

**“Days of Elijah”
Pastor Becky Smithey**

God’s Word: Revelation 1:9-20 Text: John 4:27-38

Over the past month we have been looking at the Biblical imagery in the song, These are the days of Elijah and seeing what lessons of revival or renewal we can learn from it. Today we finish the series. We’re going to do things a bit different this morning. I have some bits and pieces of the song that I want us to expound on together.

“And though these are days of great trials, of famine and darkness and sword...”

This bit is just a reminder that times of revival or renewal when God’s Spirit moves are not necessarily trouble free times. In fact, more often than not, they are times full of trouble. However, I do think that the Bible teaches that there is necessarily a link between times of suffering or prosperity and God’s approval or a moving of the Spirit. One of the big problems I have with some of the Christian TV channels is that quite often they promise what is known as the prosperity gospel or ideas such as “name it and claim it”. The idea being that if we follow God as we should then all things will go well for us, we will be healthy and wealthy. And indeed if you look at the churches that these people come from then they usually are full of healthy and wealthy people. However, this is usually because if a person is not healthy and wealthy there is only so much “you don’t have enough faith” or “repent from your hidden sin” that they can take before they move to a more biblically based church or abandon God altogether. The truth is that sometimes God chooses to heal us and sometimes not. Sometimes God does send prosperity our way, sometimes he doesn’t. It is a fact that for many people when they become Christians their financial situation improves, although this is often due to giving up wasting all their money on gambling, alcohol, becoming more responsible with their lives and money. But there is no guarantee, Christians can and do suffer financially and Christians often are sick and die of diseases. And this is not to be taken as proof that either their faith is small or they are sinners. If financial success bears any kind of relation to spirituality then as a group, our pastors must be the most unspiritual groups within the church. Not to mention the fact that Jesus himself must have been really wicked given his financial situation.

The problem comes when we see God’s blessing as the material things in our life. Sometimes God blesses us materially and sometimes he doesn’t. It doesn’t mean we’re any less spiritual. But if we understand this to mean spiritual blessings, is that ok? Well, possibly, but what do you even mean by spiritual blessings? It doesn’t mean you’re always happy. I’m not even sure it means freedom from depression. It doesn’t mean that every worship service you go to you’re going to come away feeling “blessed”, which we usually translate to feeling happy. It does mean growing closer to God, being more Christ-like, getting more and more victory over sin. Sometimes we do face days of famine, darkness and sword and that’s not necessarily a sign that we are doing things wrong.

“Out of Zion’s hill salvation comes.”

So where or what is Zion and what does it’s hill have to do with salvation? Zion is basically another name for Jerusalem and is used synonymously in the Bible. In Hebrew poetry which often uses two lines to say the same thing twice in slightly different ways you will often see things like daughters of Jerusalem do something, daughters of Zion do the same thing. Zion and Jerusalem, they basically mean the same thing. Now, while Jerusalem and Zion basically mean the same thing theologically, Zion came to be associated with the mountain on which Jerusalem was built, hence the frequent mentions to Mount Zion or Zion’s hill.

Now some of you will have heard Zion talked about in relation to heaven. This arises from the fact that there are a lot of prophecies about what Zion or Jerusalem was supposed to be like. This great haven of peace, security and true worship of the One God. However, the real Jerusalem was seldom like this and was often the seat of corruption and idolatry. This gave rise to the idea of a heavenly city or a heavenly Jerusalem where it really would be this place of peace, security and the true worship of the true. Indeed that’s how Revelation finished with the new Jerusalem descending out of heaven to be the dwelling place of God on the new earth. As Jerusalem is commonly recognized as an earthly city, Zion is more closely associated with the new Jerusalem and heaven in some Christian thought.

But what does the line, “out of Zion’s hill salvation comes” mean? There are 2 Psalms that talk about God’s salvation coming from Zion, Psalm 14 and Psalm 53. They are very similar. Look them up later and read them for yourself. Basically, the idea in the psalm is that the human race is corrupt and the psalmist longs for God to come and rescue the righteous for salvation to come. The psalmist identifies this salvation coming from Zion.

So what does this mean? Well, we have a number of meanings. First, Zion or Jerusalem was very much seen as the seat of the Israel’s true king, who was descended from David. The psalmist could be looking for the true King to come and set things right. The problem with this view is that David wrote the psalm. Another possibility is that Zion is the place of the temple, which is the dwelling place of God on earth. Therefore, the psalm is saying that salvation is from God. Again, we face the problem that the psalm claims to have been written before the temple, although, as we were looked last week at the story of David it was the location of the Ark of the Covenant which symbolized the presence of God and was the reason for God’s dwelling place in the temple. This is the probable meaning as to why God’s dwelling place on earth is associated with Jerusalem/Zion. Therefore, salvation was to come from God.

