

Featured Audio Sermon ■ Tragedy of Deflected Aims

by William Fitch

This sermon delves into the story of a young prophet in 1 Kings 13, emphasizing the tragedy of deflected aims when one strays from God's will. It explores the dangers of succumbing to temptations, the importance of staying faithful in the little things, and the ultimate need to rely on Jesus Christ to overcome trials and live a life aligned with God's purpose.

Scripture: 1 Kings 13:1, James 4:7, Luke 16:10, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Jude 1:24

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Overcoming Temptation"

Description

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Transcript

Once more tis even tide, and we, oppressed with various ills, draw near. What if thy voice we cannot hear? What if thy face we cannot see? We know, we feel, that thou art here. Thy touch is still, is ancient power.

No word from thee can footless fall. Here, in this solemn evening hour, and in thy mercy, heal us all. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

And the chapter that we are going to be thinking about is the 13th chapter of 1 Kings. Now at first glance, this is a very unusual story. A very unusual story indeed.

It's a very long chapter. The verses themselves are long, and there are 34 of these verses. So in effect, we have really a four column write up on this one story concerning this one young prophet.

And we never hear of him again. He comes onto the stage unheralded. We know nothing about him before he comes.

But he comes with a very definite word from God. He fulfills that word. Obviously, his heart's passion is to do the will of God in all its fullness.

Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. And yet, after having fulfilled God's commission perfectly, he falls. He falters.

He fails. He is misled. His eyes, for one moment, are distracted from the main aim.

And that is why I call our message tonight, The Tragedy of Deflected Aims. One of the wonders of the Bible is the way it's so full of humanity. It's full of human interests, stories, every phase of life you will find here.

And the controlling motives behind these stories. The deepest desires, and the pathetic tragedies, the hidden conflicts, the creative joys and sorrows. They're all revealed to us with amazing likeness to our own experience.

I have been many a time surprised at the way in which young people have come to me and said, just what is the meaning of the Old Testament to us today? Isn't this something that we have gone long past? Is there any need for us to go back to the Old Testament when we have all the wonder of the New Testament here? I have really been surprised at this kind of question. Because in actual fact, the Old Testament is the illustration book, if you like, of the great New Testament truths. If you like, the New Testament is the textbook.

But the Old Testament is the picture book. And in a very real sense, we see every one of the great principles of the New Testament carried out and illustrated in a very remarkable way in the Old Testament. And this is exactly what we see in this chapter.

It's told in very great detail. And that in itself singles it out as a unique story. When the Holy Spirit sets himself to record an incident in great length and in very exact detail, we can be sure that he has some very special purpose in doing so.

And this is exactly what happens in this 30th chapter of 1 Kings. It's very similar to many other stories. As a matter of fact, it's paralleled almost in the occasion when Aaron turned aside with Moses up on the mountain top, and Aaron turned aside to idolatry, unthinkable idolatry, and led the people in that idolatry.

Or when Samson was turned aside through the wiles of Delilah to his own destruction. Or when Solomon was turned aside from great wisdom to great vanity. Or when Judas was turned aside from being one of the disciples of the master to the one who betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver.

Or like Demas who forsook Paul, having loved this present world. Or like the Galatians themselves, the Galatian church who were bewitched by some enchantment that turned them from their Lord. It happened in all these cases, and it's happening still today.

And it may well be that there are men and women in this congregation here tonight of whom this is true. If we were to write the human interest story of your life tonight, if it were possible for us to see it, this is what we would say. That your life as of now is an exemplar of a tragedy, of a deflected end.

That your life has been turned aside from seeing and from following God's best. Now this is the kind of thing that we see in this story of this prophet. Obviously a young man, and he is anonymous.

We do not know what his name was. And he was sent by God with a very definite message to King Jeroboam. Now who was King Jeroboam? Jeroboam was the first king of the northern kingdom.

You know the story, and I haven't time tonight to go into the story of how the kingdom was divided. And there came to be two kingdoms, the northern and the south. It's a fascinating story.

Why just two weeks ago when I was down in Schenectady, I was asked if I would speak to the university and college group at half-past nine in the morning. And we did so. And it was just fascinating to see the way in their eyes and minds were riveted on this story as we began the development of the history and the breakdown of the kingdom.

How it happened. God never intended that the kingdom should be divided. But the kingdom was divided.

And the first king of the northern kingdom was Jeroboam. And after Jeroboam came to the throne, he saw to it that the people in the northern kingdom should not travel south to Jerusalem at the times of high festival. There was great danger if they went there, because there was always the possibility that their hearts might be turned again to follow Judah.

