

I Kings 18:41-19:3; The Running Prophet I. Elijah Runs in the Rain II. Elijah Runs for His Life

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, running the race is a Biblical concept that we often consider.

Especially at the end of a person's life, we often read the words of II Tim. 4, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. So the Christian life is often compared to a race that we run as we are called to run towards the goal- to strive to arrive at the end of our lives with a clear conscience and heart of faith. But in our text this morning we find Elijah who is the running prophet. The question before us is this- does Elijah run the correct way? Is the goal to which Elijah strives faithful or not? As we return to our study in I Kings, we remember that Elijah is a man like us- he experiences highs and lows. Both victory over sin and defeat- sometimes excited and hopeful and other times fearful and afraid. The fact is, discouragement and disappointment are a part of this life and its trials. After the mountaintop experience, Elijah is going down to the valley of humiliation and fear. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ calls His people to run the race of faith with endurance and obedience in times of acceptance and rejection. Before we come to our first point, we remember the immediate context. Last week Elijah prayed, the fire of God fell down from the sky and the people responded with a confession of truth. The LORD, He is God! There is a repentance and faith made evident, and the false, idolatrous prophets are killed. So this iniquity has been purged from the land, the sacrifice and prayer has been accepted, and we are hopeful for the future! But the reformation has not yet reached the seat of power in Israel.

### **I. Elijah Runs in the Rain**

The battle belongs to the LORD, and the battle has been won! Next we find the promise of peace and the assurance of pardon. As the LORD had told Elijah back in 18:1- the LORD is going to send rain. Now this promise is revealed to Ahab in our text- go and eat and drink, for the sound of rushing water is heard. As a sign of God's goodness and provision for Israel, the king is told to feast because the drought is over. If the drought and lack of food and water was punishment for sin, rebellion and idolatry; it is necessary that Israel see the rain and bountiful blessings restored when the sin is confessed and repented of. This is not a time

for sorrow but a time for feasting! The wicked prophets are dead and God's covenantal blessings are being restored and returned! Now Ahab may not have felt like feasting- his prophets were all dead- but he obeys none the less. After this instruction, Elijah returns to His position of prayer in v. 42. He bows down and prays- for 7 times- that rain would be restored. Now we note that rain has already been promised by God- and promised to Ahab- but still Elijah prays for that which has been promised! Here we can learn something about prayer- persistent prayer is rooted in the promises of God! Knowing what God has promised- moves us to pray all the more fervently for it! For example, if God promises to give us His Holy Spirit and our daily bread, won't we constantly cry out for these gifts we have been promised? Also, Elijah's prayer is rooted in expectation! He knows God will do what He has promised, so He is bold in His prayer! As he prayed for 3 years that it would not rain- now He prays 7 times for the very rain that has been promised! And the LORD is pleased to hear and answer the prayer of his prophet! Ask and it will be given to you- seek and you will find! A little cloud rises from the sea. Don't despise the day of small things- because this cloud will grow! So Elijah tells Ahab to get going or else the rain will stop his travels in v. 44. Now we need to remember a little geography here. This exchange is taking place on Mt. Carmel- which is on the NW corner of the land of Israel- right on the edge of the Valley of Jezreel. The Valley of Jezreel leads down to the city of Jezreel where Ahab was residing. The Valley of Jezreel was a broad basin that led from the Jordan to Med. Sea. This valley was the location of some serious battles- those of Gideon, Saul, Jehu, Josiah and the last battle as we saw last week in Rev. 20. We also note that this valley was hard to navigate when the land was wet- as Sisera's army found out when their iron chariots got stuck when battling Barak. So if Ahab is going to get home, he had better leave before the ground became saturated and brooks a flood. Although Ahab normally lives in Samaria, his summer home was in Jezreel- and that is where he is going. So Elijah sends Ahab on his way- and as the rain starts to fall- both the king and this prophet make their way to the royal residence. But unlike the Ethiopian eunuch, Ahab does not invite Elijah into his chariot. But the hand of LORD was on Elijah, and he outruns the chariot all the way to the city. The Spirit

of the LORD and of power enables Elijah to run in the rain. Elijah girds up his loins for action- he tucks in his cloak with his leather belt- and he runs some 17 miles all the way to Jezreel. He runs a half-marathon in the rain with a prophet's cloak on his back- with a better time than the king's chariot! Ahab had traveled to Carmel with 450 prophets of Baal- he returned from Carmel led by the one prophet of the LORD. Now why did Elijah go to Jezreel? Wasn't the battle over? The prophets of Baal were dead, the people had acknowledged the LORD as God, and the rain was falling. What more needed to be done? Well, remember that Jezebel still had here 400 prophets of Asherah in reserve. The reformation needs to take the seat of power in Israel, but Jezebel was still pulling the strings on the throne. Did Elijah go to Jezreel hoping to complete the covenantal renewal and recommittal of the Israelite throne to the LORD? Was the national revival to be dispersed by the king's hand from Jezreel? Would Elijah now serve as the prophet and vizier to the king of Israel? As we saw last week, the final battle was over! Now comes the feast- the wedding supper- the banquet of God's blessings- right! Well, whatever Elijah was expecting does not come to fruition. He runs to Jezreel in the rain- but in the next point we find that he runs again- this time for his life. Now this is an instructive point. Hardship and national tragedies rarely have a long term effect on the religion of the nation as a whole. Unless God sends out His Spirit who changes the hearts of the people, any reformation will remain superficial. As seen in the day of Josiah's reforms in II Kings 22- how long until Israel slumped back into her old ways? Or in the days of the Judges, how long did their rule have on the people after the judge was dead? The fact is, mankind is like a pig that is washed only to return to the mud. Even think about what happened in our own country. After 9/11, how long did people return to church? And in our day, we note that in God's grace the pandemic is being lifted from our land. Do we see the citizens of this country return to church to thank and praise God for lifted this scourge and hardship? Well, if Elijah was expecting a national revival and a reformed monarch, he is going to be disappointed! His first run was in the rain and it was a run of hope and obedience! His loins were girded for action. But now we come to his second run- as he runs to save his own life and flees when persecution comes!

