

## **GO BACK THE WAY YOU CAME -- GO BACK TO THE WORD!**

1 Kings 19:14-21 *altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and n*

**TEXT:** *(Elijah) replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your ow they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel-- all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-by," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Joel Osteen is probably the most popular of TV and radio evangelists. I've seen TV commercials promoting his ministry and one of the more prevalent sound bytes being played is Joel Osteen saying: "The power within you is greater than any power that comes at you." That's typical Protestant false doctrine. They teach "Christ IN you" while the Bible teaches "Christ FOR you." What I mean is this: If Joel Osteen would have preached this to Elijah, I would bet that Elijah would have punched him in the mouth.

Elijah was one of the greatest prophets of the Lord who had experienced both. His call was to minister to Israel, at a time when it was being ruled by the most wicked king and queen their history had ever known: King Ahab and Jezebel. The country was steeped in the fertility cult known as Baal worship. They were killing the preachers of God's word and were hunting Elijah. It was no small act of courage when Elijah came out of hiding to challenge King Ahab's 450 prophets of Baal to a showdown at Mt. Carmel on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. There the Lord revealed himself as God by ignoring the prayers of the Baal prophets and answering the prayer of Elijah and sending fire to consume his sacrifice. By Elijah's command, the 450 Baal prophets were executed to shouts of the Israelites: ***The Lord--He is God!*** Success!

But the very next scene from Scripture shows a defeated prophet. His emotional high over the blessed revival was short-lived and he falls into a deep depression. He gives up and prays to die. When the Lord confronts Elijah, he voices his complaint: ***I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*** Even the great Elijah is a man with an Old Adam that lusts for and covets success. As holy as this desire for success appears (***I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty...***) it's misguided and sinful. Therefore our gracious and compassionate Lord steps in: ***Go back the way you came....*** complete the ministry I now assign you. Just be faithful, for ***I***

*reserve seven thousand in Israel-- all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him...* God always succeeds, and all glory must go to Him.

Therefore His advice to Elijah is good for us too: Go back the way you came! -- Go back to the Word!

No one should doubt the sincerity in Elijah's voice: *I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.* What's wrong? Is it my preaching? Is it my methodology? Is it us as a congregation? Are we turning people away? Is there something we, or our pastor, should be doing to get people to join our church?

The great miracle at Mt. Carmel got their attention, but things went right back to what they were before. Israel would continue in the idolatry of their kings until God would turn them over to the Assyrians in less than 150 years.

No one should doubt our sincerity either! For 124 years the people of this congregation have given, some have even sacrificed, for the work of proclaiming the Gospel here. For over a century, this church building has stood as a public testimony to the work that goes on here, the teaching that goes on daily in the halls below us, and the faithfulness of its pastors, teachers and dedicated laymen. But just look at us! How pitiful we look! I know it's vacation season, but look how many empty pews there are! And you who come back week after week just keep voicing the same old confession: I'm still a poor miserable sinner...! When's that going to change? If Elijah did not escape the sinful desire for the kind of success he could see and feel, will we?

Concerning the work of God's Kingdom, Jesus said: *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.* Jn 3 There is an invisible power at work calling men, women and children to faith in Jesus. It is God, the Holy Spirit. We have no control over Him because He is God and proceeds from the Father and the Son to accomplish the will and purpose of God in building His Church. Like Elijah, we need to be reminded of this so that we do not become anxious or depressed over the apparent success or lack of it in the Church.

*Go back the way you came...* God told Elijah. Go back to the Word! Then rejoice in the success of God's Word!

Ignoring Elijah's whining, and seeing his repentance over the foolishness of his old heart in not trusting God's Word, the Lord graciously restores Elijah with a new assignment: *Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu ... king over Israel, and anoint Elisha ... to succeed you as prophet.* This Elijah did. When he found Elisha, he was at work. He was a wealthy hard-working farmer and a believer in the true God of Israel. Taking his robe, he put it on Elisha's shoulders ordaining him as his successor. God's work would go on, and the Lord's Word would be proclaimed.

Today we rejoice in the success of God's Word. Once again, hearts united in faith in Jesus have gathered here without a single doubt that the Lord is God! We worship the true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David and Solomon, Peter, James and John! We worship Him who was crucified, died and was buried, but rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, ascended into heaven and has announced: *Before*

*long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.* Jn 14 You don't feel that success? Neither did Elijah. But the Lord doesn't fail.

Today, gathered around the distribution of bread and wine, the awesome miracle of Jesus coming to us with His actual body and blood, sacrificed 2000 years ago on the cross, to assure each of you that your sins are forgiven and that here in this sanctuary there are a portion of the *...seven thousand in Israel-- all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him...* Here is visible evidence of the Communion of Saints, *whose mouths have not kissed him...* For our mouths have opened to receive our Lord's body and blood through this sacred meal He himself has instituted for the spiritual feeding of His saints.

Today, we rejoice in the success of God's Word apparent in the commitment of another generation of Christians giving what they have to support the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, here at this location! Even to maintain a Lutheran Elementary School for our future generation of Christians.

In our personal lives as Christians, like those "7000" of whom Elijah had no knowledge, we each go back to doing what the Lord has put on our plates as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, employers and employees, to continue to serve the Lord and one another as children of the Lord who has promised never to leave us nor forsake us.

Let us always go back the way we came to faith, and that is through God's Word and Sacraments. Let us continue to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Word, and the Lord will carry out His Spirit's work among us! He will be our God and we will be His people! Like Elijah, we will always be tempted to measure the success of God's Church in what we see rather than in what God has promised to do FOR us. But keeping Elijah in mind, may we always have the wisdom to go back the way by which we have been called, and always go back to God's Word. Amen.