

Allan Boesak preaches to a packed St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town at the March 13 service.



# 'Your Days Are Over!'

*The promises of God confront the state.*

A sermon by Allan Boesak

*Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life...."*

1 Kings 19:4

**T**HIS SCRIPTURE, so well known, is a very beautiful story, one of those gripping stories that I remember so well from my childhood. Elijah—that great prophet who becomes the symbol of prophecy for Israel and for the church of all times—is now under this broom tree completely dispirited, tired, ready even to give up his life.

Before this, Elijah had made up his mind that it was the time to come to grips with Israel and with all these prophets of Baal who were misleading the people, and with Jezebel and her husband, Ahab, who formed the government of the day. And so they came to Mount Carmel, and there Elijah made his challenge, "Today you must make your choice. Either you choose Baal or you choose God." And you remember the incredible victory for Elijah and for God on that day.

And then came the message from Jezebel, saying, "Tomorrow I will have you killed because you are the kind of minister who does not want to keep out of politics." That's essentially what she said. "You keep on interfering, you are inspired by I-don't-know-who. But I am telling you now, you must stop this, because you are going to die."

Elijah flees for his life, finds himself under this broom tree, and says to God, "It is over now, God. I cannot take this anymore. I cannot stand all these threats anymore. I cannot fight this battle anymore."

And then there comes this marvelous moment when

God sends the angel. And the angel tells Elijah, "Rise up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you; because I want you to go on even farther than you have come now."

But Elijah had no intention to go on another journey. He did not have the courage to face Jezebel and Ahab again.

But God said, "Oh no, Elijah. This is not the end of the road for you. There is still some work for you to do."

**GOD UNDERSTANDS THAT** there may come a time in the lives of people when we get tired. God understands that the struggle is long, drawn-out, painful, tear-filled, and we may get tired. God understands that the powers that we face in this world are the powers of evil, and destruction, and violence and intimidation, and we get tired. God understands that when you get up in the morning and you have to fight the same fight that you have been fighting for 20 years, and 40 years, and 50 years, you get tired. God understands that bumper sticker that says, "Ten years of P.W. Botha, 40 years of apartheid, and a lifetime of suffering."

And so our battle has come. For more than 300 years now, we have been fighting for our human dignity—and we get tired. We have been fighting for liberation and for freedom, and sometimes we get tired. We have been fighting against this government that has done everything in its power to cripple our movement and to kill off our people, and we get tired.

Sometimes I get tired of fighting the same battle over and over again—two years of a state of emergency, children of 8 and 9 and 10 and 11 and 12 years old in prison being tortured, children being shot in the streets, parents not knowing where to go, our hearts filled with despair day after day after day. And sometimes you get tired.

*This sermon was preached at the March 13 service in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa.*

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Sometimes we get tired of picking up the telephone and wondering whether there's going to be another threat against our lives. When will they stop trying to subject us to the kind of psychological and physical terror that our people have been living under? And so sometimes, just sometimes, we feel like Elijah.

But you must not worry when you feel like that, my brothers and sisters. Don't feel bad, because God understands. Don't think that God wants you to be strong all the time, 24 hours a day, 60 minutes of every hour, 60 seconds of every minute. Elijah was in that same position, and God told Elijah, "I understand, Elijah, just how you feel. I understand your pain. I understand the worry that you carry in your heart."

But God also says, "Don't lie there, Elijah. Don't give up now. Get up there and walk to the mountain of God, because I have a message for you. I have work for you."

God says to Elijah, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Ahab, you have displeased me. You will no longer sit on the throne of Israel.' And go and tell Jezebel, 'The dogs will eat your flesh.'"

**A**ND IT SEEMS TO ME, my brothers and sisters, that if we think of what is happening in this country, if we think of how time after time after time we have to try again—and the church meetings get banned, and our rallies get banned, and churches get tear-gassed, and people get detained, and children get terrorized—then we can't give up the struggle now. Don't say, "Let us lie down under the broom tree"; don't say, "There is no future for us"; don't say, "There is no road for us to walk on"; because God has work for you to do.

And Bishop [Tutu], you and I have to do the work of Elijah. We will have to go to this Jezebel who sits in Pretoria, you and I will have to go to "P.W. Ahab," and we will have to say to him the same message that Elijah was giving to Ahab and Jezebel: "Your days are over! God has decided you will no longer sit on the throne of Israel. You shall die in the face of this God!"