And so Jeroboam made golden castles. And at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south, that's the south of the northern kingdom, just at the borderline, a way up there north at Dan, and then at Bethel, he established two great centers of religious worship. And there he made a calf, so that they were to worship the people.

And he said, these will be your gods. Oh Israel, Jeroboam wasn't the first man to use religion in the game of politics, and he won't be the last. It's still being used.

It's still being used very greatly in our own country, of Canada, at the present time. But it certainly was his objective at this point, the people must not go south of the border. Because if they go south of the border, they might not want to come back again.

And yet there was the impulsion, compulsion, and impulse within their hearts to worship. You see, there is the God shaped blank in every life, and the necessity for worship. And if the true God be taken away, man will still make for himself gods.

Well Jeroboam set himself as king, was established as king. And he, having done this, and having ordained that there should be these places of worship at Dan, and Bethel, God sent a messenger to him. And it's this messenger with whom we are concerned, this young prophet.

There came a man of God out of Judah, from the southern kingdom, Judah. There came a man out of Judah, by the word of the Lord, to Bethel. And Jeroboam was standing there by the altar, to burn incense.

And this young man cried, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, behold a child shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name. Now this is prophecy, because Josiah is not going to be born for many years yet. But Josiah is going to be born.

And he says, continuing his message, upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. Now imagine Jeroboam listening to this. This young upstart prophet, daring and deigning to make a proclamation like this in his presence.

It came to pass, when the king heard the saying of this man of God, that he cried against the altar. He put forth his hand from the altar saying, lay hold of him, lay hold of him. And the hand that King Jeroboam stretched out, pointing to this prophet, suddenly withered up.

It became like a leprous hand, so that he could not pull it again to him. And in the very moment in which that happened to the king, the altar was wrecked. And ashes were poured out from the altar, just as the prophet had said.

Now here was a dreadful condition of things. What did Jeroboam do? Let us not forget that Jeroboam had known the truth in his earlier days. And Jeroboam asked this prophet, pray for me, entreat the face of the Lord thy God, that my hand may be restored again.

And the man of God, besought the Lord, and miracle happened. Now you may get the impression that the whole of the Old Testament is full of miracles. But in actual fact, not so.

There is a miracle in the first, second, third chapters of the book of Genesis. There is a great record of miracle in the days of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. And there is a great record of miracle in the time when prophecy began.

God sealed the word of the prophet with miracle. And so in the lives of Elijah and Elisha, we have many instances of unusual miracle. And this happens immediately.

He besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before. And the king said to the man of God, come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward. And the man of God said to the king, if you will give me half of your house, I won't go in with thee.

Neither will I eat bread, nor drink water in this place, because I was charged by my Lord, eat no bread, drink no water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. And so when the king, having failed to terrorize this prophet, and having failed now by flattery, and by the promise of reward, to woo him over to his side, and to take him home to suffer, so to speak, we are left with the prophet. Jeroboam for the moment is set aside.

And this young prophet, who had been sent by the Lord from the kingdom of Judah, not to Israel. And who had come to Bethel, and so wonderfully fulfilled this commandment, as it was commanded unto him to declare. This young prophet goes back to Judah another way.

Because God had said, eat no meat, drink no water, and come not back by the way that you came. And so we read, he returned not by the way that he came to Bethel. Now this is where we begin to pass into the realm of shadowed tragedy of another sort.

The history of Jeroboam itself is one of terrible tragedy. And yet there's a sense in which there's a measure of grandeur about Jeroboam. He was a man's man.

He was unafraid. He was a great leader of men. And there's no doubt about it that he had occupied a significant place in history.

Though he made Israel to sin, and though the epitaph that is read continually throughout these writings, is that Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, is his epitaph. Yet nonetheless there's a certain grandeur about his figure. But now another man steals out of the shadows, and creeps for a moment into the light.

And I want to read this to you. And I know you're listening intently. Now there was dwelling an old prophet in Bethel.

If he was old, it means that he had at one time known the truth. He knew God's way. But he had stayed on in Bethel after the institution of false worship and false gods.

There was living an old prophet in Bethel. And his sons came and told him everything that had happened to the king. All the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel.

The words he had spoken to the king. Then they told also to their father. Now he was an old prophet.

Probably by this time he was inactive. It may well be that he wasn't able to go as fast as once he could. But he had his sons to help him.

And their father said to them, how did he go? Which way went he? His sons had seen the way that the man of God went, who came from Judah. It's interesting to note how the world is always watching the people of God. And they know what we're doing.

