

Fear is Good, Being Afraid is Not

I was greatly blessed by a message I heard on the story of Obadiah from 1 Kings 18:1-19. This is not the Obadiah who wrote the OT book. But he was a man who was in charge of the household of wicked King Ahab. Ahab was the husband of the infamous Queen Jezebel. She helped lead the Northern Kingdom of Israel deeply into idolatry. The wickedness was confronted by the Prophet Elijah and led to over three years of drought under Elijah's leadership.

Obadiah was a man who feared the Lord. While there can be a negative sense of fear (1 John 4:18), the fear of the Lord as used here is a good thing. Obadiah had great respect for the authority and power of God. So, while Jezebel was busy slaughtering the prophets of God, at great risk to his own life, Obadiah had saved and cared for 150 of them in caves. Since Elijah was the point man on the drought in Israel, he was a target for Ahab and Jezebel and they were looking for him.

Because of Obadiah's courage, it might surprise us to read of his fear. Ahab had commanded Obadiah to search for grass for the livestock. He went one direction to search and the King went another. While Obadiah was following the King's command, he met Elijah. Elijah told him to tell King Ahab that Elijah had been found. Obadiah's response was one filled with fear.

Obadiah expressed to Elijah that the King had been looking everywhere for him. Obadiah was afraid that if he went and told Ahab that Elijah was there and then the King came to see him, the Spirit of God would take Elijah away. Then, Ahab would not find him and kill Obadiah in his rage. Do you see what's going on? This brave man was a man who feared God, but did not trust God.

I find that is often true of me. I want to obey God. I respect His power and His authority. But sometimes, while I fear Him and His power, I have trouble trusting Him. "Are you going to take care of me and those I love?" "Can I trust You in what's going on?" In Obadiah's case, "I am willing to protect Your people because You're the Lord. But what happens if I tell the King, 'Elijah is here' and you take him away?"

What a great message Obadiah was given for the King. "I have found the man who can solve our problems". But his concern was, "If I get his hopes up and you're gone, I'm a goner myself". What if God did that to him?

It's silly to think God would do that, right? It's silly to doubt God's love and God's character, but at times, that's what I do. My suspicion is, that's what WE do.

Elijah gave Obadiah what he needed. He gave him what we need. A word from God. "As the Lord of Hosts (armies) lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him". That's what God is like. He loves us. We can trust Him.

We don't trust someone if we don't believe they love us, if we don't believe they have our best interests in mind. Paul understood that when he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me". In essence, Paul says, "A God who loved me enough to die for me is Someone I can trust".

And isn't that true for us, too? Doesn't God always have our best in mind?

Like Obadiah, we need a word from God in times of need. We respect the great God we serve. We might even be willing to do amazing acts of devotion. But sometimes our struggles don't involve fearing Him, but trusting Him.

Never forget this. As this speaker pointed out, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but it's not the end of it all. True wisdom understands the God who gives it. True wisdom not only fears the God who rules our lives, but also understands that our God is a God of mercy, grace, and love.

Like Obadiah, we need a word from the Lord. We have it. We have time to spend in it these days, to immerse ourselves in the reality of His love. Let's do that.

Think about just one of the many expressions of His love from His word from Romans 8:35-38 - "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'"

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God loves us. He has our best interests in mind. Whatever comes our way, it is allowed by a God who loves us and who we can trust. That's true even if at the time it is something of which we are afraid or that confuses us. Fearing God does not mean being afraid of the One who loves us. We can trust Him.

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