We must tell P.W. Botha, "We have stood up from under the broom tree. We are sick enough, and through our tiredness and our tears, we have been given courage by this God who never leaves his people alone, and we will tell you your days are over!"

It doesn't matter whether they ban us. It doesn't matter whether they threaten us. It doesn't matter whether they throw us in jail. It doesn't matter whether they tell us that we have been inspired by I-don't-know-who.

The point that they must hear, and hear very clearly, is that the church in South Africa has decided we have work to do in this country. And we shall continue to do that work until freedom comes for our people and the demands of God's justice are being met in South Africa.

**AND SO WE MAY** be tired today, but we will go on, for we have work to do. As long as apartheid exists, we have work to do. As long as our people are detained, we have work to do. As long as the church and our people are being threatened, we have work to do. As long as there is a [government] minister who thinks that he's God, we have work to do.

I just came back from Johannesburg, and on the plane some person gave me a newspaper. In the newspaper it says "Vlok tells Churchmen 'Toe the Line, or Else.'"

I don't want to defy [Minister of Law and Order] Adrian Vlok. I don't even want to argue with Adrian Vlok, because it is not worth it. That is not my point.

My point is not even that I want to challenge this man. I just want to say to him, "Adrian Vlok, who do you think you are?!" From where does he get the arrogance to tell the church of God we must "toe the line"? Whose line must the church toe in South Africa?

There is only one line that we toe, and that's God's line! I don't

want to argue with the minister, I just want to tell him, "You can forget about threatening the church of Jesus Christ!"

You know, the problem with Adrian Vlok and P.W. Botha and these people is that they think that they are talking to Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak. They will live to regret that mistake! They are not talking to Allan Boesak, they are not talking to Desmond Tutu, they're not talking to any of us. They are actually taking on God himself, and they will regret it!

And so the minister says that we must speak to the Christian message. Isn't that the problem—when you belong to a church that has, for so many years, distorted the Christian message to such an extent that no one in that church recognizes the truth anymore? That is the problem when you are a member of a church that calls itself Reformed but has denied every basic tenet of the Reformed tradition.

If his church had taught him, the minister would have known what the Christian message is. But, you see, he does not. Well, Mr. Minister, let me say, if you had read the gospel, if your church had taught you, you would not have spoken such utter nonsense.

To feed the poor and clothe the naked is the Christian message. To fight for justice is the Christian message. To say that peace without justice is impossible in South Africa, as anywhere else in the world, is the Christian message.

To say that a government, which knows no justice and denies God, is illegitimate and will die ignominiously is the Christian message. To proclaim to this government, "In your denial of the Word of God, in your insistence upon oppression, in your persecution of the church of Jesus Christ, you have ceased to become the servant of God of Romans 13 but have become the beast from the sea of Revelation 13"—that is the Christian message that the government must hear. To call upon God's people to obey God rather than the government is the Christian message.

**MY BROTHERS AND MY SISTERS**, we are entering a new phase of persecution of the church in this country now. But there can be no turning back. Those of you who have decided to follow Jesus Christ must follow Jesus Christ now, even into the streets of this country and into the face of the casspirs, and the guns, and the water cannons, and the tear gas. What you have to understand is that the church's witness in this country today will stand or fall by our faithfulness to confront the South African government in the evil it persists in doing.

And so, amidst all of the warnings that we get these days, we have to proclaim one thing, and this is that Jesus Christ is Lord. I know how difficult it sometimes may be. I know how I felt last Friday morning when the telephone rang and last Thursday night when that brick flew through our window, fortunately not hurting any of our children. But it must be said: Jesus Christ is Lord.

And so I want to say this as calmly as I possibly can. Mr. Minister, you can threaten us all you like—Jesus Christ is Lord. You can put us in jail as many times as you like—Jesus Christ is Lord. Let your security police terrorize our children and threaten our lives—Jesus Christ is Lord. You can come into the streets and into our churches and you can massacre us—Jesus Christ is Lord. The battle is on! But Jesus Christ is Lord.

And so the government of South Africa has signed its own death warrant. No government can challenge the living God and survive. And that, Mr. Minister, is the good news for the people of God and the bad news for you! □

