the king: thus says the LORD! The king, and if he doesn’t dare then the queen instead, will tell the prophet: this is what you will speak.

And that Elijah came in as number one and the king as number two and he made this fact in a public demonstration, this humiliation she will never forgive. That was an open affront! A crass defeat of the kingship!

Poor Ahab thinks it is okay. But Jezebel swears: I will not step aside one step! For no one! Not for a prophet, not for the Word, not even for a demonstration of power such as on Carmel.

She has been publicly challenged, and she publicly accepts the challenge. She is prepared for a duel between prophet and king, between the LORD and Baal.

Indeed beloved, Jezebel is not thinking of murder at this time although she certainly is not scared of it. It is a threat; she wants to know if the prophet will stand behind his message. She wants to see proof that he will hold his ground when opposed. Yesterday he had publically humiliated Ahab, and especially her scornfully and she will not take it.

Naturally she could kill him. But what would that accomplish? That does not undo the debacle although she would have removed the opponent by force. Then there would not be a moral victory over him as he had achieved over her the day before. He had made a great impression on the people. Kill him now; the people will still make him great and call her deed a callous murder. A murdered Elijah remains the victor in the perception of men! Only if he himself leaves the field empty for her, only if on account of her threats, the spiritual weapons, he becomes silent, then has she won!

Which of us will be eliminated by the indiscriminate sword is not a question for her? But it is a question of who will go in defeat and retreat, admitting that the other party is the greater? To cut him down is a cold accomplishment, a matter of overpowering. She wants to be able to measure up against him. She puts her *word* against his. She desires a duel, to fight it out with him with the weapon that he choose: the *word!*

He threatened, she will too. He swore, she follows, word against word, threats versus threats. Who has the stronger spirit? Who has the greatest faith in their God? Of the two which will hold fast to their God absolutely? Will the prophet bow to the queen or visa-versa? Will his God triumph here or will hers? All Baal’s prophets may be lying dead – she presents herself as the only prophetess of her God over against that one prophet of the LORD. Word against word, oath versus oath, God versus God!

Jezebel realised that Elijah is an opponent that you don’t simply remove with the dumb sword. That can be done to recalcitrant elements such as Naboth or such like ordinary folk. Elijah is an opponent of such format as can only be overcome by extraordinary means. Yesterday he stood on Mount Carmel, him against all the rest. By himself alone he has destroyed everything. With the Word? No; with his spirit, with his faith, with his fanaticism, with his immovable radicalism. At the least he meant what he said, his God is the LORD!

She will certainly not withhold that honour from him: he conducts himself according to his confession. He does not act in the compromising style of diplomats but in the exclusive way of absolute faith. The only one who said yesterday, in the midst of those thousands including her own husband, here I stand I cannot do otherwise and if I most stand alone I will, but this is my faith and the LORD is my God; He will help me. That is why they had all changed course.

Except Jezebel, also a figure in large format who, like Elijah, does not walk along with the masses or change direction when they change direction. One who in turn says: here I stand I will not do otherwise.

Are all the prophets of Baal put to death? Have all his followers run over to the camp of the LORD? Even the king himself? Well then; Jezebel stands alone, opposed to all the others. Now she stands alone against all others as Elijah had done yesterday. She dares, saying: my faith is as absolute as yours and my God is as true as yours. Here I stand, alone; I can not do otherwise, Baal help me. My God suffered defeat against your God yesterday. Today I will be prophetess of that defeated God and declare war against you as prophet of the victorious God. I meet you in a duel and our only weapon will be the *word*. You have cast the judgement of your God on the people; I throw the threats of my God on you, and who of us will remain standing? My God is defeated but his prophetess will never bend. Your God has won. Remain true to this victorious God if you dare!

The Greek translation has added some words that may not have been there originally. Some words preceding Jezebel’s oath make a beautiful commentary on it. According to that translation she said, before she swore “*if you are Elijah, then I also am Jezebel*”.

Meaning this: your name is not common like any twelve words in a dozen, but it is an agenda, a confession and a symbol! When somebody in Israel mentions your name it will be with respectful tone and deep reverence. Your name is not like one everyone else has. This is your agenda: the LORD alone and not Baal. A confession unmoveable and fearless! A symbol of absolute faith: the LORD is God, even if you are the only one who still says it. But if the name “Elijah” denotes that then I am exactly the same.

