

1 Kings 20

In chapter 16 we were introduced to the man who would go down in Israel's history as the most wicked king they would ever have reign over them, king Ahab. But God always has a man, a beacon of light so to speak to shine forth in such times who is equipped and equal to the task of such times. God always has a man of righteousness to ready to do His will in the midst of the times of wickedness, so consequently as soon as Ahab is introduced in ch 16, Elijah comes on the scene in ch 17. The most wicked king would have to contend with the most powerful prophet (if you'll allow that term humanly speaking). And so far we've been seeing Elijah weave in and out of Ahab's life, but primarily the focus has been on Elijah and God's preparing him, placing him in the public eye, and then last week sort of putting him on pause (for lack of a better word) as He was placating him, pacifying him so that he might be refreshed, refocused and resent. And there comes that time in each of our lives, where we become physically exhausted, emotionally overwhelmed and we feel as though we're on system overload and we're in "warning" mode preparing to blow. But we serve a God who remembers that we're but dust, and He pities us as a father pities his children and He'll allow us those times of refreshing, refocusing, but there comes the time for the re-sending, God's not finished with your life, or else you'd be before His throne. As long as you're here, it's because God wants to use you. The last we seen of Elijah he was recruiting Elisha to one day take his place, and Ch 20 serves as sort of a cut scene whereby the focus shifts from Elijah back over to Ahab and some things going on in his life, God isn't finished dealing with him either. Elijah may be done for a season, but God isn't. The bible teaches us in regards to the Lord, "*He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.*" Ps 121:3-4 So you may need rest, you may need revitalized and refocused, new recruits at your side to aid you here and there, God doesn't need any of those things. He continues on in the sovereign path of His will, and Ch 20 finds Him continuing to deal with Ahab even though Elijah is on a short sabbatical, receiving a little R&R.

Vs1

Samaria is a part of Israel, now you remember that Israel and Judah are 2 different entities right now, so as we're reading about Israel, that doesn't include Judah.

Vs2-4

He's a real "Brave Heart" isn't he? This is what's in the heart of Ahab, Ben-Hadad sends to him and says, "All your wealth, your loveliest wives, and your children are now mine!" Ahab is all, "Let me think...Ok! Sounds good," now you remember going through 1st and 2nd Samuel that harem of the king basically equaled his throne. Remember when Absalom was conspiring to overthrow David and he pitched a tent on the top of the house and went into his father's concubines in the sight of all of Israel. In essence declaring all the power and authority that once belonged to my father, now belongs to me.

Ben-Hadad is saying, “Everything that means anything to you as far as power and authority is concerned, now belongs to me.” and Ahab is overwhelmed, what’s he going to do, no doubt the 3 ½ yr famine vastly weakened him militarily, he’s just seen the impotency of Baal on Mt Carmel not to mention the last 3 ½ yrs that he was unable to do anything. So he can hardly cry out to his god, he’s as powerless as is his god. And you guys that’s the key, had he been *servicing* the Lord, walking with the Lord, had he humbled himself *before* the Lord, he could’ve turned this situation over *to* the Lord. But he figures its absolute acquiesce, submission and compliance or he’s a dead man, that’s what he thinks. So rather than resist and die with dignity, he just completely caves in and crumbles.

Vs5-6

Now he’s adding insult to injury, “...that was too easy!” So he decides to open the floodgates, and you guys this is the way your enemy works. You compromise with him just a little bit, decide to give in just an inch, he’ll take you a mile, he sees your turning the faucets even to a drip as an avenue to open the floodgates. 1 beer turns to 6 turns to 12, 1 quick peek on line turns to hours of flooding your mind with that which will destroy your soul. What you thought would just impact you suddenly begins to impair, and influence and hurt everyone around you. You give him an opportunity to dig into you just a bit, and he sends his cohorts in to plunder you and everyone around you to the full. He has one agenda, and it’s 3 fold, to steal, kill, and destroy, and that’s Ben-Hadad’s mission here, to take anything of profit, kill the people, and destroy the city.

Vs7-9

This is the 1st thing that I can recall that Ahab has done (according to the record) that shows any form of wisdom whatsoever. The bible says, “*Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*” Prov 11:14 Left to himself he was prepared to let the people fall, but once he rallied some counsel around him he was a little more bold to do the right thing. He said, “Listen fellas, this Ben-Hadad wants trouble, he asked me for everything of mine and I told him fine, but that wasn’t enough.” and The elders said, “Don’t listen to this guy, or given into his desire.”

