

# God's School For Greatness

**1 Kings 17:1 KJV** And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

## I. INTRODUCTION -- SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

-It is May and school is almost over. Some who are graduating this year have already filled out scholarship requests and admission requests to go to various schools around the area.

-I recently read about a young man in our community who received a scholarship from the Houston County Medical Society. The value of that scholarship was over \$100,000 and it will almost entirely finance his way through medical school for him to become a physician.

-People who know about colleges say that gaining the entrance to certain schools around the country is very important. One may apply to the Ivy League schools to get into Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and so on. While those schools do not assure immediate success, having gone to one of

those schools will certainly increase one's chances of landing a profitable job with a highly honored company in the United States and perhaps even on the global level.

-Much value has been placed on education in the last several years. In addition to the Ivy Leagues, there are business schools around the nation that have garnered great reputations for turning out competent graduates. There are medical schools that also have excelled with the demands that they have placed upon students.

-In our area, a couple of engineering schools have shown great promise in the last several years. One is Georgia Tech and the other is an in-state school, Auburn.

-These schools attract the sharpest minds and the entry levels of many of them prove to be very exacting.

-If I were to suggest that someone drive down into the edge of Florida to a little crossroads called Two-Egg and go to Two-Egg Tech, that suggestion would be met with much disdain and sarcasm. It doesn't really matter if they offered a great medical program or an excellent engineering

program few would want to attend because of the location and name of the school.

-We have a tendency to be a little serious about our schools.

-What I would like to tell you is that God is very serious about His schools! It is in His schools that we are shaped for life (if we will humble ourselves and learn).

-His university uses two methods: Obscurity and Isolation. Furthermore, some of His greatest results have been gained from these methods.

- **Abraham** -- Trapped in the obscurity of Ur and then wandering about in a wilderness of isolation.
- **Joseph** -- Confined in the obscurity of a servant and locked up in isolation of a prison.
- **David** -- Confined in the obscurity of the youngest child and locked up in the isolation of a pasture (where he learned to fight, pray, and worship).
- **Paul** -- Sent to the desert of Isolation north of Damascus.

- **Amos** -- Linked to the obscurity of fig-gathering and the isolation of his prophetic call.

-This is the case with Elijah. . .

## II. THE PROPHET ELIJAH

-Elijah shows up at a very dark time in Israel's history. Ahab provoked God more than any other king.

**1 Kings 16:33 KJV** And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

-He was not so much a wicked man as he was a very weak man. He became the pawn of a very crafty, unscrupulous, cruel woman.

-He fell under the wicked sway of Jezebel's spirit. After Ahab married this woman of Phoenecian descent, she immediately set about to work to destroy Israel.

- She built a temple to Astarte in Jezreel.
- She built a commune that supported 450 priests of Baal.

- She built a temple in Samaria.
- She tore down the altars of Jehovah at Carmel and replaced them with shrines and groves.
- She begin to persecute the priests and prophets of Jehovah throughout the land with a fury possessed by hell.

*Here comes Elijah!*

-It is doubtful that Elijah would have chosen the path of obscurity that God planned for him. In fact, it is probable that very few men would have chosen this path of obscurity. Most are very unwilling to admit it, but we are quite proud as human beings and that is why that God has to use schools like obscurity and isolation to pull us into a useable condition for Him.

### **A. A Resilient Life**

A few years ago (2004), Gordon MacDonald, who is one of my favorite authors, wrote a little book entitled *A Resilient Life*. In this book he tells the story of a coach and teacher named Marvin Goldberg who changed his life in a great way. MacDonald said that he tried out for football but was so small and skinny that the football coach

did not want him and called the track coach to get rid of him.

In the early stages of his running days, he said that Coach Goldberg put him on an individual training plan that involved him having to run many days alone. He would go out to the track and he would read off of a white bulletin board his plan for the day. Sometimes it would include running the 400 meter run ten times. On other days it would men running up hills over and over again. Numerous times he would try to beg off because of a headache, the sniffles, shin splints, or the famous line “I think I’m dying!” Coach Goldberg would always tell him, “Now Gordie, if you will just get out there and warm-up, you will feel much better when you loosen up.”

