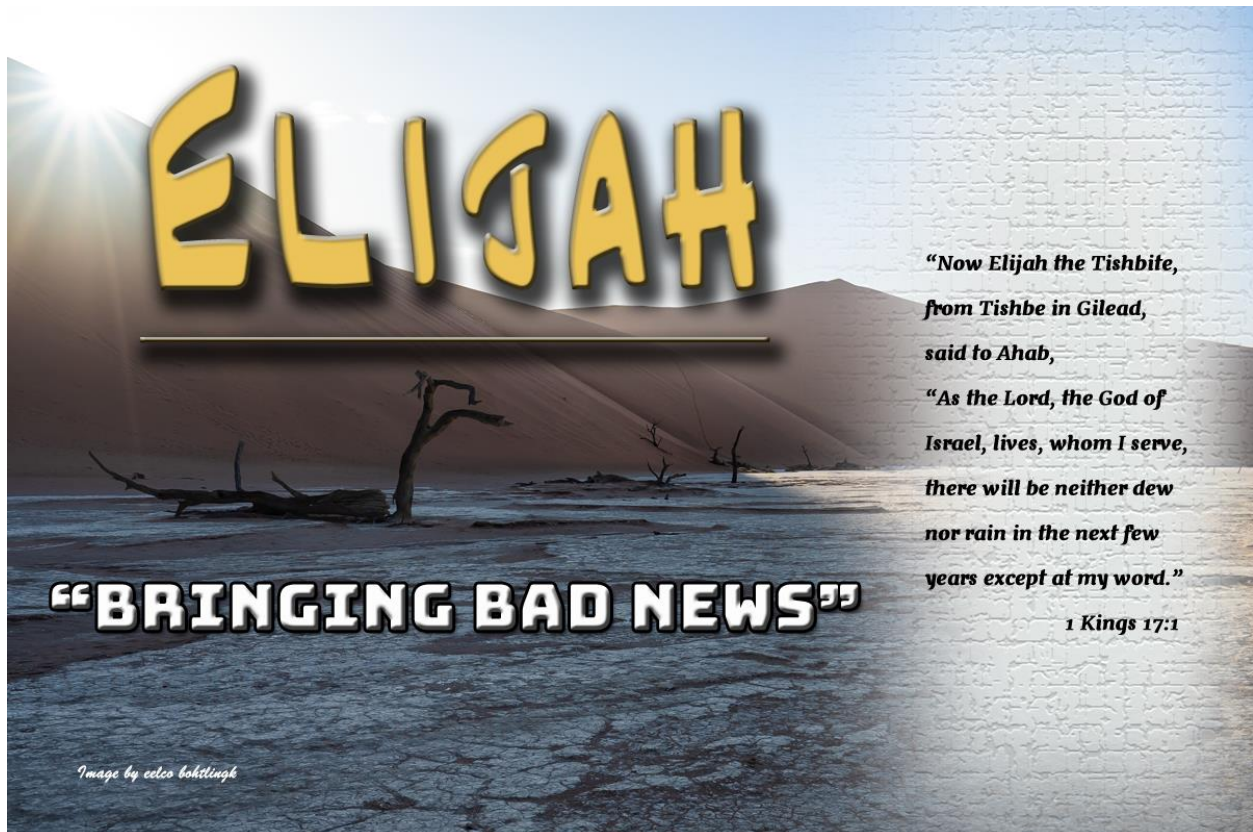


January 2, 2022

Bringing Bad News

1 Kings 17:1

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”



Special Music: “Bring the Rain”

Mercy Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kseRKxkq5iY>

BAD NEWS

I've got some bad news
You don't want to hear
But still, it's important
So I'll make it real clear.

There's a draught on the way
You need to prepare.
But you can't get it right
If you stay unaware

The land will dry up.
The rivers will die.
The crops will fail.
And the people will cry

To the God they've ignored,
Or the idols they've built
As the altars are buried
'Neath dust, dirt, and silt.

But no God will hear
Either they won't or they can't.
There's no changing the moment
No way to recant

Before my words become truth.
You can dance and then prance
Before carved graven statues
Hoping they will give you a glance.