Don’t be afraid to invite the counsel of mature believers whom you respect into a given situation of your life. You can’t stand alone, remember ch 19, the journey is too great for you, its too great for me, especially if the decision you’re considering might have some pretty radical ramifications if you make the wrong one. This is why we have a board of directors regarding our finances and decisions of that nature, and a board of elders in regards to the spiritual pulse of the people and dealing with body life. Because its important to be above bar, remaining blameless and accountable, not only corporately, but individually. If the bible speaks clearly into a given circumstance than do it, but if you’re uncertain don’t make guess work out of it, or just respond in some way for no real reason, seek out counsel, there’s safety and accountability there. I was talking with a guy the other night (doesn’t go to church here) but he was wrestling with this whole idea of hell, and a God of love, and how could God simply inflict pain for pains sake and force people to eternal torment and all these things.

And he started trying to spiritualize hell, and wondering if we couldn't really understand it so God just gave us some description that was the closest thing we could get but in reality it was the separation from God was just so horrible and all and that was the fullness of it. And it was like, "If I can't get my brain to wrap around this concept I just might not be able to follow God." It was a situation where left to himself he may've fallen. But by grace he sought out some counsel, and we spoke about the literal nature of the word of God, we spoke about the fact that God is well able to communicate to us in a way we can comprehend, and if it goes beyond that He lets us know with key words such as, "like" or "like unto." and If those kind of words aren't used, I have no right to spiritualize God's Word or else I become God and I'm my own standard as to what's literal and spiritual, what this mean and that means. But I said, "Rather than focusing on things you can't understand, how about trying to focus on that which you can understand. The bible teaches that God is love, that God is good, that God isn't willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that all we have to do is believe on Him and we'll never perish.

That He doesn't send people to hell, but has done everything possible to provide the means of escape." The bible says, "*...whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*" Phil 4:8-9

And I said, "You're not focusing on these kinds of things, consequently you have no peace. But this you know, God is good, and He always does the right thing." I saw him a few days later and we were just kinda hanging out and he said, "By the way, I want you to know I took your advice on those things you told me and I'm serving the Lord full on again, reading my bible, going to church and all." and He said, "I still don't understand it all, but I know that God is good and in that I have peace." How important it is to seek out counsel when we're confronted with choices that have the propensity to change our lives and the lives of those around us. To his credit Ahab sought counsel, and it was a wise thing.

Vs10

Or to understand that another way, "You just bit off way more than you can chew. There's so many men in my army that by the time we're through with you there won't even be enough dust in Samaria to provide a handful for each of my men." It's that last ditch over confident intimidation factor that the enemy likes to throw in there. "It's impossible for you to take us on." God loves impossible situations, gives Him an opportunity to show Himself strong and glorify Himself. How does Mt's on the left, Mt's on the right, the Egyptian army closing you in from behind and the Red Sea in front of you sound Moses? Hey Gideon, how about 450 to 1? Hey there boy, how about you completely vulnerable with only a sling, going up against a fully armored 10-12' tall giant of a war veteran? The question isn't how impossible is your situation, it's how big is your God? Because with God nothing will be impossible, and man's impossibilities only make for God's opportunities.

Vs11

Or as the old saying goes, “Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched. Don’t presume to be taking off your armor in victory before you’ve even put it on for the battle.” Prov 27:1 says, “*Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*” In other words it’s never wise to presume, remember James said, “*Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*” James 4:13-16 Ahab says, “You better make sure your bite matches your bark before you go spouting off at the mouth.”

Vs12-15

I think the context of Ahab’s life shows us that this isn’t the act of a man of faith, but rather of someone clutching desperately to the last shred of hope extended to him. So to me Ahab’s response isn’t the highlight of this passage, but rather God’s offer of grace. And by the way, who was this prophet? We don’t know, it obviously wasn’t Elijah or Elisha, you see God didn’t need Elijah, His work is still rolling forward, perhaps he was one of the 100 prophets that Obadiah provided refuge for, certainly one of the faithful 7,000 but it serves to kind of accent the misnomer that Elijah was purporting, he wasn’t the only faithful follower of God left. God was still using other people to accomplish His purposes.

