

I Kings 18:1-19; Matthew 21:33-44; Source of Trouble Identified I. The Prophet's Return II. Obadiah's Reception III. Ahab's Rejection

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are living in what is called the Cancel Culture. If someone disagrees with what the accepted narrative says, they attack you as a person and shout you down until you are silenced. Instead of having a reasonable discussion where ideas and evidence are discussed, what tends to happen is that the offended person labels you and attacks your person instead of discussing the idea. You are identified as a troubler- there is no room for your ideas. Well, in our text for today we find that Ahab himself would fit in well with the Cancel Culture of today. Instead of listening to the word of the LORD and his prophets, Ahab along with Jezebel has tried to silence this word by putting all the prophets to death. But as we have seen in the past week, the idol gods of the nations and the kings of men are unable to stand against the LORD and resist His purposes. The heathen gods are nothing and can do nothing- good or ill! Baal and Asherah cannot provide food, water, children or life! But even in the Gentile land- to a heathen people- God can and does provide food, water and even life! So in our text we circle back to Ahab and Israel where it all started. The time has come for the word to return to the nation of Israel and the water to fall on the dry, cracked land. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ rebukes the hard-hearted for their rejection of His word by identifying the troubler of Israel.

I. The Prophet's Return

In our first point we consider the return of the prophet, Elijah, to his home country and land of Israel. While residing with the widow and her resurrected son, Elijah receives a word- a message from the Lord. Go and show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain. Now remember that a little over 3 years has passed from the time of the initial judgement on Israel back in 17:1. Added to that, Elijah has been hidden by the Lord during this period of time as well. But the drought from the rain of the heavens- and the drought from the Word of the LORD are both coming to an end. The two-fold famine is now concluding! Not because Israel has become better- not because Ahab has repented of his sins- no, but only because God is

gracious and merciful to His people. God has pity on His people- undeserved grace! Any good news heard- any mercy received in the context of such rebellion and sin can only be possible because of Jesus Christ who secures that pardon! Elijah does what Jesus will one day do- bring a message of confrontation and forgiveness to those living in the darkness! So Elijah is told to go and show himself- to reveal his presence and word to King Ahab. In the darkness of idolatry there is light! Now this was not a safe thing to do- mind you. Jezebel had been hunting the prophet of the LORD and she has nearly killed them all. And Ahab blames Elijah for this lack of rain as we will see in our 3rd point. So for Elijah to go to Ahab is like sending a goat into a lion's den- or like a sheep among wolves. It was not a safe or wise thing to do as far as we would see it. But there is a specific reason- or rather 3 reasons why Elijah is being sent back to Ahab. First of all, by this appearing Ahab is going to be confronted on his own turf and the idolatrous prophets are going to be challenged on their own grounds. Who is the true prophet? The second reason that Elijah is being sent back is because the people of Israel- the citizens of this nation- need to be confronted again! This is the congregation of God- His covenant people! Clearly it is time for them to choose- who will be your God? Whom will you serve? It is a gracious act that Elijah will perform- that God will call His adulterous, wandering bride back to Himself! To confront her sin- but also offer pardon once more! The kingdom of God was at hand- therefore repent! And finally, the third reason that Elijah is going to be sent back is because the time has come for the rain to fall. Now this almost seems like an afterthought- if the battle is for the hearts of the people why is rain so important? Well, remember that a lack of rain was sign of covenantal judgement and condemnation! As a sign to Israel and to the nations- they would see who God is by what happened to those called by His name! And God would have His name glorified- so He chooses to once again bless His people with rain and provision as He draws their hearts back to Himself! As Lamentations 3 says, the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. This is a reminder of God's love and providence- all things

come to us not by chance but from His heavenly, Fatherly hand! Both famine and feast- drought and rain- want and plenty! All things come to us from the Judge and Ruler over all! And the LORD wants Ahab- and all Israel to know- that this rain has been withheld and now will be sent only by His hand! The LORD- He alone is God- and everything comes to us from His hands!

II. Obadiah's Reception

Now that we understand the reasoning why Elijah is being sent back to the land of Israel, in our second point we consider what kind of reception he receives. The first person he runs into is the righteous and humble servant- Obadiah. His name means- "servant of the Lord." Now Obadiah is a rare figure in Ahab's day. First of all, Obadiah revered the Name of the LORD- He feared God and honored His name as v. 3 puts it. Added to this, he feared the LORD from his youth in v. 12. So here we have a consistent man who fears the lord and serves Him with his whole heart for many days. A covenant child who walks in the ways of the LORD! This is striking as we remember the context and times in which Obadiah lives. He was over the house of Ahab- a servant who had great authority under this wicked king. In this way, Obadiah serves in the line of Joseph, Daniel and Nehemiah. He stood before kings- while serving the one, True King! Added to this, Jezebel was still on the loose. She sought to kill all the prophets of the LORD- she sought to rid the land of any trace of true worship- but right under her nose Obadiah continued to walk in the ways of his forefather, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Obadiah also puts his faith into practice- he takes 100 prophets and hides them in v. 4- personally taking their welfare and provision in hand- so that they are saved from the wicked queen Jezebel. This is similar to what was found during the 2nd World War- when people would hide Jews in their homes to keep them safe from the Nazis. But what makes this more striking is that this all took place during a severe famine! Yet Obadiah is used by the Lord to provide for these 100 prophets- out of the proceeds Obadiah had access to as a servant of the King. So Obadiah is both a trusted advisor to King Ahab, and a faithful servant of the LORD his God. Notice also how he responds when he meets Elijah in v. 7- is that you, my lord Elijah? He can't believe his eyes- and he is