He said to his sons, saddle me, the ass. Saddle me, the horse. And so they saddled him, the horse, and he rode thereon.

And he went after the man of God. And he found him sitting under an oak. And he said to him, are you the man that came from Judah, the prophet? And he said, yes.

Then he said to him, come home with me and eat bread. And he said, that's a prophet, a young prophet. I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee, neither will I eat bread, nor drink water with thee in this place.

Because it was said to me by the word of the Lord, you mustn't eat bread or drink water or turn to go by the way that you came. And up to this point, everything is right. But listen, this old prophet said to him, I am a prophet too, just as you are.

And an angel spoke to me saying, bring him back with thee to your house, so that he may eat bread and drink water. What do you do? He is an aged servant, an old prophet who says, I have heard the voice of an angel. And this angel said to me, you have to come back.

But you know the last five words of verse 18 are these, but he lied to him. God help the minister, God help the priest who has to turn to lying in order to try and influence a younger preacher. I tell you men and women, their pride has not died from the earth, we still have them.

And when I think of some men who should have known much better, some men who in their earlier days knew what it was to be within the true fellowship of God. And rejoiced therein. And took part in the ministry.

But as time went on and they married and settled down and the family came. And bit by bit they began to lose their enthusiasms. And bit by bit they began to make this particular play with the world around them.

And bit by bit they gradually slipped away from the absolutely razor edge of the true ethic of God as revealed in the holy scriptures. And then passed this on to other younger men in the name of truth. You've seen this happen, I've seen this happen, over and over and over again.

He lied to him. But what was the young prophet to do? We read in verse 19, so he went back with him and ate bread in his house and drank water. Now remember, God had told him that he should not do this.

And is God a God who changes his word? Is God a God who is changeable? Like the variability of the weather, is our God like that? I want to tell you that when God reveals to you his perfect will, he won't change that will. Even though the voice comes through others who say that they have heard a voice from above declaring to them what is right for you. You get your commission direct from God and from no one else.

And the first great lesson really that comes to me out of this tremendous passage is this. That once a man knows the will of God, he must do that will and nothing else, nothing else. This is what we are summoned to do, to do the will of God and to fulfill his commandment.

But here this old prophet came and he lied to him. And the young prophet went back and ate meat in his house and drank. There is one standard that you and I should observe and it's this.

The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. That's the call that comes to us from God. And God's will is really very clear, very clear indeed.

You may say to me, how am I to know the will of God? Well, what are you to do tomorrow? You've got your place of business to go to, have you? You go to work tomorrow. And you know that one of the first things that you have to do in business is to be absolutely truthful. Who taught you that? The word of God taught you that.

You know that the word of God teaches you to be considerate of others. You know that the word of God teaches you that love thinketh no evil and that love doesn't rejoice in iniquity. That love bears all things, forbears all things.

That when true love is within our heart and when the love of God has been shed abroad in our heart, then it is possible for us to encompass others and to live and work beside others. Even if their dispositions are sharp and rugged and edgy, it is possible for us to live and to work beside them and to show the spirit of Jesus Christ to them. There is no question as to what the will of God is.

You are commanded in the word of God to honor your parents, honor thy father and thy mother, for this is the first commandment with promise. And you say to me, my father and my mother, they do things that I just feel completely wrong. They do things that I just can't understand and could never follow.

Nonetheless, nonetheless, recognize that your parents have a particular place in the economy of God in your life and that in the measure in which you honor them, there is going to be blessing poured back into your life. Sometimes you will honor your parents by saying absolutely no to what they request of you. That is very, very possible, because they can be pursuing a course that is very wrong as this old prophet was.

And sometimes it is very necessary for you to say, I will not eat, I will not drink, for thus it was commanded me by my Lord. You see, you go out into business tomorrow, absolutes, the absolutes of the moral law, the great absolutes. Ah, you are working together with other people.

Can you play fast and loose with other people? You are a married man, you are a married woman. Can you be easy and easy going in your attitude with the other sex? Can you, if you are truly a Christian? Of course not. The law of God is obvious to you.

The law of God is clear. There is no question about it. For this God shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh.

This is the law of Christian marriage and so on. Right down the line the will of God is made absolutely clear. In all these great ethical imperatives, the categorical imperative of God reaches to your heart and conscience and you know what you ought to do.

You know it. But above that there is the specific will of God for you. The particular will of God, the particular plan, the particular blueprint that God has for your life.

God had a blueprint for the life of this young prophet. And from all eternity I believe God had planned that this young prophet should declare the testimony that he did. And he did it.

