

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

ELIJAH
(Presentation Against Evil)

Text: I Kings - Chapter Eighteen

ELIJAH STANDS OUT as an outdoor man of great physical strength, but in this national crisis at Carmel he will not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places. For such an encounter, he must be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Elijah now has such a faith in God's power, as a result of his testings during the draught. In the meantime, the sufferings resulting from the draught have had a softening effect upon the seared conscience of national Israel. The time is ready for the public presentation of the Prophet of God. He now comes forth from Zarephath as God's representative. He comes to present a charge against Ahab, a choice to the people, and a challenge to the prophets of Baal.

I. AHAB AND ELIJAH meet while the king is out in search of new supplies of water. Immediately, Ahab accuses

Elijah of being the troubler of Israel. In his mind, the prophet is the scapegoat upon whom must fall the blame of this national crisis. The prophet is responsible for the cloudless skys and the sunbaked earth. He must bear the blame for the mountain of human misery which had grown higher and higher as the draught moved into the third year. When Elijah had opportunity to speak, he responded with the words, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house."



REV. D. M. CLARK

This is an interesting play upon the word ANCHOR translated troubler in this passage. Its meaning is illustrated in the story of the fall of Jericho. The soldiers of Israel were forbidden to covet anything within the city, "lest they bring a curse upon the camp and trouble it." The guilt of Achan, you will remember, brought defeat to all. Now, at a much later time in Israel's history, Elijah charges Ahab with being the troubler of Israel, the one whose sin brought forth idolatry and resulted in national judgment. Ahab's house is also included in this judgment. The compromise introduced during the reign of Jeroboam has now resulted in the reign of Jezebel and the public dethronement of Jehovah. Thus, Elijah traces "the troubler" of Israel to the throne, and the charge of God's broken commandments strikes Ahab with the impact of a tablet of stone.

WE ALSO LIVE in a time of trouble. In this age of conflict, dreams of a world made safe for democracy have vanished before the stern realities of iron curtains, class struggles, and atomic bombs. What is the source of our present trouble? Is Communistic Russia the Achan among the modern nations or do all the nations share alike the blame for our international crisis? Of this much, we can be certain that our sin today is but the sin of Ahab in modern setting. We have broken God's first and greatest commandment! And let us not think that we shall escape the judgments of God. We might ponder with profit these questions raised by a student of history: "Where are the winged lions of Nineveh? Where are the navies of Phoenicia? Where are the hoplites of Greece? Where are the legions of Rome? Where are the treasures of Spain? Where did they go? Was it only a matter of time? Of Age? Of national decrepitude? Or did the matter of sin and judgment enter into their fall?"

Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. Too long our trust has been in "reeking tube and iron shard." Let us pray for individuals of faith and Christian character to fill our governmental offices. Let us call for a national day of prayer.

II. THE TEXT NEXT DIRECTS our attention to the people and the choice that Elijah presented to them. All Israel was gathered on the plain of Megiddo at the base of Mt. Carmel. Here from

this battlefield of sacred history, the people will view a battle on Carmel of far more significance than any which has ever taken place on the plain.

Elijah standing on the Eastern end of the Carmel ridge cries out, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." Many years later Paul writes in a similar vein to the Christians in the idol-infested city of Corinth: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness. . . and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"

Today we are faced with the same choice. You ask, "Where are the idols?" We reply, "Our atheism is no better than their polytheism." Is it entirely wrong to think of communism, secularism, and nationalism as the idols of the twentieth century? You make a choice today whether consciously or unconsciously. You are forced to choose between a world with God or a world without God; between faith in prayer or trust to luck.

ONLY THE SHORTSIGHTED and superficial mind can find a resting place between these two opinions. How long will we halt between these two? General McArthur reminded us that we face a spiritual crisis similar to that in Elijah's day. And Senator Tobey clearly stated that "solution there is none save in the reign of Christ alone."