MacDonald related that his coach wasn’t a negotiator. He had plans for his runners and he refused to negotiate with them. Actually the coach was not planning for the day as much as he was training these young men for life. There would come a time when greater responsibilities would demand that they ignore their sniffles and headaches and many other distractions to do what needed to be done.

One of the things that running on the track alone and hidden away from everyone else taught MacDonald was that to quit then would make it a little easier to quit the next day or at the next opportunity. It was through the obscurity of running around a little track at Stony Brook Prep School in northern New York that summoned a champion from Gordon MacDonald. It would prepare him to win a state championship later on before he graduated. And it would teach him much greater lessons later on in life.

Gordon MacDonald said that there were four major lessons that he learned from training alone:

- To run alone summons great possibilities from the heart and the mind.
- To run alone will cause one to look back over the track he has covered and learn from yesterday.
- To run alone taught him to love self-discipline and to beware of the temptations of self-indulgence.
- To run alone will cause one to appreciate the power that comes from a team when it is time to run with the team.

-To run alone is one of life's greatest challenges. . .  
but it can also be one of life's greatest blessings!

## **B. The Lessons of Obscurity and Loneliness**

-When we look at Elijah there are few lessons that come from his own obscurity and loneliness.

### **1. They teach us dependence on God.**

-There would come numerous times in Elijah's life that he would be alone. He would face overwhelming difficulties alone with God.

-The path of obscurity was good for him because it would teach him not to let loneliness rattle him.

- He would face Ahab in the royal courts. . . alone.
- He would watch a brook at Cherith dry up. . . alone.
- He would have to ask the widow at Zarephath for her last meal. . . alone.
- He would face death and pray for the dead child. . . alone.
- He would openly rebuke the king Ahab. . . alone.



- He would face the wicked priests of Baal. . . alone.
- He would mock Baal and the priests. . . alone.
- He would have to repair the broken down altar. . . alone.
- He would have to pray for a downpour of fire. . . alone.
- He would have to marshal the people to destroy the prophets of Baal. . . alone.
- He would have to pray for rain. . . alone.
- He would have to face the doubt of a servant who saw through faithless eyes. . . alone.
- He would run seventeen miles to Jezreel while Ahab rode in a chariot. . . alone.
- He would battle depression under a juniper tree. . . alone.
- He would be ministered to by angels and the voice of God's direction. . . alone.

-No matter how you look at it, there must be some times in your life when you are willing to face down the calamities of life. . . alone.

- This is why private prayer is so important. . .
- This is why that wrestling in prayer is so important. . .

- This is why that fasting for a breakthrough is so important. . .
- This is why that meditation on the Word is so important.

-Because all of these avenues are generally hidden away somewhere from the prying eyes of the unsanctified. It is in these times that we find great dependence on God.

-However all of this makes me want to ask a question: Can one man make a difference? Absolutely!

## **2. They teach us humility.**

- The first lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us dependence on God.
- The second lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us humility.

-When Elijah was fighting all of these battles that we have mentioned, the fact is that he immediately understood that any victory or any deliverance would come from the hand of God and not from himself.

-If the job is going to be completed, then God is going to have to step in and bring a remedy to the

situation. God needs a man for one thing. . . to be in the proper position for the power of God to channel itself through.

-When flesh starts exalting itself, the Spirit of God begins to taper off. Why?

**Romans 7:18 KJV** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: . .

**Romans 8:8 KJV** So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

**John 3:6 KJV** That which is born of the flesh is flesh. .

-If we allow the flesh to rule us, deadness of spirit and purpose will ultimately ruin us. But if we are willing to submit to the work of the Spirit there is a day coming!

-The day comes and the tide turns and suddenly we are pushed to a place of service that obscurity has prepared us for.

-Do you know any of these men?

- Asyncritus.
- Phlegon.

- Hermas.
- Patrobus.
- Hermes.

-Very few in any congregation know who these men are. But they were very important cogs in the early church.

**Romans 16:14 KJV** Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.

-These men were so very important to the Apostle Paul. To him they were world-changers. If you are looking for history to be written down here, it will be written, but the view of the world is written much differently than the Kingdom editorials.

-God will immortalize those who have lived quiet, godly, righteous lives in this dark, dirty world. He will take notice of purity, character, cleanliness, and holiness in this confused world.

