

A Godly Man in Wicked Surroundings

Elijah was a man who reached true greatness in the Lord's service. He was always ready to go where God would send him (I Kings 18:1; 19:15); to pray whenever prayer was needed (I Kings 17:20, 21; 18:36, 37), and to confront evil whenever confrontation was necessary (I Kings 18:17-24; 21:17-19). He was translated without seeing death, and he, along with Moses, was chosen to appear with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration.

The remarkable thing about Elijah is that he attained this greatness while living in a wicked and hostile environment. Had he lived in Judah during the righteous reign of Hezekiah or Josiah, we might not be surprised at Elijah's attainments. But he lived instead in Israel during the wicked reign of Ahab. He was subjected to the cruel intents of Jezebel. He was under constant harassment and threat of death. He became so discouraged at one point that he asked to die, but he never denied his God.

In this wicked environment Elijah was able to influence others. The widow of Zarephath was blessed through Elijah (I Kings 17:8-24). The multitudes on Mount Carmel were led to cry, "The Lord, He is God!" through his courageous efforts (I Kings 18:39). Elisha, his successor, must have been greatly influenced by him. And even Ahab was brought to humility on one occasion, clothing himself in sackcloth as a result of Elijah's rebuke (I Kings 21:27-29). The message of Elijah is clear. You can live a godly life and influence others for good in a wicked and hostile environment.

When one hears the excuses people make today, it is obvious that Elijah's message is badly needed in this generation. People excuse their failure to teach others the gospel with, "People are so prejudiced around here they just won't listen"; when the truth is, little effort has been made. If they are approached about their ungodly conduct, they explain that "You just don't know how terrible the people are that I have to work around every day". If their children go astray their explanation is, "Our children are faced with pressures that we didn't have growing up". Such statements, repeated often enough, become to many a "license" to do wrong and a salve to soothe their troubled consciences.

We must throw aside our excuses and make up our minds to do right. Elijah could serve God in wicked surroundings. And so can we.

- by Bill Hall

A Man Who Had Plenty

Only Luke records Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). Scholars debate whether this was a parable or a historical account. Since parables are true-to-life illustrations, it makes little difference. The story is addressed to the Pharisees, who were lovers of money (v. 14). Their money and outward show of religion impressed men (v. 15). Perhaps folks viewed their wealth as an indication of God's approval. Jesus knew better. The story is about a man who had plenty. We ought to be able to relate to that.

He had plenty of money. The man is not named. (Some folks refer to him as Dives, based on Jerome's Latin word for rich.) He was just "a certain rich man." He could be anyone with plenty of money. Who is that? Doesn't rich always describe folks who have more than we? It shouldn't. Most of us have plenty, far more than is essential to life. Plenty of money was not the man's problem. It was what he did with it. "He habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day" (v. 19). He consumed it all. It all went to self. And that was inexcusable because...

He had plenty of opportunity to help others. "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table..." (v. 20-21). Sometimes we console ourselves that we would do more if only we had opportunity. Beware. The problem is rarely lack of opportunity; it is unwillingness to see it. This man couldn't see it lying at his gate! Neither will we if we, like him, are always looking in a mirror. That focus on self later became unbearably painful because...

He had plenty of torment. In Hades, the realm of the dead. The man who had been so comfortable in life was now indescribably miserable in death. Instantly, he became the beggar. "Father Abraham, have mercy on me...I am in agony in this flame" (v. 24). Now he could see clearly. It was too late. All that remained was an eternity of agony. And it was his own fault because...

He had plenty of instruction. At the end of the story the rich man pled with Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers. "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead'" (v. 31). The Bible that the rich man had so long ignored contained all the instruction, evidence, promises and warning that anyone would need. If that won't move us, what else would?

Are you living daily in service to the Christ who was crucified for you?

- by *Frank Himmel*

Are You Upset & Concerned? Do You Have Questions?

Do you wonder why things are done the way they are done? Do you have questions about the work, worship or operation of the congregation? Does it seem that there are things going on that you don't understand? Are there issues floating around that trouble you? Are there times when you don't really agree with the decisions that are being made?

If so, join the club! We all face the kind of questions and concerns that we've just described. The big question is not: Will such issues arise? The question is: How will **YOU** deal with these things when they happen?

Let us offer some do's and don'ts for handling these potentially difficult situations.

DON'T...

- Don't get angry and upset before you have gathered all the facts.
- Don't gossip or backbite. This doesn't help, and it is a sin (Proverbs 6:19).
- Don't complain if you don't intend to get busy correcting the problem. Typically, churches have way too many fault-finders, and 'not enough problem solvers.
- Don't immediately assume the worst about your brethren. Too often we hear harsh judgmental words about the elders, the preacher, or other members before the facts have all been sorted out. True love demands better than this (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

DO...

- Ask for information. Very often any disagreement or controversy can be quickly cleared up this way.
- If there is a problem, go directly to the source. Speak to the one(s) involved and work for a solution.
- Pray for wisdom in dealing with the problem, asking for God's help to do and say the right things (Jas. 1:5).
- Maintaining sound doctrine is the highest priority (Gal 1:8,9), but maintaining peace must also be an important goal for every member (Eph. 4:1-3).

- by *Greg Gwin*