## II. Elijah Runs for His Life

Upon his arrival at Jezreel, Ahab rushes in to speak with his wife in 19:1. Note what Ahab does not say. He does not say- the LORD is God and I have seen His fire from heaven! Nor does Ahab say- the God who answered by fire has answered the prayer of Elijah and sent rain! No, Ahab says- Elijah has killed all the prophets of Baal! That is what Ahab chooses to focus on- the death of these idolatrous prophets! Not what the LORD has done to end this drought- but the loss of Jezebel's chosen prophets. And instead of finding an embrace, Elijah finds a wicked queen plotting his demise! So Jezebel sends a message in v. 2- you are a dead man! Remember that Jezebel has already killed all the prophets of the LORD- already Jezebel has shed the blood of these innocent men who worshipped God rightly. And when the same thing happens to her prophets, she responds with fury! You will be dead like them by this time tomorrow. The display of God's power sometimes softens the heart of the wicked- and other times God's works harden the wicked in their sins! Kind of like the response of the Pharisees when the blind man was healed- instead of praising God for this miracle they try to find some excuse for it in order silence this witness since they had set their hearts on rejecting Jesus! So, after being threatened Elijah runs again. Instead of a 17-mile race in the North, this time Elijah runs over 100 miles south- all the way to the southern tip of Judah to Beersheba. Now we need to be clear here. Why was it wrong for Elijah to flee- to run away in v. 3? Many saints- even Paul- fled from persecution at times. This is not always wrong- since Jesus told his disciples that when they were persecuted in a city, they were to move on to the next in Mt. 10. But what makes the flight of Elijah sinful is that the hand of the LORD was on him in 18:46. He was commissioned, sent and equipped by God's Spirit to go to Jezreel. In fleeing- as he runs away in fear- he follows in the footsteps of Jonah before him. Instead of going to Nineveh- instead of staying in Jezreel- Elijah flees way to the south. So although the LORD sent him back to Israel- so that the drought from God's Word would be over- Elijah hides himself in the desert wasteland instead. In fleeing from his enemies, we are reminded the Elijah is not our perfect prophet. The perfect prophet must stand firm and be obedient even to the point of death!

In our earlier reading from John 18, we find one such example of Jesus obedience in the presence of the foe- a situation where Jesus could have run away- fled for his life- but rather He stood still! He was firm and resolute in His submission to the Father and He did not run from his enemies- but rather presented himself to His enemies! Jesus asks in John 18:4- whom do you seek? I am He! Note that Jesus does not run and hide himself- rather He presents Himself- and it is his foes who fall back and tremble- falling to their knees! You see, Jesus is faithful in where Elijah was not! Elijah ran, Jesus stood still! Elijah hid, Jesus presented Himself! Here am I! That is why our salvation is secure- because Jesus took the cup of God's wrath- it was the will of the Father that He suffer at the hands of wicked men! And in this suffering, Jesus defeats the foe and conquers the enemy of God's people! But with Elijah, he is moved by the fear of man. Let us learn then, not to fear man who can only kill the body, but fear Him who can cast both body and soul into hell! Jezebel should have learned to fear the God who is- and one day soon she will learn what becomes of those who rebel against the true King! When we look at Elijah's response to Jezebel, we can say that we'd likely do the same thing ourselves! But when we remember the victory that Christ has accomplished over Jezebel- the seed of the serpent- we can rejoice in the fact that He has overcome the world! He has crushed the wicked queen and Satan's head!

Before we conclude, let's consider a few applications. First of all, Ahab is set before us as a spineless king who does whatever his wife tells him to do. He listens and will bend to whatever way the wind blows- and his wicked wife has the most sway over him. We are left longing for a greater- better king who will lead the people into righteousness and truth. And with Elijah, we find that a great victory is followed by a flight in fear. The second application is this, even the strong in faith can sometimes fall and tremble. At this one point in his life- Jezebel's threats held more weight than God's promises. Elijah has stepped out of line with his mission and calling. As the LORD will ask in 19:9- what are you doing here? This is not where I sent you- you are not supposed to be in hiding now- but visible and present for the sake of my people. For a time, Jezebel's voice is heard, while the prophet of truth is silent in Israel! We can rejoice in the fact that our

perfect prophet never fled when He was called to stand- and that He was willing to suffer at the hands of wicked men for our salvation. His voice will never be silenced, His word will always accomplish His will.

To conclude, the life of Elijah illustrates what is true of our lives. Sometimes, things are going well for us- other times not so much. We go through mountains and valleys. Even personally we have times of joy and times of sorrow- when we are faithful and even times when we fall. But thanks be to God, our perfect prophet was faithful in times of joy and in times of sorrow! When He was praised and when He was rejected by men! As our theme stated, Jesus Christ calls His people to run the race of faith with endurance and obedience in times of acceptance and rejection. So whatever this next week may hold, a mountain top experience of joy and victory or a valley of depressing defeat- remember that in Christ we are conquerors. That we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!