-Take a look at who the world has noticed in last few weeks and months. They have elevated the starlets of Hollywood, they have exalted the political figures who are priming for a presidential run, and they have gushed at the

accomplishments of athletes. Exalted in time but they will be forgotten in eternity.

-Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobus, and Hermes would not have even garnered a second glance from this world. But just as the tides roll in and roll out and the moon goes through its phases, there will come a day that these men will rise from the dust of their obscurity and they will be championed.

-All of the best men are not in the fore-front! These men that Paul mentions fought a noble battle in a very paganistic society that was filled with the prevalence of heathenism and hedonism.

- Where would Dwight Eisenhower be without his troops on that overwhelming day in June of 1944?
- Where would George Patton be without his tank corps that pressed out Rommel in North Africa?
- Where would George Washington be without his men on the Delaware that cold winter night?
- Where would Ronald Reagan be without his obscure speech-writer Peggy Noonan?

### **3. Greatness is always preceded by preparation of character.**

- The first lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us dependence on God.
- The second lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us humility.
- The third lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us that greatness is always preceded by preparation of character.

-Obscurity is one of the principles of divine selection. This is exactly what God was doing with Gilead.

-Gilead, east of the Jordan River, was a wild, rocky, mountainous region and its citizens matched the country. The country turned him into a man. . . . Don't curse your geography. . . It is in the plan of God!

-It was a place where thieves and outlaws ran to. It was not the genteel place that boasted of culture and charm.

-But these obscure places are what God's design seems to be. He appears to revel in preparing men in places like this and then pulling them out

suddenly and pushing them to the national scene.  
God's hands are not limited by the geography.

**John 1:46 KJV** And Nathanael said unto him, **Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?**  
Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

-It's an old pattern. . .

- Call Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees.
- Move Moses from a wilderness in Midian.
- Find a Nicodemus on the Sanhedrin Council.
- Take Joseph of Arimathea and remove him from the aristocracy of Jerusalem.
- Deal with Cornelius who is a Roman centurion.
- Set up the saints in Caesar's household.
- . . . and from a half-heathen Gilead, call Elijah out to be a prophet of fire.

-Because for every Jezebel that you find on the face of this earth. . . God is going to raise up an Elijah.

-Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth???

-There is a great danger sometimes in mistaking noise for power and activity for zeal. Some very

important ingredients of the apostolic church can come from very obscure things.

-It is in the small places of life that great things can rise from. God has a meticulous plan in allowing the quiet and withdrawn places to shape our character. The two-talent man has no need to be jealous of the five-talent man.

-There is much potential in the two-talent man developing his gifts into that of a five-talent man. Yet this can only happen when we submit to God's school for greatness which is the withdrawn places of obscurity.

-The Namaan Syndrome can swallow up much effectiveness for the Kingdom. Namaan's difficulty was that he did not want to submit to Jordan's muddy waters. Instead he wanted to go back to the crystal clear waters of the Abana and Pharpar rivers.

- Abana and Pharpar can only provide relief, Jordan supplies healing.
- Abana and Pharpar is much more appealing, Jordan is saving.
- Abana and Pharpar will serve self, Jordan will serve the Spirit.



- Abana and Pharpar are man's ways, Jordan is God's way.
- Abana and Pharpar caters to our pride, Jordan rests in humility.
- Abana and Pharpar are extravagant in the world's eyes, Jordan is extravagant in God's eyes.

-Namaan was so concerned with greatness that he almost died with leprosy. These are the antics of an immature mind.

-The great ticket to obscurity is that God is using it to shape our futures. *If God can find us faithful in the few things. . .*

**Matthew 25:21 KJV** His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

-Work on in the shade of obscurity because there comes a day when the planet rotates and suddenly in the full glare of the sun, your work is suddenly spotlighted!

- The first lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us dependence on God.

- The second lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us humility.
- The third lesson of obscurity is that it teaches us that greatness is always preceded by preparation of character.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

-It will be more often than not in the coming days of your life that you will curse your obscurity. You will rage and battle and tussle with the challenges of the weary wilderness and the full plan and purpose of God.

-I wish that I could do or say something that would give you some relief from the rocky lands of Gilead but it is not to be. It is in the plan of God and when you submit to His plan for life, there will be some discouraging days but in the end. . . the discouragement will turn to triumph and you will have been counted faithful.