

# From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

ELIJAH  
(Preparation Through Testing)

Text: I Kings - Chapter Seventeen  
AS MARTIN LUTHER stood before Charles V, and John the Baptist before Herod, so Elijah, long ago, stood before King Ahab and his corrupt court and challenged the nation to return to God.

The times were dismal. Corruption abounded. God had been forsaken. Ahab was guilty. Some years before he had married a pagan Phoenician Princess who had brought with her to Samaria a train of gods, goddesses, prophets, priests and prostitutes. Soon the altars of Baal and As-toreth sprang up like weeds throughout the kingdom. The prophets of God had either been slain or were hiding as exiles in caves in the mountains. Gradually, spiritual darkness enveloped this kingdom which had been so greatly blessed of God.

But not all have bowed the knee to Baal. God always has a man to meet the challenge of each age. Elijah, who will come forth in iconoclastic fury with a message against idolatry, is already being prepared for God's service.

Many believe that our age is not unlike that of Elijah's. If our sin is not that of idolatry, it is surely that of atheism. Communism in the East and secularism in the West have broken down the altars of the Lord. But God is even now preparing men and women in this age of revolution and judgment, who will lead us into a great spiritual awakening.

I. LET US NOTICE now God's preparation of His prophet through testing. Having given God's message of judgment and drought, Elijah is directed to the Brook Cherith. Here God will provide for His servant a table in the wilderness. The ravens bring to this wilderness retreat his daily bread, and his thirst is quenched by the cool water of the brook. The days grew into weeks and the weeks into months and finally one day Elijah was startled to see that the brook was drying up. By this time, the heavens had become as brass, and the earth was scorched from lack of rain. It must have been with much apprehension that the prophet watched the diminishing supply of precious water. Why does not God who guides the ravens cause this brook to flow? Finally, came the day when the pebbles glistened in the dried up bed of the brook. The last drops of water are now used and Elijah can only cry out to God from parched lips, "Why?"

Perhaps, you believe that Elijah had too much faith to question God. Perhaps! But which of you can come to the place of utter helplessness without a shaking of your faith? What, if today, God should direct you out of the place of plenty into that of poverty? Are you able to say, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content?" This is the place of trust to which God wished to bring Elijah then, and to which He desires to bring us today. Let us not therefore evade the hard things of life, for through them, God would strengthen our faith and prepare us for greater things in His service.

II. LET IT BE KNOWN then that Elijah faced up to the crisis at Cherith. He turned to the only one who could meet his need. He turned in faith to God. There comes to the prophet now a new command, but within that command there is a new challenge to his faith. He is appointed to go to Zarephath where God has commanded a widow to sustain him during the remaining months of the drought. It might appear at first that God is merely changing the prophets base of supply, but let us notice the testing of faith involved in this change.

Consider, if you will, the dangerous journey confronting him. He must either cross or circumvent the Kingdom of Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah is on the man-wanted list. The kingdom

of Samaria and those kingdoms surrounding her are all searching for this prophet of doom whose God has closed the heavens. Elijah is well aware of the danger. If he leaves his wilderness seclusion at Cherith, he must face unknown dangers and possible death on the road north to Zarephath. To go is dangerous, but to remain is death. The brook has dried up. The water is gone! As a mother eagle is forced to push the young from the safety of the nest, so God would force Elijah out into new ventures of faith.

Remember, too, the problem of food and water for this journey. From our text, we learn that these were the things first requested by Elijah upon his arrival at the gate of Zarephath. This would indicate that the journey had been one of physical weakness made more acute by hunger and thirst. The request for the last meal of the widow was not simply to test her faith, but also to meet the urgent need of a prophet of God for food and water. Elijah must have thought of these things back at Cherith when he heard the command of God to move. Remember, he is a man of like passions with us. He is not only the prophet of faith, but he is also a man of flesh and even at times of fear as we shall definitely see in a later message.

Zarephath, the town to which Elijah is directed, was a place of smelting furnaces. It lay only eight miles north of Zidon, the capital of the Phoenician Empire. Here at Zidon, Ethbaal, the father of Jezebel, had his palace. This was the center of Baal worship from which Jezebel had gone to Ahab's court. Why is it that Elijah who had challenged Baal worship in the Kingdom of Israel is now commanded to move into the very stronghold of Baal Worship? As Elijah stood at Cherith and thought of this fiery furnace of danger, he was probably tempted to say, "Not so, Lord." But in spite of the dangers involved in this new command, Elijah did go in faith, and he discovered that God who had planned the way, led His servant in the way that He had planned.

III. WE NOTICE NOW in our text a third crisis, a third testing of the prophet's faith. You are familiar with the story of the cruise of oil and the barrel of meal that did not fail. The widow is repaid a thousandfold in return for the last meal given to a needy servant of God. Everyday there is enough to meet the need.

But then the grim reaper, death, visited this humble home. We can sympathize with the anguish of this widow. First her husband had been taken, now her only child! In her grief, past blessings are forgotten, and she cries out against Elijah whom in a sense she blames for the tragedy. Her words spoken in grief and bewilderment may be interpreted to mean, "Get out of my house." Where will he go in this country? Will this widow, in her resentment, reveal his true identity to the devotees of Baal? Will Ethbaal be summoned to drag him back to Ahab's court and death?

Elijah remembers that God has never failed. Carrying the child to his own part of the house, he prayed in great earnestness before God, "Let the child's soul come into him again." God answered his prayer. The mother rejoiced in her son's restoration. Elijah's faith in God became even stronger. During the years of the drought, God has tested His servant and tempered his faith through trial. Elijah is now prepared to be used of God in a national crisis to take place at Mr. Carmel.

AND AS THEN, so now, God must prepare us before He can use us. We must learn to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ before we can become leaders in the struggle against secularism, communism and atheism. Let us then use every difficulty as a stepping stone to greater faith in God. For the empty cupboard, the dangerous journey, or the visit of death to our homes may be the plan of God to make us stronger for His service. And it is true today "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."



REV. D. M. CLARK



## St. James Catholic Church

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### SCHEDULE OF NEW YEAR'S SERVICES

Friday, December 31 \* New Year's Eve.  
(Dispensation for partaking of meat granted)

Confessions: From 4 till 4:30 p.m.  
From 7:30 till 8 p.m.

Saturday, January 1, Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord. . . Holy Day of Obligation.  
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