

The Chariot Is On Its Way

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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**This Sermon is also available in audio format on our "Audio Sermons" web page*

Today I have news for you. Not just good news, great news! The news is "the chariot is on its way." For some, that phrase may not mean anything right now, but I hope by the time we finish our study, it means everything!

We've been looking at "Signs Of The Times" for the past couple of weeks, seeing how the words of Jesus are being fulfilled before our very eyes. Two Sabbaths ago we looked at His predictions of false Christs coming, and we saw a number of those who even today are making such claims for themselves. The very next week the news broke about another one claiming to be the Messiah, who was arrested on allegations of sexual misconduct. When his face was splashed on the screen, I turned to my wife and said, "I think I know who that is," but the name didn't match, so I forgot it. Later, I discovered that it was indeed Wayne Bent, a former pastor with whom I had served, now calling himself Michael, in the misguided belief that he is Michael the archangel. You can "Google" his name on your computer if you have further interest.

Each week there are disasters and calamities that should awaken us as to the times we live in. I turned the news on last Monday--a deadly 7.9 earthquake in China, hitting in a very populated area. As of this moment, about 22,000 confirmed dead, but they think it could go to 50,000. Also on the news that same day, lethal tornadoes in Missouri, destructive fires in Florida, and these things following the massive cyclone of Myanmar that struck the week before. The thought crossed my mind that we could have the same sermon title printed each week

in the bulletin, "Signs Of The Times," because there seems to be a never-ending supply of data to support the theme!

But there's good news today—the chariot is on its way! Can you guess as to whose story in the Bible we're going to look at? It's the story of Elijah. I love his story! I love it because it has the ultimate "happy ending." Those who spun the fairy tales of the past were fond of ending their stories with the words, "and they lived happily ever after." That's never true in this life. Because of sin, that doesn't happen. That postscript can accurately be applied only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because eventually death puts a period on our stories down here.

I asked the Lord, "What would you like me to say to Your people this Sabbath," and He put into my mind this thought,

"Tell them that I love them
Tell them that I care,
Tell them that I'm coming soon,
To take them home up there."

God's tender love and pity toward His children is the theme of this Book. His great plan of redemption, whereby He paid the price of the sins of the world through Jesus dying on the cross, is the thread that is woven from Genesis through Revelation. All who accept the provisions of His grace and comply with the conditions of salvation, and allow His grace to transform their characters to fit us for heaven, He will take to the place He's prepared.

And it's not just a verbal promise, as precious as that is. Beyond that, He's given us the assurance of His final victory and the reward of the saints, by bestowing the gift of immortality upon a select few, as tokens, as representatives of the group that will one day receive the crown of life. How do we know that? The Bible explicitly tells us that when Jesus was on this earth, appearing with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration were Moses and Elijah. (Recorded in Matthew 17.) It was a miniature display of that Great Day of Jesus' return, with Christ's garments and

appearance taking on glory brighter than the sun; with Moses representing all who have died, but will be raised from their graves when He returns, and Elijah representing all who will be alive and welcome His appearing.

The Scripture tells us that Elijah was swept up to heaven by a whirlwind in a blazing chariot of fire. "Then it happened, as they (Elijah and Elisha) continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and *Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*" II Kings 2:11. A search party was convened, contrary to the counsel of the prophet Elisha, to see if perchance Elijah had been tossed out on a rugged Judean hillside somewhere. They came back empty-handed, with the only sensible conclusion being that God had indeed taken him to heaven.

"Well," you might think, "he must have been a super good man. He probably never made a mistake in his life. That explains why God took him." No! The testimony of the Bible is that, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours." James 5:17. Think of it! Someone just like you and me, someone with the same struggles with temptation, the same conflicts with sin, is now in heaven! Safe from trials, safe from the grasp of death. How great is that! What a confirmation of God's promise. If He could save Elijah, there's hope for me!

Review with me a few of the episodes of his life. I want to point out at the beginning, that there's irony in this story. Actually, there are two ironies. Irony exists when you, the reader, know something that the participant in the story does not. It makes you want to reach into the pages of the story and tell him what you know, because you know what's coming!

Elijah served as prophet about 850 B.C. at a time of great apostasy. Israel had come from Egypt to inhabit the land of Canaan as a way of preserving the true worship of God. They had dispossessed the ones who had lived there before, who had practiced of all forms of idolatry, which obscured the light of God's

truth. But now, centuries later, those very corrupt forms of worship were being adopted and embraced by His people! It was shameful! It was misleading! They looked upon Baal as being the one responsible for bringing the necessary sunshine and rain which watered their fields and gave them life.