My name is not just a personal name which any lady could enter into the municipal record book. My name is also part of the program! You say the LORD alone! I answer: Baal and no other!

Your name is on all lips as the essence of self confidence and bravery today; it is the symbol of absolute conviction. They don’t even mention Ahab. Elijah is number one for everybody!

Do you dare to stand against everyone alone? So do I.

Are you undaunted and radical? Me too!

You don’t move over for anyone? Neither will I!

I stand here and can’t do otherwise nor will do otherwise.

Do you swear by your God? I will do it by mine!

Did you say: Baal will be eliminated and I will stop the mouths of all his servants? I say: the LORD will never be mentioned again and I will stop the mouth of his bravest prophet!

You are prophet: I am queen. Who of us will yield? I challenge you!

Beloved, this hour is much more critical then that of Carmel. Then he was alone against all. He could remain standing, he, with the living God and His Word, because Baal had no voice and no answer. But today he stands with his victory against her alone, the king and the people are behind him! She calls him out as he had done from his place yesterday. One woman who takes it up for her defeated god against God, whose prophet had defeated all just yesterday. She dares! She dares alone with her vanquished god, with her faith and her conviction!

If she had cut Elijah down, she would have made him small but would not have overcome him. Someone can buckle under brute force yet remain the moral victor. But she plans to duel! If he, after his exultant victory and the support of the entire nation behind him, now capitulates to this woman who alone chooses the side of her beaten god then he will have suffered a defeat so crushing that it completely overshadows yesterday’s glory! She draws him out: are you Elijah? Then I am Jezebel! And she swears: I wager that tomorrow my name will be on everyone’s lips. They will say again tomorrow night: Baal is god, because of me! He helps me truly!

What a woman beloved! Yesterday the entire structure of her fortress, with the king in the lead, was destroyed because of one hero. There is still one woman on the loosing side who does not give in, who, who, although alone, scorns the victor! One woman with a lost cause, but she wins! Because her faith is also absolute and her worship is also radical! It is not a question of how many stand behind me or beside me or of who goes along? It is a matter of: he is god even if no mortal professes him!

Do you understand how critical this became? Not Carmel, but this fight is decisive! If Elijah loses here, after yesterday’s victory, if he is silenced by a woman who takes her idolatry absolutely serious and dares to swear by a defeated god, not seeing but believing,-- then Elijah is gone. Not as a person but as prophet! Then the faith of a woman here in Israel has put a dam against the Word which had come irresistible and triumphant. She forced that word back simply with an oath by her god and a threat, only by one spiritual weapon. Elijah didn’t stand here for himself but for Israel, for the Word, for the covenant, for the LORD!

That is why this text is so oppressive. It is not a matter just between those two, for then it would undoubtedly be interesting from a psychological viewpoint. Then it would not be a matter of life for us to!

Did you see the Baal that scorned the LORD by the mouth of Jezebel? And that on the day after the LORD had achieved His great triumph? Did you see that by the appearance of Jezebel the whole reformation and its first fruits were undone straightaway?

Do you see that today this struggle is still being fought in a bitter and radical way? What is happening today? The world is divided into camps according to economic ideologies. On one side there are the socialists (Russia, communism) who will not work with the capitalistic (American) idea even though much of the world would expect cooperation and finds it foolish that other parts of the world will not.

But where does the church of our Lord Jesus Christ stand?

You say economic recovery is good isn’t it? Wars and depressions have resulted in great need. What destruction and poverty! How life has bled! Wouldn’t getting out of misery and impoverishment make anyone rejoice?

Yet today the scriptures still say that the LORD is God, and not Baal! Asking today too; how do people seek that recovery! Do we expect it from the LORD or from Baal?

Should we choose between the two ideologies? They are both Baal service. True they do not hold images of their god on high in order to kneel before them. They have no temple either. They have risen above that primitive stadium. Yet with both there is the honoring of nature: a cult of the economy! They both boast of a system that guaranties life and unlocks the fruits of production. They both proclaim the saving of life according to their religious ideology and with both that salvation comes from below. Both systems east and west are totally different yet both preach a religious system, a following a rule of methods, consequentially ritualistic, by which the powers of success are put into motion. That way Baal comes in from all directions!