And he fulfilled the word and the will of God. And God had planned that it should be so. And God has his own plan for you.

And I tell you there is only one thing in life worth doing and that is the will of God. Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. And when once God has revealed his will, do it regardless of consequences.

Regardless of consequences. Once a man knows the will of God he must do that but we must read on. You know there is a second thing just to note and let's note it as we pass by.

Let's note it. I see our time is gone but I must say this. You know this story teaches me that temptations once overcome have a habit of coming back.

Have you ever noticed that? No doubt this young prophet felt that he had done what was asked of him when he said to the king, I will not go back to your palace. I will not enter into your palace. I will not eat.

I will not drink. I will not go back the way that I came. I am out to do the will of God.

And Jeroboam for some reason or other let him go. But you see temptations once overcome have a habit of coming back. And that's what happened to this young prophet.

Winning in the case of the king and losing in respect to this old sinner of a preacher. Perhaps the guard of the young prophet was dumb because he was found under an oak tree. Perhaps he was in a moment of reaction from high endeavor.

And that so very often is the devil's opportunity. And the devil tempted him again and the devil won the second time. There is no time in life in which we can relax our watchfulness.

Perhaps your getting on in business is good. You've got promotion. And in the act of it you've thanked God for his goodness.

But perhaps you fail to see the temptation that this very promotion has brought. You've got different types of people now. You've come up into an echelon let's say in this promotion.

In which you're now on a first name basis with the president. OK. You know the devil will attack you at that level with the identical temptation that he attacked you when you were on the first rung of the ladder.

And what at one time you won you may lose. If you don't watch and pray. You see the world will often set us in such a way as to draw us to itself.

The world will so very often forge their will around us. And we'll find ourselves selling our soul for money. May well be that we say to one another, well this is a family trait.

We'll do anything, anything for money. God deliver us from the curse of money. God save us from ever becoming attached to money.

God has sometimes had to do some terrifying things. When I think of some of the things that have happened within this congregation in the past 15 years. The men who have made a lot of money.

And in the making of a lot of money for God. I tell you I tremble. I tremble and so should you.

From the love of money may God deliver us. The devil will tempt you along that line. But whatever line is most likely to win he will tempt you.

He will tempt, he will try and he will test. And temptations that once you thought had been put completely behind you. Have a way of resurrection.

And you find yourself being attacked all over again. Now there's one final thing I want to say. And if you want to be with us at the continuation of this story you'll need to come up to Elam Lodge.

But the final thing I want to say is this. That some of our souls most searching trials very often come over little things. After all what's wrong in going in to take a meal with a king? Or what's wrong in going in to drink water with an aged prophet? What's wrong? Very simple thing.

And yet this is how life works. And he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is great. And when God can trust us in the little things he can trust us in the big things.

He can put us anywhere he likes. Once we have demonstrated that we can be true to him in the things that are least. The temptation to this young prophet as I've said came just over the eating of a meal.

A tiny thing. And there may be some very small thing in your life. Something you'd like to do and you're not sure about it.

By all means discover for yourself. Listen to what others have to say. Young people listen to parents listen to what they have to say.

But in the end of the day you have to make up your own mind. And your parents if they are wise they will insist that you make up your own mind on these things. Sometimes it's a very little thing.

Just a very very little thing on which temptation will win. What did God do? Do you know what God did with this young prophet? God took this young prophet right out of this mortal scene. As we would say in modern times his life was snuffed out on the highway.

It didn't exactly happen that way. But when he was gone a lion met him in the way and slew him. It's the same thing.

It's the same thing. God speaks to us tonight and I believe that God speaks to us in the person of Jesus Christ his son to whom all the scriptures give testimony. God says to us tonight it is only in the power of my son that you will be able to overcome.

He will keep you from falling. He is able to deliver you from temptation. He is able to present you faultless before the presence of the glory of God.

He is able. He can. He is able.

O turn then to him and let Jesus Christ be the center and circumference of your life. And begin to live for God. Begin to live for God with such a dimension of strength that you will come all things but lost for the excellency of the knowledge of your Savior.

This to you will be life and life eternal. This to you will be the life more abundant. And this is the life that is offered unto you through Jesus Christ.

Go in for God's best. Choose his will and do it. Our Father and our God, we thank you for the way in which there is so much of revelation here of the will of our Father.

We want to know and to do that will. We pray that by the Holy Spirit's power you will break through the barricades that we have erected in the heart of our personalities. And that you will come to us yourself tonight in all your glory.

And that you will show to us that there is a way. The way of holiness. And on that way you want us to walk.

Help us to walk. Upon it we pray through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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