God in His mercy told Elijah to give a message to the king of Israel, Ahab, that there would be neither dew nor rain for a period of time, which turned out to be 3 ½ years, to demonstrate the futility of trusting in a false god. From his homeland in Gilead, east of the Jordan River, Elijah traveled to Samaria, Israel's capital, to deliver his message. Abruptly, having given it, Elijah walked out of the palace, leaving many to ponder his words. "What did he say?" someone might have asked. "Something about there being no more rain, I think."

Months, a few years passed, and Elijah's words were not given much weight, *till* the watering holes began to shrink, the trees began to brown, the fields began to parch and the stores of grain began to dwindle. The specter of famine loomed, and refreshed the prophet's words spoken before. Now their attention was focused. Now they were ready to listen.

Meanwhile, Elijah was sequestered by a stream, being fed by ravens, and then later by a widow in Sidon during these hard times. Here again I find, like we studied a few weeks ago, that Elijah was not "raptured," or taken to heaven *before* the "time of trouble" that scorched the land, but he was sustained by God *through* it. The chariot of fire would come after the time of trial.

Eventually a confrontation was arranged on the top of Mount Carmel, whereby a demonstration would make it clear who it was that was responsible for the preservation of life. Who was the God worthy of worship? The proposition was a simple one: two altars were to be prepared, with a sacrifice laid on each. One altar would be for Baal, one for Jehovah. The God who answered by fire would be acknowledged as the Supreme Being. It was a reasonable test.

The priests of Baal dressed their altar and called upon their gods, without answer. For many hours they shouted aloud and cut themselves in their efforts to evoke a response, to no avail. Then it was Elijah's turn. He asked that water, twelve barrels worth, be poured upon the sacrifice laid upon the altar which he had repaired, and prayed a simple prayer. Like lightning from the sky, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the water, and even licked the ground.

Spontaneously the people shouted, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (This, by the way, is the literal translation of the name "Elijah"—"My God is Yahweh".) The priests of Baal were executed. Elijah prayed again, and the rain came. The drought was ended! What a day of victory and of honor for the true God!

But, when Jezebel, Ahab's wicked wife, and primary sponsor of idolatry, heard about it, she threatened the life of Elijah. What would Elijah do?

What would the fearless prophet who dared to enter the Ahab's palace 3 ½ years before, unannounced, do now?

What would the fearless prophet, who seemed to stand alone against a tide of iniquity, do now?

What would the prophet, who was sustained miraculously for all those years by the hand of the Lord, do now?

What would the prophet, who had prayed to the God of heaven Who answered him, by fire and by rain, do now, threatened by this woman?

One of the chief evidences that this Book is of divine origin is the fact that the stories of its heroes are told without touch-up. The portraits have the warts and blemishes intact. The cosmetics are absent, and the lives and characters of human beings are presented just as they are. The fearless Elijah, who championed the cause of truth on the mountain top, lost his grip in the valley. He ran.

“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed.” I Kings 19:1-4.

Elijah had prayed, and the fire fell. He had prayed (seven times!) and the rain came. Now he prayed again, but this is a different prayer. This prayer is not a prayer of faith, but of weakness. It is not a prayer designed to uplift God’s glory, as were the other two, but it is drawn from the pit of human self-pity. “And he *prayed that he might die*, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.’” I Kings 19:4. This prayer represents the nadir point of Elijah’s experience. He lost his hold on the arm of the Almighty and ran, and then his conscience smote him thereafter. That’s what the devil does—he gets you to lose your connection with the Source of strength and do something foolish, then he condemns and discourages you for having done it. It’s a vicious cycle of despondency.

Elijah felt he was a total loser. He felt he wasn’t worth anything. The world would be better without him. It would be better if he just died. That’s what he prayed. I won’t ask if you have ever felt that way or prayed that prayer. Probably all of us at one time or another have had thoughts in sympathy with Elijah’s thinking at that time. There’s a word to describe the human condition in sin: misery.

The Lord had answered Elijah’s prayer for fire. The Lord had answered Elijah’s prayer for rain. Thank God He didn’t answer this prayer! Thank God He doesn’t answer all our prayers, at least in the way we present them! Thank God He filters our prayers

through the Holy Spirit when they're offered in discouragement and self-remorse.

