

1 KINGS 19:1-18
“THE GOD WHO IS ALWAYS ACTIVE AND IN CONTROL”

Elijah Flees to Horeb

19 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. **2** So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, **4** while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” **5** Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” **6** He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” **8** So he got up and ate and drank.

Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. **9** There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The Lord Appears to Elijah

And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the

sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

11 The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

14 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

15 The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

BEGINNING OF SERMON

Last week we Examined we tragic moment in the life of king David, with the death of his newborn son. It is a time of extraordinary crisis for David. He has experienced a catastrophic

moral failure. God has punished him severely. Despite his desperate prayers, his son is taken from him by God.

But instead of falling into despair and rejecting God, David bounces back and embraces life. He bathes and eats and makes love to his wife, and God gives him another son, Solomon, greatly loved and favored by God.

As I said earlier, this is the perfect image of resiliency—going through a challenging time and re-emerging stronger and renewed, instead of being defeated and deformed by a negative experience.

Today we examine the experience of Elijah, who we mentioned briefly last week.

James 5:17 states that, “**Elijah was a man with a nature like ours**” (NKJV). meaning that he experienced that he experienced the same emotions and had similar weaknesses to that of any other human being.

James was probably referring to Elijah’s experience in the desert, when he ran and became depressed after learning of Jezebel’s intention of killing him.

What made Elijah’s experience so noteworthy was the fact that here was a man who seemed bulletproof, impenetrable, incapable of experiencing fear, depression or self-doubt.

Elijah was anything but delicate, or sensitive, or given to running from danger. This is why his experience is so strange and out of character.

It is also why it is so rich and full of spiritual and practical lessons.

The background: Jezebel's threat. Elijah experiences extraordinary fear and flees the scene. He isolates himself.

Where does Elijah's fear come from? It may have been supernaturally induced. See Peter's experience during Jesus' interrogation. God had a purpose in confronting Elijah with his humanity and frailty.

I believe in both cases God himself was involved. He wanted to deal with aspects of the personality of both men. He wanted to prune them, and to take them to a new level of maturity and self knowledge. He wanted to humble them and better prepare them for service.

In the case of Peter, God wanted to crush his pride and excessive self confidence, to prepare him to be a true, humble servant of Jesus. To make him more aware of his imperfections, make him more compassionate and less prideful.

In the case of Elijah, I would say that God allowed this moment of crisis to show him another side of God's personality, His nurturing, delicate, tender side.

He also wanted to bleed Elijah, to make him spiritually stronger by weakening him in his flesh, by confronting him with his frail, more human side.

Elijah comes to the end of his rope. He becomes severely depressed. He is tired of ministry and life and just wants to die. He is emotionally exhausted and falls into a deep sleep.

This is where God steps in and takes over the narrative. (The ministry of the angel.) Twice Elijah falls asleep and wakes up and there's an angel waiting to feed him.

Essential lessons:

Nothing in the life of a follower of God happens by coincidence. There's always a reason and there's always a purpose. God had a plan in what Elijah was experiencing, including his persecution on the part of Jezebel.

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

This principle helps us when we're going through moments of crisis. We should should ask ourselves: "What is God trying to accomplish through this negative experience or crisis?" What spiritual lessons can I obtain from this moment?

God is always at work in our lives, teaching us and preparing us, leading us to a new understanding of who He is and of who we are in Him.

As we've said, it seems clear that God was pruning Elijah, showing him a side of God that he hadn't often experienced, his loving, tender side. Elijah only knew the other side of God, the severe, confrontative side, the God of thunder and lightning. His whole ministry was about conflict and confrontation. His ministerial circumstances demanded it.

But God now ministers to him, gets him to rest and reflect, feeds him.

There are moments in life where we have to stop serving others and take time to rest, to catch up, to rest and recover, to take care of ourselves.

In order to effectively minister to our families or our church, we need to be healthy ourselves. We need to be in a perpetual state of self renewal and growth. Otherwise, we grow stale and mechanical.

But, especially, God shows Elijah that He moves not only in the spectacular and the sinister, but also in the delicate, soothing whisper of the wind; not only in the wind that tears apart the mountain, or the violent earthquake, or the consuming fire.

It is clear from the entire narrative that God wants to teach Elijah a spiritual lesson, just as He wants to instruct us and shape us through the experiences of life, even those that are unpleasant and even tragic.

Again, everything that happens in our lives is originated by a God who is intent on filling the holes in our personality. God wants to perfect us as well as our understanding of Him. He will often use negative experiences and hostile individuals to break us and humble us, to make us more sensitive to His voice, and to cut off the dead branches in our personality.

We can cooperate with this by (1) realizing that **this way of God working is a reality**, and (2) by **remaining sensitive and alert** when we enter into times of trial, and asking God to illuminate us as to why He is proceeding in a certain way through a particular circumstance. (3) We must also understand that **we are continually in God's workshop**, and that everything that

happens in our life is because God is in control, not circumstances or people.

In the end, Elijah discovers that it is not Jezebel or Ahab who are in control, but God himself. Things are not as negative or hopeless as Elijah thought!

He discovers that there are seven thousand Israelites who have not bowed to Baal. There is a remnant that still worships the living God.

But also, Elijah receives instruction to channel God's will by anointing the new king of Syria, the new king of Israel, who will destroy both Ahab and Jezebel, and to anoint Elisha as his companion and eventual replacement for the prophetic ministry.

So we have a clear picture of a God who is very much aware of Elijah's needs, and in control of the very circumstances that cause him such great anxiety and fear.

SUMMARY

It's extremely unpleasant when we are in the Master's workshop. It may last longer than we can imagine or want. But if we persist in our faith through times of trial and testing, God will always show himself faithful and in control.

God is always in control of our circumstances and our lives. It is never Satan, the world or individual human beings.

God's ways are often mysterious. He sometimes uses materials and instruments that are very difficult to understand. Even very negative unpleasant ones.

But His purposes are always good and have a positive result.

We must learn to discern God's presence not just in the signs and wonders and in spectacular manifestations, but in moments of quiet meditation and gentle worship.

God's main purpose is to turn us into useful servants, to disciple us and make us more like Christ. This may require experiences that humble us and break us, in order to weaken our flesh and allow the spirit to break through in us.

In times when we feel frail and exposed, when Satan seems to be in control, we must insist on focusing on God and remember that He is inside our boat and in control. As long as He is there, our boat will not drown.

After the storms of the evil day, God will bring about times of refreshment and restoration, if we stand on His promises and use the armor of God to wage spiritual warfare.

(Ephesians 6)

The Armor of God

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, *and after you have done everything, to stand.*

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and

with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

***18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions* with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.**

19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.