But no, they can't see you
Nor can they help,
And the God that created you
You've set on a shelf.

You've ignored all his words.
You've set God aside.
You've forgotten His promise
And embraced your own pride.

So, here's a reminder
Like it or not
The draught, it's a coming
And you're likely to rot

Store up your wheat
Make bread while you can.
Gather your crops
Before they are sand.

Fill up your wineskins
Put water in jars.
Look up to the sky

And see all the stars.

No clouds will be forming

To block out your view

The draught it's a coming

it's a coming for you.

No one likes getting bad news. No one likes delivering bad news because no one likes getting bad news. The United States Military has a long tradition of finding ways to inform families of the loss of their loved ones. During WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam war, the majority of these notifications came by... telegram. The telegrams usually began with the phrase, "On behalf of (whichever branch of the service) we regret to inform you," or "It is my sad duty to inform you..." It reached a point where people who had loved ones serving our country dreaded receiving any telegrams of any kind for fear of what they might say. A telegram implied bad news.

Today, these notifications are done in person by uniformed service personnel. But a new fear has taken over the old fear of the telegram. When someone with a loved one in the armed forces sees a military vehicle pull up to their house and uniformed service personnel who then make their way to the door, those loved ones know exactly what they are about to hear. Bad news. As humbling as it is to bring these messages to loved ones, the military has an extremely hard time finding volunteers to perform this service. But delivering the notifications this way is far more appropriate and reflects the depth of a service person's sacrifice much more compassionately than a telegram.

When we look out the front window and see a police car sitting in our driveway in the middle of the night with flashing lights, we are well aware that they are not bringing good news. How brave one has to be to walk up to a house in the dark, knock on a door, and tell the persons inside that their daughter, son,

spouse, parent has passed in a tragic incident or accident. The officers know that this is something that should never be done by phone.

We look at doctors, nurses, and first responders in the same light. Those words that we dread to hear, “We did everything that we could, but...” But these doctors, nurses, and first responders know that it is always best to deliver these notices in person. The survivors deserve that courtesy.

I remember well the day that I was sitting at home and received a call from Jimmy Wells, Dana’s brother. His first words were, “Is Barbara there.” I responded, “Well, no, Jimmy, why would Barbara be here. No, wait, there she is at the door now. Let me let her in.” Seeing the look on Barbara’s face told me all I needed to know about what Jimmy was about to say. They had decided to pull the plug on the machines keeping Dana alive. But Jimmy did not want to tell me that on the phone or without someone beside me when he told me. So, he had called Barbara first, and she was there when he gave me the bad news. And I will forever be grateful that she came.

No one likes getting bad news. No one likes delivering bad news because no one likes getting bad news. No one should have to handle news like that alone.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

1 Kings 17:1

This is the first mention of Elijah in the Bible. We don't know anything about his parents or his background other than he was from Tishbe in Gilead, which was located in the Northern Kingdom, just south of Damascus. Elijah was a prophet during the reign of Ahab. Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Phoenicia and she was a worshipper of Baal. Together, Ahab and Jezebel had encouraged the worship of Baal, a Canaanite god, over the worship of Jehovah.

In Hebrew, the name Elijah means "My God is Yahweh." We do not know if this was his given name or a name given to him as a prophet. In spite of the fact that we know little about his background, he must have been fairly well known for people to listen to what he had to say. At the same time, Ahab and Jezebel had killed many of Jehovah's prophets and priests. The Bible does tell us in 1 Kings 18:17 that Ahab considers Elijah to be the trouble maker, but Ahab had been unable to get rid of him.

The first words we hear from the mouth of Elijah are, **"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."** This warning is delivered to Ahab.

It is important that we take this message in context. There are many scholars that interpret this passage with the caveat that Ahab had caused the situation of the draught by his disobedience to God and his direct involvement in the killing of God's priests and prophets. But as hard as I have looked at this passage, I just don't find that judgement. I see no cause and effect here. As a matter of fact, I see God warning everybody that a draught is coming without

blaming anybody. There is no suggestion here that God brought on this draught. But here is Elijah, God's prophet and messenger, warning of the draught so it is easy to draw conclusions. Elijah does say the draught will not end until he says it will end. We have to be careful not to imply more than the scripture states. This could either mean that the rain that will end the draught will come at Elijah's summoning or it could mean simply that it would be Elijah that would announce the coming of the rain.