Therefore it is matter of life and death for the church where its members stand. How workers and employers organize themselves and what they do in these organizations. We are not against Christian organizations par se, but it may be of serious concern what spirit drives these professors of Christ.

It doesn’t interest many how they receive their bread as long as they get it, as long as something can be earned and life can improve. One seeks it the American or capitalistic way and another in a socialist or communist way. They will fight about it because everyone swears by his own system, by their own idolatrous doctrine. Yet they will all go where they see the best results.

Where are our people and their organizations? No I do not question the motives of their struggle for Christ in the economic world. I also know that in these organizations many human weaknesses and shortcomings will keep any progress in check. If only it was the gospel that acts as leaven and permeates everything in spite of all.

If only the confession of the LORD and His covenant was maintained as central. If the bible spoke the deciding word each time again! If there is a wrestling for the name of the LORD and for His sake people presented the antithesis as absolute and accepted the consequences.

It is my conviction that many no longer know what it is all about and it concerns me. I believe that secularism has penetrated so deep that it is no longer important how to build the organization with those who truly confess the name of Christ but simply to seek as strong an organization as possible by having a large number of members even if it means taking in unbelievers. This has become so bad that now the main things are markets, profits and investing and I don’t know how many other matters. In other cases the main items are sick days or holidays, child care or pension and being involved in management.

Then the stakes are no longer: the words of the LORD! But the ideals of men! Inevitably the state increasingly takes over more and more of the ordering, regulating and guaranteeing all of life from cradle to grave.

And so we drift straight into the direction of worshipping the beast!

If these things are mentioned in a sermon the employer will say: you mean well reverend, but life is so complicated; what can we begin in the factory with the bible? The worker also thinks the minister a good man with warm social manners maybe, but he will say that he sits too long in his study, he lives outside of reality! You might as well say that the minister doesn’t understand any of it. But only tell me this, fabricator and labourer, how you personally serve the LORD in your work and carry on the struggle against the Baal? How you fight for the name and right of Christ Jesus there!

With many, faith in the LORD as far as these things are concerned has left room for dependency on government and the system and the organizations. Talk to the people, they say we have a great association and so we will achieve something. We mention our wishes to the government. If that doesn’t work we demand, and if that is unsuccessful we threaten and if there is no other way we strike. It is as if we could organize the misery away! As if the making of laws could coerce distress to abandon us. As if we could demonstrate and talk the curse of God out of our lives!

Oh that proud, unbroken spirit that economically speaking no longer knows what grace is, or knows what the covenant means! And the people do not understand it, they don’t see it! What is keeping people busy? That the recovery takes so long, and that everything is so expensive, that things are not lovely between east and west and if there might be war again! Who recognises the great spiritual warfare in these things?

Our organizations currently work so well with the others. But where is the testimony of our people, as opposed to the other associations, that the distress is due to the adulterous wandering away from the LORD? That it is His curse which makes life poor. That relief only comes when there is a return to the LORD. Where is the wrestling with His Word in order to testify in the matters of the day, the Word with its promises for daily life in these times, also with its demands and threats?

I fear that with many the altars of the LORD have been broken down already even though they still pray and give thanks at their meals. They do not kill but silence the prophets of the LORD by saying that they have no understanding of these things.

But beloved open your eyes. We meet Baal in the economy and Jezebel in the organizations and unions and they will never move aside. They will first try to mislead us and if we resist they will seek to force us to capitulate. If we still aren’t silenced they will kill us!

Doesn’t the scripture say so? And is it only the Old Testament? Isn’t that also the language of the new?

You know Revelation 2 with the letter to Thyatira the city of business and industry, the city of factories and unions. Jezebel lives in that city! She may even have been the wife of the minister. She misled the people into idolatry, into bowing down before the idol of trade; that they were all allowed eat together from the sacrifice brought to the economic god that is Baal! They all could profit from the prosperity that this idol brings. And in the church this wife of the minister or of someone else says to the believers: join in! Then John says that there sitting with you is Jezebel who teaches you to bend the knee for Baal!

But who sees her now? And those who see are so alone and so small in number that they become silent. That is also capitulation!

**TWO**

Therefore this is written about Elijah in the scriptures. When he saw that Jezebel kept her toe to the line, even though all alone, then he fled for his life’s sake. He moved aside and the queen was number one.

And it was only one day after the events on Mt. Carmel! The last blow was for Baal!

That was terrible beloved! And right after the glory of Carmel!

