

Introduction: There is a very glorious consistency in God's Gospel power throughout the Old as well as New Testaments. People are saved by the power and the grace of God *in the same way in days of old as they are today*. The discovery of that Gospel in the days of men like Elijah, as we see them live by the very same faith which we possess by the same Holy Spirit who indwelt them and indwells us – is surely one of the most thrilling reasons why we study all of God's Word, from beginning to end. We love "tracking" the footsteps of God in the darkest of Old Testament Bible days!

As we look once more at the life of Elijah in this week's notes, we will see how *his experience* of the gracious character and power of God is also the experience of all true believers through Scripture and church history. May these notes be rich sources of meditation that we can take with us all summer long, in all our travels, holidays and family-times.

Monday - Friday: read Acts 19:23-34; 2 Timothy 2:1-2 and 1 Kings 19:1-4, 19:13-16.

In the days of Elijah's flight into the desert, as he panicked because of the threats of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-4), how he needed God's encouragement – much like timid and weak Timothy needed strength through God's Word from the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

For remember what dangerous events confronted the Gospel in Ephesus, where Timothy was the pastor at the time of the writing of 1 & 2 Timothy. Faced with a hostile city of idol-producing pagans (who, in angry rejection of Paul's Gospel, had taken over the local football stadium to shout for hours in support of their local goddess Diana – see Acts 19:23-34), Paul knew first-hand how important it was for Timothy to "guard this precious Gospel" from those who would attack it. For example, read 2 Timothy 1:14, where Paul urges Timothy to:

"Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

Thus both Timothy and Elijah were to guard the Word of God in days of hostility to that Word. The devil in Elijah's day sought to eradicate the Word of God and to kill all His servants, the prophets (1 Kings 19:10 & 19:14). In Timothy's day too, there were arising enemies of Christ who would resist God and pursue their own violent and godless agenda (2 Timothy 3:1-8).

How then would Elijah and Timothy endure? After all, taking a stand for God against such godless values and anti-gospel attitudes can wear any believer down. We see the sad result in Elijah's exhaustion and request that God would let him die in the desert (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah believed he had failed God miserably, and he felt completely alone, deserted by the people to whom he had been sent with the life-giving word of God. See 1 Kings 19:10 & 19:14's declaration by the prophet: "I alone am left."

Paul warns Timothy that *he too had been deserted by everyone* (2 Timothy 1:15)! The lesson for us? There are always, in each time period of church history, days when believers are forsaken of almost all who should support them. Do you feel that way today – as if you are going it alone in the marathon race of the Christian life?

Dear believer, when the world's rejection hurts, and when, on top of that, many superficial believers desert you in your profession of faith in Christ, so that you begin to experience the life of the long-distance runner – the crowds melt away and you are running by yourself - remember that there is One who never rejects the lonely, hurting believer. There is One who was always there to shepherd and to deliver suffering Old Testament saints like Jacob, Moses and Elijah. Hear Him speak to you in your weariness in the words of Isaiah 50:4-10, with words italicized for these Bible notes for emphasis:

The Lord GOD has given *Me*
 the tongue of those who are taught,
 that *I may know how to sustain* with a word
 him who is weary.
 Morning by morning he awakens;
 he awakens my ear
 to hear as those who are taught.
⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
 and I was not rebellious;
 I turned not backward.
⁶ *I gave my back to those who strike,*
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting.

Meditate and Pray: Who is this One who has a Word from His Father to sustain us? It is the One in Isaiah 50:6 that gave His back to scourging and His cheeks to those who would strike and spit upon Him, the night of His betrayal. This is one of the greatest prophetic passages of our Savior's sufferings for us in Jerusalem. But notice how Christ, from eternity "went to school" to be trained by His Father to know exactly what to say to us in our loneliness and despair – "a word to sustain the weary!"

And the glorious result of the Son of God's commitment to strengthen every suffering believer in the Bible, including both Timothy and centuries before him Elijah? Read on in Isaiah 50:

But the Lord GOD helps me;
 therefore I have not been disgraced;
 therefore I have set my face like a flint,
 and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
⁸ He who vindicates me is near.
 Who will contend with me?
 Let us stand up together.
 Who is my adversary?
 Let him come near to me.

⁹ Behold, the Lord GOD helps me;
 who will declare me guilty?
 Behold, all of them will wear out like a
 garment;
 the moth will eat them up.
¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD
 and obeys the voice of his servant?
 Let him who walks in darkness
 and has no light
 trust in the name of the LORD

Here is our victory, downcast Elijah! Here is your courage and strength, fearful and weeping Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4). There is a Savior, God's very own Son, who took a stand for you against all in this world who would marginalize and hate you. When the world sought to destroy you, as it tried to wipe out the prophets in Elijah's day; when the city of Ephesus roared like a lion against the timid little group of believers under Timothy's care – Christ stepped in to be struck in your place. His stripes, for you, absorbed the blows that would have cut us off forever.

So now, dear Christian, our security in Christ is complete and enduring. Even if we walk *where there is no light* – see Isaiah 50 verse 10 above – we can trust in the Name of the God whose Son has gathered us to Himself.

We can rest, knowing that this same Son will defend and preserve us, come what may – against all the Baals and other false gods who demand our allegiance.

To sum up, here are some quotes to be reminded of when we think of how God will gather, defend and preserve us – even when all appears to be dark around us, as it appeared to Elijah and Timothy. Take these previous truths with you in all your summer travels and vacations:

QUOTES FOR THIS WEEK -

1) We often forget that the Author of our faith must also be the Preserver of it. The lamp that was burning in the temple was never allowed to go out. It had to be replenished daily with fresh oil. Likewise, our faith can only live by being sustained with the oil of grace, and we can only obtain this grace from God Himself...

... He who made us Christians must maintain us by His Spirit, or our ruin will be speedy and final. Let us, then, day by day, go to our Lord for the grace and strength we need. We have a strong argument to plead, for it is His own work of grace that we ask Him to strengthen –

‘Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us’ (Psalm 68:28).” (Spurgeon)

2) Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 54:

Q. What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church?

A. I believe that the **Son of God**, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, *gathers, defends, and preserves* for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it.

3) Also, treasure the Puritan John Owen’s comments on Isaiah 50:10: “*Who is among you that fears the LORD, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the Name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.*” Owen writes:

“God’s forgiving grace is not only for sinners, but sinners in great distress as those addressed in Isaiah 50:10. Darkness is their condition, which in Scripture denotes everything that causes disconsolation and trouble. To be, then, in darkness, where yet there is some light, some relief, though darkness be predominant, is a sad condition...”

But Isaiah 50:10 describes an even worse state, namely:

“... To not only be in darkness, but to walk in it, that is to continue a long-term course in darkness, and that with no light, no discovery of help or relief, - this seems an overwhelming condition: yet Isaiah calls such “to trust in the name of the LORD.”

CONCLUDING REFLECTION FROM PASTOR CARL: How confident God is that His simple name is enough (when men’s names are never enough, since our reputations and actions never fully live up to what we claim to be). What is it about God’s name that guarantees we will trust in Him, even as Psalm 9:10 promises? Well, let the words of this hymn (# 647) about the Name of our Savior God answer that question:

1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
and drives away his fear.

3 Dear Name! the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding place,
my never-failing treas'ry filled
with boundless stores of grace;

5 Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

2 It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary rest.

4 Jesus, my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

6 Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.