concerned that Elijah's presence is too good to be true. Now Obadiah is afraid- he is afraid that Elijah will disappear as he did before- or that the Word of God would be removed from the land once again. But Elijah calms his fears and sends him on his way. Go and tell Ahab- Elijah is here! Obadiah has not forgot- and the LORD has not forsaken His servant! It is possible to in this world but not of it! You can fear God and honor the king- even when that king is as wicked as Ahab! There will be a remnant in the land- the church will never be snuffed out completely! Not only can the LORD save and provide for His people outside of the land- as with Elijah and the widow. He also can also spare and preserve His people living inside the land- in the belly of the beast as He did with Obadiah and the 100 prophets. Remember that Jesus is still king- and even if kings like Ahab rage and wage war- they will never unseat the true King of Kings! Christ gathers and protects His church- even faithful Obadiah- even in places of great persecution- Christ will have His people! So Obadiah fears the LORD and respects His servant- his life will be spared by the LORD even though he must bring a message to Ahab- and the message is- Elijah is back- and he has a message for you!

III. Ahab's Rejection

Now when the word is received- Elijah has returned- that could have been a reason to rejoice! As we found back in the opening of ch. 17- there will be no rain or dew except at the word of Elijah. Elijah's appearance could be seen as a beacon of hope- even good news. But that is not how Ahab sees it in v. 17! Is that you, you troubler of Israel? Have you come to make matters worse? It is your fault that there is no rain- and really it is your God's fault that there is a drought! Instead of seeing Israel's sin and rebellion as the reason- Ahab blames the messenger! So, its you again- you trouble maker! You have decided to come back, you thorn in my side. Where Obadiah said- is it you, my lord? Ahab says- is it you, you troubler of Israel? Why do people hate the 10 Commandments? Because they expose our sin and misery? Why did Ahab hate Elijah? Because his presence reminded him of his inability and need! We could add- why do people hate the pure preaching of the word- why do they hate Christians? Because the Word and our

presence exposes their need- that their deeds are evil- and they hate the truth! Here Ahab had allowed his wife to round up and kill the true prophets of God, suppressed true religion and encouraged the breaking of the first and second commandments! But again, the arrival of Elijah is a sign of God's blessing- how He is quick to forgive- that His mercies are new each morning! Even though the Israelites did not deserve it- God was going to spare them further devastation! For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son! Christ died for the ungodly- while they were yet enemies! God's mercy is far greater than man's sin! Even when Adam and Eve sinned, still the LORD came to them and promised the coming of Thee Son! Call together the people and your prophets- Ahab- its time to finish this battle!

Remember that during this time, it was common to see the king as shepherds. Not only in Israel, but in many nations during this time, the king was said to be the shepherd of people under his rule. And in our text, Ahab actually takes up the work of a shepherd. He takes his horses and mules under his hand and tries to find them water and grass so that they do not die in v.5. Ahab is tending his animals- not wanting them to perish. But although he is willing to go to great lengths to feed his animals of the stable- he cares little for the pressing needs of his people! In fact, he has made sure that the people of Israel will not and cannot have access to the Word of the LORD as Jezebel kills all the prophets. So Ahab, in a very significant way, brings about the famine from God's Word in the land. But he does not want to lose any animals as v.5 concludes! Ahab has his prosperity in mind- caring for animals more than the spiritual wellbeing of those under his rule. His people may be starving to death- but let's not lose any animals- and do not dare to mention their spiritual needs! It's like having a President declare a National Day of Prayer- referencing the need for healing on our land while ignoring and avoiding the name of God all together! It is a lot easier to focus on the external than the internal needs of people to be sure. But the LORD will not let this stand- the famine has come because of their sinful rebellion and rejection of the LORD! As Moses warned in Dt. 28- if you are not careful to obey all the commands, the heavens will become like brass and the earth like iron- and you will be cursed! Although Ahab blames Elijah and Elijah's God for this mess- it is

clear that the LORD'S judgment is just- but by the appearance of Elijah we find that the LORD is going to bring this famine to an end as well! Ahab is the current King of Israel- but how does he lead? For what is he concerned? How does he receive the Word of the Lord? The true, troubler of Israel is identified as the one who lives by the lie! Who suppress the truth in unrighteousness! These are children of their father, the Devil.

In identifying Ahab as the troubler of Israel, the LORD is making His distinction clear. Because you have rejected me, I have rejected you! You will remain under my judgment- as you and your wife will soon experience! But for the sake of my people and the glory of my name, I will have a people- a remnant will remain! The word of God is like the sun that shines in the sky- it has different effects on different people! As the sun hardens clay but softens wax- so the Word hardens some in their sin while softening the hearts of others. Ahab and Obadiah display the two responses and effects to the presence of God's Word! Here, Ahab and Jezebel really illustrate the false church. The false church is the gathering of those rebels who forbid true worship and persecuted those who do seek to rightly worship the one, true God. In this, Elijah is taking his place in a long line of prophets who were rejected in Israel. As we read from Mt. 21, the LORD graciously sends prophet after prophet to call Israel to repent. Eventually, God will send His Son whom they will also reject! But these rebels cannot thwart God's sovereign plan. He has His remnant- and He will gather His people! The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ and His church! Jesus has conquered the troubler of Israel- and one day the accuser of men will be cast into the bottomless pit!

To conclude, we should not be surprised when the world hates us. They hated Christ- they hate His word- and they hate anyone who brings His word! The cancel culture may try to silence God's witness and testimony- they may call us trouble makers because the truth exposes their sin. But the fact is, God's word will not be silenced! Jesus Christ rebukes the hard-hearted for their rejection of His word by identifying the troubler of Israel. So be bold- strong and courageous- for the Lord your God is with you! In this world you will face trouble, but take heart, Jesus has overcome this world!