Some have tried to explain it psychologically. It was a reaction to the tension of the previous day that was equal to a tension of many years! It was a day wherein Elijah had to use up his last bit of spiritual strength no less then his physical. Running so fast before Ahab’s chariot with the high expectation that his cause for the LORD was decided! Through all these things Elijah became completely exhausted and therefore Jezebel could take him by surprise.

This is inadmissible to me. The previous day had certainly demanded the utmost from him physically and spiritually, but do they also explain the psychological condition of Jezebel? Did she have stronger nerves them him? It was a flattening blow for her: her god had been unable to do anything; all her prophets were killed; the whole nation had turned and even Ahab had backed off. It would be understandable if she had become numb and paralysed now, if she had been so defeated and dazed by the shock that she would give way and surrender.

It appears unbelievable that Elijah was so out of balance that he could not digest the shock of Jezebel’s threats.

The fact we face is that he gave it all up in one moment. It was *unbelief!* He had counted on absolute victory. Yet when Jezebel, despite all, remained steadfast he gave up everything for lost.

Perhaps he thought: Jezebel will get Ahab behind her again and together they will get the people to follow once more. Indeed what is more fickle than the voice of the masses? So the whole nation and the whole apparatus of the state; the army and the sword will stand behind Jezebel again, keeping it in the hands of Baal. So he fled for his life. Was it a moment of weakness? I don’t believe it. He gives up everything as lost for good!

Notice: he does not stay in Judah but travels much further, into the wilderness. His heart heavy without hope sends him where Moses once taught the children of Israel the rules of the covenant. That great beginning at Horeb was written in his heart. All his life he was appalled that Israel had erased all that past history! That it no longer wanted to be governed by the history at Horeb!

That is how he wandered through the wilderness. Here it had begun. His heart was aflame by that past, even now. He will never bend to Baal. If there is no other way and there is no place in Israel for the LORD; then leave that land of Baal, he can’t live there nor does he want to. What was there for him yet? He desires nothing there besides the LORD!

He turns his back to the Promised Land for good. He gives all Israel up as lost, because the struggle for the LORD has come to a dead end and nothing will come of it any longer. He could have stayed in Judah but he doesn’t: he gives all Israel up for booty. He vacates the struggle; he has no desire to undertake a new effort. What greater thing can move the hearts of the people if Carmel can’t make a breakthrough? The case for the LORD is lost!

He wants to die here in the land of his dreams. He had fought for an illusion! Letting go of the dream is impossible for him and its the realization even more! There is only one wish left: to die in the wilderness. Ages ago the dream was born here: here it will perish and be buried under the sand.

What will become of Israel without the Word? And how will the name of the LORD become famous in that nation? He didn’t know. He only knows that he was a wrestling for many years, a wrestling without result, also a wrestling without prospect. All he knows is despair.

He lies under a broom tree and prays his last prayer: LORD now it is enough, take my soul. I can no longer overcome. I have battled long and with zeal for Thy name but all in vain. I waited long, had great hope, and rejoiced a moment but I was a fool. I will never win over Baal who has adherents like Jezebel and has everything going him. I can do no more and in the end am no any better then my fathers. Their strength was limited and so is mine. Their struggles were in vain as were mine. Their work for Thee had no permanence nor did mine. Did I not battle and suffer for three years for one victory in Carmel? After one day it already appeared that I got no further. It was like flogging a dead horse. LORD every attempt at reformation is beyond the power of men and every effort is doomed to failure. I return Thy mandate to Thee; I am no match for it. Neither the fathers nor I and in fact no one! It makes no sense. There was no one, there is no one, and there will never be a man child who will cause Thy covenant to triumph.

Here you have Elijah in an abyss of despair. He achieved a victory but it was not decisive. He suffered a defeat. He said to himself; now all is lost. Fight for repentance in Israel and go back into the ring once more, no; let me die here in the wilderness where it all started so beautifully. LORD I loved this beginning of Thine in this place and I could never renounce it. But I know that this beginning has long since run stuck. I am the only one whose heart was grasped by it. There any sign of it left anywhere. LORD that beginning I loved but the memory is heart wrenching because all has come to a dead end.

Elijah bows his head and stretches his limbs; he goes to sleep for ever. At that moment God’s covenant for him disappears for good in the land where it once began. Who is the LORD; reality or illusion? O; it numbs him for he can no longer think. He only knows that the LORD will never triumph with His people. He only wants to sleep and never awaken.