It take on a new meaning, though, for Christians as Jerusalem/Zion was the place where Jesus died and rose again. In particular, Zion’s hill may be referring to this. Therefore, “out of Zion’s hill” refers to the fact that salvation is to be found in Jesus because of his death and resurrection.

“These are the days of the harvest, the fields are as while in the world, and we are the laborers in the vineyard, declaring the Word of the Lord.”

Here the song writer draws on the words of Jesus from John 4 in the KJV. He is essentially saying that now is the time of the harvest, that people are just waiting to become Christians all we need to do is go and pick them, by preaching the Word of the Lord. This was certainly true in the time of Jesus and the early church where the church literally exploded onto the world scene, going from an obscure sect of Judaism to the official religion of the Roman Empire in around 300 years, converting millions in that time. It's certainly true in Africa, South America, and Korea now a days, and it is also true here. Are the fields really white, is it the days of harvest? For many it appears not. Churches are shrinking and closing and people are not being saved. One person I talked to recently about their home church, said it had been 17 years since someone gave their life to Christ in their church. I don't whether that's true or not, but we haven't really exploded recently. So can we really say the fields are white?

Actually, I think we can. I think people are crying out for the message of salvation, for a relationship with God. Despite what some people say we are not a secular society. Belief in all sorts of religions, superstitions and faiths are rampant. Even a majority of those who don't actively practice a religion believe in God or at least something out there. The trouble is they're looking in the wrong place and the church isn't giving them an answer. We are told to go into the fields and harvest...not wait for the wind to blow the grain through the barn doors. We have a message that is the answer to what people are crying out for but we're not delivering it. It's true churches are in decline mostly because they're not making a real attempt to reach people, either by expecting people to just walk in or by talking about things in a way that non-Christians don't understand. Or by expecting people to clean themselves up before coming to church in total defiance of Christ's commands—that people come and then HE cleans them up. The fields are white to harvest if we are willing to get our hands dirty and do whatever it takes to bring in the harvest. Some churches are in decline but others are growing, not by compromising or changing the message but by going to the people, meeting their needs and showing them that God and the church cares and can do something for them.

The fields are white to harvest, the question is are we ready to do what it takes to reap?

“Behold He comes riding on the clouds, shining like the sun at the trumpet call;”

Imagery is often associated with Christ's Second Coming and this is what is meant in the song, particularly when associated with a trumpet call. The proper Biblical imagery for Christ riding on the clouds is not the second coming but rather his return to heaven and his vindication. That he is proved right before God, that his death was not a mistake or a victory for the devil but rather part of the plan and the victory of God. When you read in the gospels about Jesus riding on the clouds, Jesus is drawing on the imagery of Daniel to talk about his life, ministry and ultimately himself being proved to be in the right. It is the stamp of God's approval, of returning to God to receive his blessing and approval.

However, as we said, the writer of this song is using the phrase as it is popularly understood to refer to the second coming. There is a bit of support for this in the passage we read where the believers are caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and in Acts where Christ ascends into the air and is hidden by a cloud and the disciples are told that Christ will return in the same way.

The shining like the sun, is a reference to the description of Jesus we read from Revelation 1, which contains a lot of metaphors to describe various aspects of Jesus' character. Shining like the sun, speaks of Christ's holiness and his approachability for sinners. Try looking directly at the sun and you'll find you can't and actually you shouldn't because it can blind you. When we read the description of Jesus from Revelation 1 there is a great deal about the intensity or holiness of God. John flings himself on his face before Jesus, and this the disciple who leaned on Jesus' breast during the Last Supper. But notice also, this truly awesome God, this one who you cannot even look at, says do not be afraid and invites John to be with him. The unapproachable made approachable by what Jesus did. Again this imagery is not particularly associated with Christ's return other than it is in Revelation. However, when Christ returns we will see him like this.

But what is the significance of Christ's return in the context of revival. We are told in 2 Peter that we can hurry the day of Christ's return by seeing others begin a relationship with Christ, but is that all there is to it? The return of Christ is the goal towards which we are working. The time when the world will truly be revived, in that all will see and all will serve. We just need to make Christ known to the world.

But the idea of Christ's vindication and the return of Christ are linked in the passage we read from Hebrews 10. It's worth persevering in the times of darkness, famine and the sword, because Jesus is right and He is coming again and it will all be worth it in the end. When Christ returns and sets up His kingdom forever and ever.