



Whatever else is going on in the world where we live, we need to focus on our triple spiritual responsibility, because we are not responsible for what is going on in the world around us, as much as we are responsible for what is going on in our world and how we choose to respond to this big bad world. Instead of blaming the incredible spiritual corruption which surrounds us for all of our problems, like Elijah, we need to understand that the only real chains that can take us prisoner are the ones we forge for ourselves by the way we choose to live and to respond, no matter where we live and no matter what is going on in the world around us.

We will always be given enough strength and more than adequate protection, and provision to do all that G-d wants us to accomplish. We do not do our greatest work for the Kingdom when we are leaping tall buildings in our super hero suit, battling the forces of evil, to make the world safe once again for democracy. From the heights of glory, the blessed Creator selected one little old man to become the vehicle through which the dispersed children of Adam and Eve could be brought back into relationship with their Heavenly Father. His children became a great nation and eventually built a golden box, so that the L-rd of Eternity could dwell in their midst.

And, at the appointed time (which is always better than in the nick of time), one of Abraham's daughters provided this same King of Kings with a physical body in which He dwelt long enough to win eternal salvation for all believers in every generation, to the Jew first and also to the Jew. G-d will always get His work done, which is the statement He made to Elijah and which I want to make to you this Sabbath morning – and here comes the question of the week – can He count on us to get our job done? Let's look at that triple job which Rav Sh'aul talks about in I Tim. 5:22 and relate it to the rocks, the sun burn and the pigsties which shipwreck our spirituality and which the L-rd was speaking of when He said: "Those who are on the rock, are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy, but have no root. They believe for a while and succumb during times of temptation".

When Paul says not to lay hands suddenly on anyone, he is not talking about sneaking up behind them and scaring them. He is talking about placing people in leadership before they have the necessary qualifications. What are these qualifications? They have to do with having roots, and not growing on rocks. We are built upon the rock of the Word, but we grow in a field full of rocks, which are barriers to growth that stand in our way and which distract us from our real task – sending down roots into the Word. Until we have a firm, even stubborn grip on the true spiritual nature of this world, we are not ready to lead or to grow, because we are not in the place where we should be.

Jezebel and her kind still walk this earth and there are mammoth problems which we could waste our energy trying to get a grip on, instead of looking after our own spiritual destiny first and foremost. Isn't this a little selfish? Shouldn't we be passionate about souls? Shouldn't we weep for the lost? Yes and no. Elijah wept because of Jezebel, but he did not weep for Jezebel. There is so much spiritual opposition in our world that could break our hearts and consume our energies, when we need to realize that spiritual responsibility brings people to a place of choice, and it is this choice which we are called to respond to. We need to have a social conscience and participate in the moral debates which are raging around us – I'm going to write my share of letters about the government's attempt to legislate on behalf of same sex marriages.

But what about my own spiritual and moral battles and what about my own spiritual growth – and my own rooting in the Word? We all face personal temptations and must decide how much integrity we will exercise in our daily lives, and in the life of our community. Band wagons failed miserably during prohibition because we can't expect people to adopt our morality if they do not share our spirituality. I will always strenuously object to same sex marriages because it gives legal sanction to socially destructive behaviour, but no government legislation can prevent evil from occurring, as long as there are Jezebels walking in our midst, slaughtering their unborn children and making people's immoral sexual behaviour the number one high risk health concern in our society today.

I will not be drawn into endless debates on specific moral issues, so that "sinners" will have another excuse for not examining the Gospel of G-d's love in our Glorious Messiah. I will speak first of G-d's love and then explain why sexual immorality of any kind is as destructive to any society as murder, theft, lying and coveting. G-d's love hates sin and all and any kind of sexual immorality is sin. Let's not get pulled into any more Crusades, they were horrible spiritual side tracks in the Middle Ages and the Message of the Bible is bigger than that.

But what about Paul's second admonition? What does it have to do with sun burn? Participating in another person's sin means to lose the personal battle with our own flesh, both in how we handle our bodies and how we handle our minds. Pollution, poverty and political corruption are sinful responses by people who are walking with Jezebel. Our first job is not to be pulled into her little schemes and to make sure that our heart, our mind and our strength is focused on loving G-d and obeying His word. There is a judgment coming and all criminal behaviour will be dealt with, so how much of your behaviour are you judging? How much of it is criminal in G-d's eyes? Who rules your pocketbook? What is growing in your private heart? Do you walk in darkness or in the light of His Word?

Especially on this Shabbat we need to understand that our lives are required to be lived according to G-d's unchangeable specifications, ALL Ten of them as a package deal. Spiritual sun burn comes when we expose our hearts and lives to any mental or physical behaviour which violates the Ten. The survey I referred to last week indicates that too many modern believers are burning up and not digging their roots into G-d's Word, either by the spiritual disciples they fail to fill their lives with or by the moral choices they fail to make in a world full of Jezebel's disciples.

Which brings me to my third point and to my conclusion, and I trust I have given you much to think about as we go through this series. Pigsties involve both individual choices and group behaviours. Holiness needs a clean life in order to flourish and bring forth an hundredfold of spiritual fruit. A believer's biggest struggle is never with the world, but with themselves in the world where they allow their hearts and lives to become spiritual and moral pigsties.

The saddest reality of the Gospel is that it does not make us any less sinful, it just equips us with the possibility of defeating sinfulness in our own lives. It our success in every aspect of this perpetual battle which I will be continuing to talk about as we go through this series. But I want to conclude with a very personal spiritual challenge that each of us needs to own. It is our own successful battle with personal temptations that is the only measure of spirituality which really matters in this crazy world, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. It is only as we learn to master our own hearts and our own personal lives, that we can belong to that select group of seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and whom the L-rd will use to reach out to the lost sinners languishing in Jezebels evil grip.

Who has a firm grip on your heart? G-d's Word or Jezebel's lies? Ahab repented too late to have any lasting spiritual impact on his generation – what kind of spiritual impact are you having on your generation? G-d got around to dealing with Jezebel and she literally went to the dogs, pieces of her that is. He will deal with any pig sties we allow to function in our lives – and here I am speaking as much about drunkenness, smoking, and overeating as I am about coveting, gossip, fornication and murder. You see, they all have the same source and the need to have the same solution.

Don't get sidetracked into making moral battles the spiritual focus of your lives. Don't get pulled into negative moral behaviour of any kind, either. It is one thing to slip in the mud, however and quite another to live in the mud of a pigsty. We need to keep our own selves clean, daily, weekly and always. How is your repentance doing both in your positive avoidance strategies and your stubborn repentance strategies where you deal with the personal dirt you are wading through as you learn to have victory over your flesh in every area of your life? Are you sunburned among the rocks, as you wallow with the pigs, or are you digging deeply into His word and walking in His light in every part of your lives? Next week, the first of three studies in practical holiness. Let's pray.