O no beloved, I do not want to reproach Elijah, especially today. For who are we?

We love the people of God and we think with respect of the past; with the reformation of the church in the days of Luther and Calvin and with new reformations in the past centuries under de Cock, Kuyper and others. It grips our hearts that all of life should be for the LORD and that the church would observe the covenant and Word of God as her treasures. Don’t we also want that beginning at Horeb to continue into our century through Jesus Christ!

What came of it? The church had fallen asleep again. The majority of the children of the reformation of the previous century no longer confessed the solidity of the covenant or said that they are no longer interested in what baptism actually signifies. And consequently the foundations of Christian life began to waver. They rudely rejected the rule of Christ in his church after it had received dominance again barely sixty years ago.

The reformation and blossoming of Christian life – ah yes, it is so beautiful, but what is it other than a beautiful dream that never become reality? What is left of it today other than an illusion, jut as with Elijah? We cannot deny the ideal but we would begin despair of its realization.

Indeed in nineteen forty four there was a new reformation in the church. Our God be praised! The question is was it well founded: how many had run along without knowing what it was all about? Without it having grabbed their hearts? Some had gone back. Indeed we didn’t, at least not yet. How many will still be here when the LORD calls for repentance again. How many will be able miss the greater numbers?

There have been signs here and there that the streams of the last reformation have silted up. There were those for whom the liberation was not absolute. I’m not saying that the break must be permanent but the commandment that led to the liberation has eternal validity. But some only grieve for the brokenness and want to heal the break. They don’t discuss that the norm is untouchable and cannot be compromised.

There had been talk from both sides of eventually finding a temporary road which could lead to reunion. Not a road that people would consider ideal but which would be considered permissible and passable. That road would have both parties confessing the sin of the break while upholding the rightness of their cause before the Lord and to then proceed with an as yet to be established basis.

As if the LORD had dotted in temporary paths beside the high road of his covenant and law! As if, He, instead of the way He commanded and prescribed, knew of other paths which, although not ideal, could be surveyed and built for covenantal traffic when the need arose! If He doesn’t prevent it He will soon find His people struggling everywhere on their own improvised narrow pathways of which they say: they are not ideal but we are walking and going forward and therefore for the present situation they will be considered ideal and even recommended! But who exalts the way for Him? Who prepares the way of the LORD, the straight way in the wilderness? Who makes straight what is crooked? Who levels the hills into valleys?

Beloved now, see the snares! They wanted to see sins confessed from both sides. But if they are serious each side will have to make a judgment on what happened. The man who put on the binding and therefore broke into pieces will have to say that it was sin. And whoever rejected the binding, and so ended up separate, will also have to say that it was sin. Whoever suspended will have to say it was sin for otherwise the consequent break was not sinful but God pleasing. And those who rejected the suspensions and liberated shall have to confess that it was sin for what else would restrain their confession regarding the sinfulness of the break. But when it comes down to it both parties will claim their actions were right before the LORD! For people still hold and maintain their positions justified before Him. But then the entire confession of guilt is fiction. They confess communal guilt but when they put the breach before the LORD they each say in turn that they sinned and not us!

Who bound says: it was according to the will of the LORD, I bind on earth what was bound in Heaven. Whoever rejects the binding also says: it was according to His will. What was loosed on earth shall be called loosed in Heaven. Who will come free of this chaos? Binding is obedience as is the rejection of it. Suspension was ordered by God but rejecting it no less.

Whoever maintains the rightness of his cause does not just say that his past conformed to God’s law but also professes that law as norm for the present. He does not deny his past and does not bury it but carries his reasoning through, finishing today what he started yesterday!

They say then that both sides should maintain the rightness of their causes, each telling God and men that it was His will that divided but that tomorrow they should come together on a new basis. Both sides get to appeal that the rightness of their case holds true for the past but has no force for the present. Today there will be judgment on a new standard.

The rightness of your cause can be maintained because your present exists as an extension of the past. But the new basis involves making a break between yesterday and today.

Justifying yourself means saying I can and may not do otherwise. The new basis however declares: I can do differently and I must.

