

# Sermon Text for October 13, 2019

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**I Kings 19:1-10, Acts 16:35-40**

*“Out in the Open”*

Can I say without getting into trouble with any of you that we are living in interesting times. I graduated with a degree in political science and a concentration in International Relations before I went to seminary so what happens in our government and what happens in the world fascinates me. I don't publicly root for one side or another but I do remain interested and fascinated by the times in which we are living.

We can agree that we are living in a time where it is not politics as usual for anyone. A president is about to be impeached, that is not new for our country, but it is not usual. We are about to be at war with Iran, China is our friend one day and our enemy the next, a Kurdish genocide is about to take place, the NBA has lost its moral compass and all of that leaves us spinning and wondering can we go on without taking sides or hiding and keeping what we really feel secret and don't dare for it to come out in the open.

Both of our Scriptures today we have protagonists who are butting up against the civic society of their day in general and specifically against the individuals who are in power. For Elijah it was the king and queen of Israel, Ahab and Jezebel, for Paul and Silas it was the Roman Emperor and his minions.

We will see two very different actions and reactions by our protagonists today as they face this very evident conflict. Elijah reacts and turns to fear and insecurity and hides hoping no one will see him while Paul and Silas demand a public apology and go toe to toe with the powers that be who had thrown them into prison. God tells us in Luke 8:17 that “nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light.”

We are called to live out in the open for God's kingdom is not to be hidden and we are not to be fearful of anything.

## **READ SCRIPTURE**

One of the highlights every year on our trip to Israel is going up to Mount Carmel which is the location where Elijah beats the prophets of Baal by bringing fire down from heaven when the false prophets were not able to. After his victory he takes a victory lap and slaughters all of the false prophets of Baal. But there was a problem.

Yes, while Elijah was a prophet of the one true God of Israel he did not work for God, he worked for the king and queen of Israel. Ahab and Jezebel had hired the prophets of Baal for

their own services. They had surrounded themselves with false prophets who would back up their policies and further their own immoral agendas which flew in the face of the faith that had been passed down from generation to generation. Elijah had drained the swamp but the king and queen actually liked the swamp, they found out that it actually served their purposes.

So, while Elijah was thrilled with his victory of casting out all the priests of the false god Baal, his queen, the queen of Israel, Jezebel tweets out: I am going to kill Elijah just like he killed all of my prophets. Elijah wasn't sure if he should take the tweet seriously or not, but it scared him.

God had just performed an amazing miracle, he brought fire down from heaven, in order to show that he was on Elijah's side, and as a result of a single threat from the ruler of Israel that all disappears for Elijah. So we read in vs. 3 that he was afraid and as a result he flees for his life. Then in vs.4 we read that he wants to die because just as the people of Israel in the past had betrayed God by their actions, so history is now repeating itself with the current ruler: Ahab and Jezebel.

Elijah falls asleep despondent in his isolation, hiding from anyone and everyone when once again God provides a miracle in vs.6 and then again in vs.7 where God tells him to get up and eat.

What are you doing here, in a cave, in the wilderness, in secret hiding because you are afraid. Is this what I taught you? You can almost hear the disappointment and frustration in God's voice in vs.9. Don't isolate yourself, don't be quiet, why are you not speaking up about an injustice and about the idolatry of you king and queen who happen to be governing my people.

There are at least two unfolding human rights tragedies that are unfolding before us in the world today which are taking place outside of our country. The Kurdish genocide and the squashing of the people of Hong Kong. There are certain times in history when individuals or organizations are given a platform which allows them to proclaim what is righteous and what is holy and just and what is not. The NBA has an opportunity to speak out strongly against China and the human rights abuses that are taking place in Hong Kong, but it has not, it has chosen to remain silent, like Elijah.

But be careful. You cannot criticize the NBA for being silent if you have in the past criticized Colin Kapernick for speaking up about an issue that is taking place in our very own country. I've never been critical of Kapernick so to be consistent I will criticize the NBA for not speaking up especially now that they have this opportunity. Instead they have, like Elijah, retreated into their proverbial cave because the finances require it. Never, ever make a moral,

political, or spiritual decision in your life based upon finances. God does not work that way. So Elijah was silent.

Paul and Silas, on the other hand, were not. What a high we are coming off in Acts 16. The jailer has been converted and baptized, then they just had a great meal together up in his house. It is getting late, time to tuck the two of you back into your jail cells. And that is where Paul and Silas end up because if they had been let loose the jailer would probably have been killed for letting them get away.

The word comes down to the jailer that the prisoners are actually to be freed. We don't know if it is because the Romans felt like they had served their time and so as not to be bothered with them after a beating and a night in jail they have learned their lesson. Or if the earthquake shook them up so that they were released just in case it was a sign that God was on their side and that they were innocent after all.

The jailer gives them the good news: you have been freed, go in peace. That would have made such a perfect ending. Paul and Silas placed in jail to bring salvation to the jailer and then miraculously released by the Romans in the morning in order to continue their missionary journey. That whole beating and night in prison never has to make the history books, it is one of those secret events that no one really needs to know about.

But that's not how it goes. Paul wants it out in the open. He is not content like Elijah to hide and run and escape as messengers of God tend to do. He wants God's actions to be front and center and that can only happen if all the story is told.

We will not leave until we get an apology because we aren't just mere Jews, we are Roman citizens. There are very clear conflicts not just with faith in Christ and the Jewish culture which we have emphasized over these past months, but here today Paul is saying that there are very clear conflicts with the Christian faith and Roman culture. If we are to extrapolate that truth today then we have to say that there are very clear conflicts with Christian faith and American culture and unfortunately the compromises that I see which have taken place almost exclusively have compromised our Christian faith. The American culture in which we live has taken over the priority of our Christian faith in many of our thinking.

Our priorities in our policies place our country first over our Christian values. In Acts Paul ensured that he did not place the desires of the emperor over the mandates of his faith. Caesar's actions were for his profit and his gain and not for the good of the empire as a whole and he certainly didn't even think about or care about this group of people called Christians and their understanding of the kingdom.

Paul wanted that out in the open and demanded an apology from the Roman representatives. And guess what? He got one. When an official apologizes for something they did or said which was the wrong thing to say or do and admits it, pay attention to that. It is not a sign of weakness, but rather of strength because that person is willing to bring things to the light, even their own mistakes even if it comes at a personal cost. Paul converts a Roman jailer and then corrects the Roman rulers all in this one chapter simply because he did not run away when he had the chance, like Elijah did.

Acts of ignorance and injustice must not be allowed to masquerade as truth and justice in the public eye. Paul continues to dictate out in the open. Once the apology comes and they lead him out of prison and out to the city gates, he comes back in and hangs out with Lydia and her family. He continues to act not according to their demands but according to what is right and pursues God's will for him.

In this confusing whirlwind of a time in this world seek out positions that are consistent with loving God and loving neighbor and the kingdom of God will win out. Today, everything is out in the open anyways with social media and the ever present media. You can't hide. Elijah fled for his life, asked to die, and God asks him: what are you doing here? Paul stays put, even in prison, ministers to the enemy, refuses to leave when given the chance, so that what God and the others had done would be out in the open and people would see it and consider it. Amen.