But the question the comes up is, why would God spare Ahab? He’s wicked, has turned his back on the Lord and sought after Baal.

He would’ve been absolutely just in allowing them to be wiped out, but the mercies of God are inexhaustible, His grace is an endless ocean, and so He’s still reaching out to Ahab. He’s already shown him that Baal was unable to provide rain for 3 ½ yrs, unable to provide fire on Mt Carmel, and now he’s unable to provide deliverance from the enemy and the snares thereof, but God is able to meet man’s *every* need. And we could speculate God’s sparing the wicked in Israel for the sake of the 7,000 righteous, kind of a Gen 18 principle. But God says very plainly, “I’m doing this so that *you* (Ahab) will know that He is the Lord.” This is sheer grace, God takes the initiative to reveal Himself to Ahab, just like He did with you, and just like He did with me.

And he says, “I want to do an awesome work in your midst.” and Ahab responds just like we do when God purposes to do a work in our midst... “By whom” and we expect that God will bring in some spiritual giant to champion His cause, but God says, “I want to use you, and the people around you to do the work.” God’s just looking for willing vessels, and the more unlikely you are to be qualified, the better odds that God will select you, then it’s clear, to *God* be the glory great things *He* has done, not *we* have done, *He* has done.

Vs16-18

Now whether he meant take them alive regardless of why they've come, or just in a drunken stupor he repeated himself, either way having his senses dulled by alcohol he gave them orders that they weren't to kill them, big mistake. And this is obviously an error you and I do well to avoid. That is, having our senses dulled by alcohol, because the bible is clear that we're in a battle, not with flesh and blood, but with powers, principalities and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, and that we're to fight the good fight. That we're not to be drunk with wine, but filled with the Holy Spirit, that we're to watch and be sober, if not you're going to make unwise decisions that will cost you the war, notice.

Vs19-22

Again, "*Plans are established by counsel; By wise counsel wage war.*" Prov 20:18 What's the point here? That you don't wait for wartime to prepare for war, you prepare for war in times of peace. Its when things are going smooth that you determine what to do when there are turbulent times, if you wait till things are going down to try and get your act together its too late. The prophet is saying, don't think that because you've had victory today that there's not going to be another battle with the same enemy. Maybe you're experiencing victory over a certain area in your life presently, don't just presume there's never going to be a struggle there again. Take the time of peace to establish the necessary roots to anchor you deep when the storm comes on again, because it will. And it's during the time of peace that you're to take the time to prepare and make provision so that when the warfare comes on we're prepared, not taken off guard. God tells us here, "If you're enjoying times of peace presently, don't take it for granted, take note of what you need to do to strengthen yourself now, because the warfare will rage again soon enough." The enemy isn't just going to leave you alone, or me alone, the fight's not over till we see Jesus face to face, till then prepare yourself, be in the Word, be in prayer, in fellowship, strengthen yourself for the fight.

Vs23-27

Listen king, obviously Israel's God is the God of the hills that was our problem, but if we fight them in the plains surely we'll defeat them. So get rid of those other kings, and put captains of the army in their place, and rather than going up to the hills lets take them on in the plains and then we'll take them out. They've ascribed to faulty logic, we lost in the hills that must be where their God is. They're thinking of God in a localized sense, and it's wrong to think of God in that way, but even we do this at times.

We think of God in Heaven, out there somewhere, but that tends to localize Him when the bible teaches that God is omnipresent, in everyplace at all times. We think we come into the presence of God as we gather in His name, but the fact is we were in His presence when we left our homes to come here. It's impossible that we should escape the presence of God.

David said, *“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into Heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.”* Ps 139:7-12 We think that if we do something in obscurity in the dark that perhaps God doesn’t see, the night shines like the day before God, they’re both the same, it’s impossible that we should escape the presence of God. He *is* the God of the hills... and of the plains, and of the heavens, and the sea, He’s Lord of all. And that’s what He’s going to teach the Syrians. But its what He wants us to be assured of as well, He’s not only there for you in the high times of life, but in the valleys and on the plains, during dry times, He’ll sustain you, and be there for you in any place at any time in your life. And so there are times that not only will He show Himself strong during the high times of your life, but He’ll also show deliverance for you as you pass through tough times, the valleys and plains, so that people can see He’s the God of the hills and valleys in your life, makes no difference where the battle is, the Lord is faithful to you. No matter how overwhelming the odds.