Maintaining the self justification of their actions signifies they have been done in faith and according to God’s law to His glory and they call their own works good and praise them as works of God. But with the New Basis people bury the past acts of God with songs of praise and confine the law of God, which remains the same yesterday and today and forever to a museum of antiquities, all the while confessing: how I love Thy law.

Who will draw a line from Horeb via the Sermon on the Mount to the present day? Indeed who, in this confusion, still holds fast to God’s beginning? Who, seeing these things, would not sigh with Elijah: LORD, it is enough! We are no better than the fathers. Nothing will become of it. Calvin’s work was a failure, as were De Cock’s and Kuyper’s and ours as well.

I dare say nothing of Elijah. It is easy to be a prophet in a circle of prophets and to reform a church when many help along or to make a Christian sound when you still have the support and cooperation of an organization behind you. But what will become of it when we end up standing alone and have to keep the testimony of Christ by ourselves also socially and economically? What if we cannot get our foot in the door? If Jezebel refuses to move over one step and threatens with the sword? It would be good if we at least don’t bend our knees before Baal. If we don’t belie the ideal although we despair of seeing it carried out?

But to stay firm in a crisis in which even Elijah succumbed! Who is up to it to keep testifying alone while the sword threatens?

Is the danger not great that we at best, like Elijah, refrain from kissing Baal but flee and give up the whole struggle for the cause and the right and the people of the LORD because it is a fruitless affair any way? That we, being battle weary, desire only eternal rest?

No one should say that we shall do this or that because we are liberated! Jezebel is immovable. Do you understand that it is about life and death! Our organizations? Ah, soon the drum rattling will cease and we will become like dead sheep because of the name of Jesus!

I do not dare to upbraid Elijah; but he can not comfort me either. If scripture had not spoken of Elijah’s last deed there would have been no courage left. You know that they both, Moses and Elijah, proclaimed to Christ the end which he had to accomplish in Jerusalem when he appeared with them on the mount of transfiguration. Elijah who had capitulated was standing there in heavenly glory. With Moses he points away from himself and declares to us that Jesus Christ is the Only one who would not capitulate. Who did not abandon the cause of God and His people not even when He was struck by the sword of Jezebel!

Beloved this is what we are left with. Not an Elijah, even if Jezebel says that his name is a symbol of constancy and daring and she praises him because for him religion is absolute and enabled him to stand alone. Elijah points to Christ, saying, do not look to me but hear Him!

I say that we will not come through the crisis with Elijah’s nature but with faith in Jesus Christ only. Only His name is the program: the LORD delivers! His work continues from Horeb to the last day through Jesus Christ.

Do you ask for a name? Know that he is called Christ! The victory is to Him!

**THREE**

Because if it had depended on Elijah the cause of the LORD would have been over, for good! He despaired of everything and forsook his work and his people. It is enough he said! What is left over is to die!

But the LORD says: it is not enough. He lets him sleep, and eat and drink and sleep again and eat again. Do not spiritualize it; it is not soul food or comfort food. Later he is still discouraged. It is only that when he lies down to die God keeps him alive!

Then the LORD leaves him to wander about the wilderness for forty days and nights. Where, to Horeb? He could have reached that in about eleven days (Deut. 1: 2). Elijah wandered about without plans or purpose, without hope. It hammers within him: Moses was here! It all started here and it was pure, but he thinks it was for nothing. Despair has entered his heart. He cannot abandon the ideal. But he could not successfully believe it either. So he wanders around with an ideal that is unreal.

*Never*

Beloved, it is a sad sight here to see the wandering prophet, a man without direction and hope. But it is a treasure to see the LORD here! If it had depended on Elijah the prophet would have died there under the shrub and the Word of God would have been buried with him in the sand. Then the covenant would have come to nothing in the same place where it had started.

But his God let him sleep and eat and wander. In other words the prophet, who wanted to die, lives! And the Word which was in danger of coming to a stand still is kept in motion! The covenant is not silted over in the dessert. This is God, the LORD, who Himself keeps up His work because He knows Himself undefeatable!

If you see the storm approaching and lose all courage against such an immeasurable force, -- when you are liable to give it all up; then don’t look to the prophet of God but to Him the God of all prophets!

Prophets are people who can capitulate. But God’s word stands forever and will not be moved one inch. Only for that reason do I dare risk persecution for Satan trembles as does Jezebel! The LORD who leads us, the God of the prophets shall raise the standard for you.

Amen.

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