Elijah continued on his journey toward Mount Horeb (which is Mt. Sinai) and later confessed, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. *I alone am left*: and they seek to take my life." I Kings 19:10. Feeling alone and despondent are parts of the sinful human condition.

Now there's irony! Oh Elijah, if you could only see! Oh, Elijah, if your eyes could only be opened! If you could only know! The Lord has something better for you! He has a plan for you! If your eyes were opened right now, you would see a mighty deliverance and a glorious future. You would see heavenly horses being bridled. Elijah—the chariot is on its way! Soon, the whirlwind; soon you'll be swept to glory! Who is Jezebel? The Lord God reigns! What is the sword of Jezebel against Elijah while He had the protection of heavenly angels?

I'm thankful that Scripture doesn't omit this part of the story. It records the account of Elijah the faithful as well as Elijah the faithless. It tells us that God's pitying love was present for both Elijah's. His tender care was given to the Elijah of Carmel as well as the Elijah of Horeb.

The over-riding, all-encompassing, superseding message of Elijah's life in the darkest moments of his discouragement is, "The chariot is on its way." That overshadows, cancels out and trumps all other factors in his life. What did it matter what Jezebel thought, or tried to do? The chariot is on its way! If you could have somehow intercepted Elijah on the road to Horeb and encouraged him with those words, how great a comfort it would have been for him! You would have told him, "Hang on, Elijah, just a little longer!" You would have told him, "I know how the story is going to end! Elijah--Don't pray to die—He has something great and wonderful planned for you!" You would have told him,

“Don’t give up yet, Elijah, soon you’ll be with Jesus!” You would have said, “Don’t lose your courage, Elijah, the chariot is on its way!” That’s what you would have told him, right? Oh, the mercy and kindness of our gracious God!

Here’s the second irony. To see the second, you have to turn the first one completely around. The first irony is that you would have gladly entered the pages of the story to tell Elijah what he didn’t know, but what you knew was coming. The second is, today, that’s what Elijah would like to tell you! Today, he would like to enter our story and tell us something we don’t know; or at least we don’t act all the time like we know it; we don’t talk all the time like we know it.

We should have the coming of Jesus in our minds constantly! Every day the thought should be present with us, “God loves me. He has paid for my salvation, and He is coming soon to take me to my home. This earth will soon pass away, but my home up there will last forever.” The light of that beautiful hope will chase away the gloom and the shadows of this life’s trials.

That’s the message of this Book to you today—the chariot is on its way! Jesus is coming back soon.

Are you disappointed in yourself? The chariot is on its way!
Do you feel like you’ve failed? The chariot is on its way!
Do you feel alone like Elijah did? The chariot is on its way!
Do you feel that you’re not good enough, and it would be better if God put an end to your feeble existence? The chariot is on its way!

Just as Elijah, along with Moses, came and gave encouraged Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, so now Elijah would encourage you along the path of your life. Someday soon Jesus will return. He promised He would. He put it in His last Will and Testament, which cannot be changed. He wants everyone of us there.

All the signs tell us that we're living in the days just before His return. We've seen signs in the physical world, signs in society. A few months ago we took a look at God's Decathlon of signs, a series of 10 great signs that stretched from about 1750 to 1850, demonstrating that as far as He's concerned, anything beyond that is "past time." (Those sermons were entitled "Two Minute Warning," and are available on our website.)

This is not the time to be settling into a life of ease and comfort, expecting that month will follow month, and that year will follow year forever—the chariot is on its way! Jesus will come soon, and life on this planet will be over. He will not allow the sin problem to continue indefinitely—He must take action. To secure the peace of His universe, He will end the tyranny of Satan. If our eyes are at all open to the signals His Book has given us, we know that this is going to happen very soon!

This is the time to be praying and studying. This is the time to grow in faith and grace. This is the time to ask God to take sin out of our lives, to cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness. This is the time to make any wrongs right, so that our records are clear. This is the time to ask Him to reform our characters, so that we will be fit to live among holy angels. This is the time to plead with Him to give us a new way of thinking and remove all self-centeredness from our lives. This is the time when we should be asking God to give us opportunities to share our faith with others.

If the Lord commissioned Elijah to come to our church with a message for today, what would that message be? I can tell you that he would say, "With everlasting love the Father has purchased your salvation, and purposes to bring you into harmony with His will. Choose His way, and you will find peace. His plan will come to pass. All that has been prophesied will be fulfilled. Don't be tempted to give up. Don't lose the hope of your confidence now. The chariot is on its way!"