Perhaps the scene on the battlefield of Megiddo is symbolic of our present crisis. Will the outcome of our world revolutions be peace or Armagaddon? Will East meet West in combat or will solution be found at the cross of Calvary? Only the future will tell. But the choice of the people today can change the course of history tomorrow. Let us then choose to serve God. Let us never forget that our spiritual defense is our first defense. In that day, it was not the army of Ahab that held back the Assyrian hords, but rather this man of God who stands alone on Carmel's ridge.

III. WE COME NOW to the crowning act of Elijah's career. He challenges the prophets of Baal. What a strange and apparent unequal contest. On the one side stands the lone prophet of Jehovah with flowing beard and leathern girdle?

"Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among the innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified."

On the other side stand the four-hundred and fifty splendidly robed prophets of Baal. To them is given first opportunity to demonstrate the power of their god, Baal. All morning they cry out in rhythmic chant: "O Baal hear us! O Baal hear us!" At noon, Elijah taunts them. Is their god asleep or away on a journey? Surely he will manifest his power to this great convocation of his devotees. But answer there is none. The text then notes that the priests of Baal cut themselves and prophesied. This word prophesied is used in an evil sense similar to the time when an evil spirit came upon Saul and he attempted to slay David, the Anointed of the Lord. Let us not minimize the awfulness of this scene. A kingdom is at stake and the powers of hell are angry. Reading this story, we are reminded again that "Satan, himself, is transformed into an angel of light," and that demons love to don religious garb.

LET US NOTICE NOW the quiet prayer of Elijah in contrast to the wild prophesying of the priests of Baal. Having repaired the broken altar of Jehovah, Elijah utters this deeply earnest prayer, "Hear me, O Lord, Hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their hearts back again." God responded to Elijah's faith with fire from heaven. The sacrifice and altar were consumed. The hearts of the people were melted. Prostrating themselves upon the ground, they cry out in repentance. "The Lord, he is God."

One man to bring a charge against a wicked king. One man to exhort an unbelieving people to a proper choice. One man to face and challenge the many demon-inspired priests of Baal. Yes, one man, but one who had been prepared in the school of faith. And, with God, one is a mighty army.

(BISHOP, from page 1)

at St. Augustine's seminary, Bay St. Louis, Miss., at the East Troy novitiate, Wis., and Techy, Ill.

He returned to Bay St. Louis to complete his philosophy and theology courses, and was ordained Jan. 6, 1944, by Bishop Richard O. Gerow of Natchez-Jackson, at Bay St. Louis.

Both parents witnessed the ordination of their son. The mother died in 1948, and the father in 1956.

THE NEW PRIEST did parochial work in Lafayette, La.; Pine Bluff, Ark.; St. Martinville, La.; and St. Gabriel's, Mound Bayou, Miss.

Appointed pastor of St. Joseph's, Broussard, La., in 1952, Father Perry in six years built a church, rectory, and school on a five-acre site, developing a firm spiritual and educational basis for the parish.

In 1958, the young Divine Word priest was appointed rector of the major and minor seminaries of the order in Bay St. Louis, for a full canonical term of six years, and in July, 1964, his Superior General assigned him to be Provincial Superior of the Southern Province of the Divine Word.

FATHER PERRY became the first Negro major religious superior of men in the United States.

His charge included 75 priests and Brothers working in the order's houses, and the parishes assigned to them in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Arkansas.

He has worked diligently for the past nine years, as national chaplain, to foster the growth of the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, a Catholic fraternal order numbering 14,000 members, mostly Colored persons, throughout the nation.

For the past six years, the Bishop-elect has been a board member of the National Catholic Council for Interracial Justice, and was among the 250 religious leaders invited by President John F. Kennedy to a White House conference June 8, 1963, to discuss peaceful desegregation of public accommodations.

In July the same year, he became the first Negro Catholic clergyman in the history of the United States Congress invited to deliver the opening prayer.

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