

As I read this letter to the congregation in Philadelphia (not Pennsylvania!) my mind went to Adoniram and Ann Judson. They sailed from New England on February 19, 1812, for India where they were to begin mission work for the Congregationalists. They would be in the same land as the great British Baptist missionary William Carey – they would not be alone. However, on their voyage they read the Scripture and decided the Baptists were right in their doctrine of adult baptism by immersion and on arriving in India were baptized into the Baptist faith. Carey suggested they move on to Burma where no work was being done and where they would be alone bringing the message of the living Christ. What patience? What endurance? No telephone, no emails, no support for their mission. Sixteen months after leaving New England they arrived in Rangoon. Ann was so sick she had to be carried from the ship. She writes: **“We feel we are alone in the world with no real friends but each other, no one on whom we can depend but God.”**

They arrived in Rangoon with little or no influence, with little or no power and they would endure much for the cause of the Christ. The influence of their work is still being felt in Burma and around the world.

The congregation in Philadelphia is located in the newest city of the ones mentioned by John. It had a large, prosperous Jewish population which would be trouble to the young congregation and it was also a city that had a large pagan cult which would also influence how the congregation would be viewed. It was in such surroundings that the congregation had endured much for the living Christ. They had little power or influence in the community. They were under or had been under some type of persecution and yet in the midst of all of it they had remained faithful.

They have endured much. They have kept the faith. This is not always easy to do. There is peer or family pressure to conform to the world. Why rock the boat? Why not just go along and keep the peace? If we are silent we won't be jobless, thrown into prison, lose our homes, etc. Through all the pressure of trying to be different in a world where pressure is brought on all sides they had remained faithful.

As the Judson's story continues they would move to Ava to be nearer the Emperor and the seat of power in Burma. It is when they are in Ava that war breaks out with the British and Adoniram is put in prison as a suspected traitor, as were most foreigners. Their story of how Ann found the courage to visit him each day, hide their only copy of the manuscript of the New Testament in the Burmese language and keep the faith is a remarkable one. Ann is treated with contempt by the Burmese jailers but by her persistence is allowed to visit each day. She knew what it meant to live “patient endurance.” As did Adoniram as each day at 3 p.m. the Burmese would come and take one prisoner off to death. He would sleep at night with his body lifted off the ground so that his shoulders barely touched the ground. In all of this he and Ann kept the faith.

Elijah has just had two great victories and yet in our text today we find him depressed and alone, wanting to die. He had just challenged the 450 prophets of Baal and won. He challenges them to bring a sacrifice, stones for the altar and wood but not the fire. They will both erect an altar and then pray to their respective God to bring fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifices. The prophets of Baal go first

and spend the entire morning praying, crying, hollering to Baal to bring down fire. I Kings 18:29 sums up the response of Baal: *“but there was no voice, no answer, no response.”* Then Elijah takes twelve stones and builds his altar, there he places the sacrifice and wood. Following this he has the altar doused with water from four large jars. He does this three times until even the trench around the altar is drenched. Then he prays and the fire from heaven comes down and consumes the sacrifice *“Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil and also licked up the water in the trench” (I Kings 18:38).*

Following this Elijah sees the end of the seven-year drought. He counsels Ahab to leave the place before his chariot gets bogged down in the mud. He does this because his servant reports seeing a small cloud about the size of a man’s fist rising from the sea!

Things are looking good for Elijah. Why then is he alone and depressed? Jezebel has heard everything Elijah has done and she had promised that before this time tomorrow Elijah will be dead. Elijah is afraid and runs away. He has reached the point where he wants to die, *“He came to the broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die, ‘I have enough, Lord,’ he said, ‘take my life...’” (19:4b).* After two great victories Elijah is alone in the wilderness and God asks of Elijah, *“What are you doing here?”* He laments, *“...I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (19:10).*

Endurance is not an easy thing. We understand Elijah. It is not what God has done yesterday but what is God doing today. This seems to be the theme of much of our world, our faith: What have you done for me today? Oh yeah, yesterday you did part the Red Sea? And yes, there was the victory over the 450 prophets of Baal. A drought of seven years has ended but God, *“What have you done for me today?”* Our thoughts are on the here and now. We remember yesterday but that was yesterday. We quickly forget about the past and God’s leading through the desert, the daily manna, the water from the rock, etc.

The congregation in Philadelphia is reminded of their past and their faithful endurance. They have endured. They have stood the test of persecution and they have remained faithful. They may lack influence and standing in the community but they have remained faithful. They will probably not change the world but they may be successful in changing a small part in their place where they are because of their faithfulness. And there is the promise: You have endured enough. Even though more is coming you will be exempt because of the faithfulness you have demonstrated.

It is never easy to stand against giants. Do you remember the story of the twelve spies Moses sent out to survey the land God had promised? When they return ten say the task is impossible. Only two, Joshua and Caleb, say the task is possible. When asked what kind of people inhabit the land the ten report, *“...and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them” (Num. 14:33b).* The ten won.

Elijah thought he was the only one in Israel who was faithful to God.

We wonder if we are on the right road. Are we heading in the right direction? After all God, what have you done for us today? How long must we endure? When is there some light at the end of the tunnel?

I began with Adoniram and Ann Judson and want to end with more of their story, more of their endurance.

...Judson found that winning his first convert to Christ in a new land was slow work requiring patient endurance. On the road to the Shwe Dagon, the golden pagoda which was the pride of Rangoon's ten thousand people, Judson had built a thatched-roof hut with a front porch, where he would sit and invite tired travelers to rest a while. *(Imagine that...a simple hut along the side of the road where travelers can stop and rest on their journey. And while stopped join in conversation – maybe Adoniram had something!).* There, engaging them in religious conversation, he would tell them about the one true God and his Son Jesus Christ. Among those who often came and listened was Maung Naw, who worked for a teakwood merchant. After six years, Maung Naw one day declared himself a disciple of Christ and was baptized in a large pond on Sunday, June 27, 1819. Others followed, and there in Rangoon Judson soon organized a little Baptist church of ten members. *(Italics mine.)*

The emperor now threatened to kill anyone who accepted the new religion. Therefore when Maung Ing, a fisherman, wanted to be baptized, Judson warned him that he risked his life. “Do you love Christ better than your own life?” he asked. The new convert replied he did. Another who came was Maung Shwe Gaung, an old man who declared, “No one who really knows Christ can help loving him.”

Where is our little hut on the side of the road, waiting for weary travelers to drop by and rest? Our patient endurance?

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Browne, Benjamin P. & Hoadley, Frank T., Baptists Who Dared, Judson Press, Valley Forge, 1980 (pp. 44-45)