Vs28-30

127,000 gone in one day. But I want you to notice something here, some times God will do a work in our midst against overwhelming odds to show Himself real to you, that’s what He said to Ahab at the last battle. But other times it may go beyond you so as to demonstrate the reality of the power of God to others *around* you, as is the case here. God still wanted Ahab to know that He is the Lord and there is no other, but He’s also teaching the Syrians that there’s no limit to His power and that He is able to deliver under any circumstance, there’s nothing too hard for Him. So there’s been a crushing victory, under overwhelmingly impossible odds, notice.

Vs31-33

Ahab! This just takes the wind out of your sails doesn’t it? God’s turned the tables, brought the enemy into submission, Ahab could’ve ended it all, should’ve ended it all, was told by God to end it all, this wasn’t Ahab’s choice. He had no chance, God did the work and it was to go God’s way, but instead he’s all, “he’s my brother.” What did that mean, he wasn’t an Israelite, he definitely didn’t follow the God of Israel (though Ahab didn’t either), but he was a fellow king. And Ahab is glorying in his position here, “Sure I’ll show mercy to my colleague.” It be like President Bush going, “What Osama’s still alive, he’s my brother, a fellow ruler, bring up here let him address the nation behind my presidential pulpit!” “You found Saddam in an underground little bunker, he’s my brother, a national ruler, no need to punish him, lets make a deal!” But there’s no peace treaty with the enemy, you just can’t compromise with the flesh, or the world, or the wiles of the wicked one, its total annihilation, if you don’t crucify the flesh it’ll live out the rest of its days seeking to destroy your life. Our flesh gets the zero tolerance rule. B

But Ahab seems to be the kind of fella who rolls with whatever seems best for his personal interests in the moment regardless of the moral or spiritual demeanor of the situation. If its spiritually advantageous that's a bonus, but he's not going to let a thing like that get in the way when push comes to shove when it comes to his ultimate personal agenda. But that's a dangerous way to live, and it'll cost him here direct.

Vs34

See this is sort of reminiscent of Saul's disobedience with the Amalekites, they were to be utterly destroyed, but he spared the king, and it was an Amalekite that ultimately wiped him out. To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Vs35-36

Here's a quick yet powerful lesson for you, who's the one whom the lion devoured. The one who refused to obey the word of God. Now as you know Peter said, "...*your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" 1 Peter 5:8 and He makes prey of the one who for whatever reason though he or she may *hear* the Word, perhaps doesn't *agree* with the Word, or can't track with the *rationale* of the Word therefore they refuse to *obey* the Word. And the point here is that it doesn't matter if you understand why, or see the big picture, its simply imperative that we obey, you might say the lamb the strays from the pathway of God's Word is easy prey for the roaring lion.

Vs37-43

This sort of reminds us of the way Nathan approached David, and just like David its so easy to see the spec in our brother's eye isn't it, and miss the 4x12 in our own. "If you were given an order by a superior officer you should've followed it regardless, so now you're going to have to pay the price accordingly." That was what Ahab told this prophet, yet Ahab was given an order by God Himself that he obliged himself to disobey and thought he was exempt from the penalty. Ahab heaped honor on the nations oppressor, and oppressed a fellow Israelite, just whatever suited him best in the moment. But out of his own mouth he judged himself and with the measure he measured out so it would be measured back to him. (Matt ch 7 Vs1-5) (Just like Jesus said.)

But we can't close with out drawing attention quickly to vs 40, "While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." He offered up justification for neglecting his primary responsibility and disobeying the word of his superior. Watch out getting too many irons in the fire, we can get busy here and there, doing respectable things, but if the primary thing that God has called us to gets away from us, how does our business justify our negligence? Rather than crying out in repentance, he just sank in sorrow that he got caught and returned to Samaria. He regretted, but never repented, may God help us that when we get exposed in our folly that more than simple regret we learn what it means to repent and not repeat our mistakes, but rather draw near *to* God, being empowered *by* God, that we might live fully *for* God.

(Not to be too proud to seek the safety of counsel, You can take our impossibilities use them as Your opportunities, Your grace is inexhaustible, Your purposes unstoppable, help us to make no peace treaty with the enemy, but to cling to the cross, to obey Your Word in totality, and remain faithful to Your Word, not justifying negligence with business).