It's true that Ahab and Jezebel were pushing the worship of Baal and that they had killed a large number of priests. But this passage does not suggest that God caused the draught because of this. Still, as we will see, God does use the situation to his advantage.

This draught is going to be so severe that dew won't even form on the leaves or the grass. There will be no rain. There will be no relief until Elijah announces it.

Another piece to this puzzle is that the draught is going to last a couple of years. If this had been a punishment from God, I don't believe that God would have put a time limit on it. If this had been a correction for God's people, one would think that the draught would not be lifted until the people changed their ways. This time limit suggests to me that God knew the draught was coming and wanted to give the Israelites a chance to prepare, much like the draught in Egypt at the time of Joseph. Although God was disappointed in the Israelites, God still loved them.

God can take the hard times that come into our lives and use those times to make us better people; to teach us lessons that we would not or could not learn otherwise. Sometimes, if we just take time to listen, God will let us know hard times are coming. Other times, the storm is going roll in and catch us unaware. But that does not mean that God is not with us to ride out the storm. Our creator might even be using the storm to repurpose us or move us to a place that we can be of better service to the kingdom.

We can also be distracted by the warning and try to deflect it. Just because God warns us that something is about to happen does not mean that God is causing it to happen, that it is directed at us, that it is meant to punish us. When our Creator tells us that a draught is coming, too often our response is not “Thank you for the warning and giving me time to prepare,” but instead, “Why are you sending a draught? What have I done to deserve this?” We have a hard time ridding ourselves of the attitude that if something bad happens, God is sending that something into our lives to punish us. That is a very Old Testament way of looking at things.

Jesus came to let us know that we got it all wrong; that we lost our focus. In his time of teaching here on earth, we find him constantly telling the religious leaders that they have lost their way; that creation was made for man, not man for creation. We were not an afterthought. We are the purpose. God loves us so much that he gave us the choice of whether or not to love him back. Can we even begin to understand how precious a gift that is? He loves us so much that he

sent his son to die for us so that we could be in a relationship with him, even if we fall short of our potential and our purpose.

There is a draught coming. There is a flood coming. There is a storm coming. There is a wind coming. There is a fire coming.

When the rain has brought new life to the earth, when the waters have receded, when the storm is abated, when the wind becomes a breeze, and when the fire dies out, we will be the better for having trusted in God to see us through. We will have found new purchase for our faith. We will be able to see the difficulties for what they are and will be able to glean the lessons that God is teaching us.

When Elijah told Ahab about the coming of the draught, Ahab did nothing to prepare. It isn't until 1 Kings 18 that we learn how Ahab and Obadiah split up to find grass and water for the kingdom's livestock. This happens long after the draught begins. Ahab didn't pay attention to the warning. He had the opportunity to get ready and chose not to.

Does God give us warnings today about what is to come? He often does, but we don't attempt to prepare for it until it is beating down our front door. Often, we just take a 'wait and see' attitude. When the fire gets too close, we will put it out. But by the time it is at our doorstep, we can't put it out. We take the Titanic approach. The captain of the Titanic could have avoided the whole catastrophe if he had just heeded the radio warnings about the presence of icebergs.

“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

What is so difficult to understand about that? It makes no difference if we like or do not like the messenger. That won't change a thing.

We look around us and we know change is coming. We either prepare for it or not. If we heed the warnings that God had delivered to us, we will survive and even thrive after the storm has passed. Are we willing to make the hard choices and prepare for what's coming? Are we willing to lean into our Heavenly Father? Are we willing to let go of the baggage, traditions, and comfort of our present, in order to receive the blessings that can only be found on the other side of the storm?

I pray that God will reach into each of us and allow us the flexibility to see beyond the storm, not so much to know that it will end, but to know there are blessings there to be had. I pray for insight and wisdom as we move forward. I pray for guidance as we recognize that God is in control and that he loves us most dearly. I pray that we continue to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that has seen so much loss. I pray that we continue to embrace the message that Jesus Christ is the light of world and that everyone is welcome at His table.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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