

The Depression of Elijah

Reading: 1st Kings 19

- God cares for us during the good times and the bad
- This lesson couldn't be more clear than in how he cares for Elijah
- God is there when Elijah is on top of the world
- And God is there for him when Elijah is suicidal
- We can have the same relationship with God
- He loves us and wants to care for our needs as well
- Let's look at this story of Elijah
- The contrast between 1st Kings 18 and 1st Kings 19 couldn't be any sharper and startling
- They are as different as night and day
- In 1st Kings 18 Elijah is bold and courageous
- He's almost cocky in his confidence, as he faces down hundreds of Baal's Priests in a challenge of fire
- He's incredibly brave facing an extremely powerful, evil Queen, victoriously embracing all kinds of challenges
- Look at how Chapter concludes,

1st Kings 18:46

46) **And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah**, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

- *"The hand of the Lord was on Elijah"*
- Elijah experienced God's supernatural strength to do the extraordinary
- What an awesome feeling that must have been
- Talk about having a good day!
- Elijah **RAN** home from that mountain feeling great about the GOD that he believed in and served
- But in Chapter 19, we find a completely different Elijah

- Now he is running scared, fearful, exhausted, depressed, and even suicidal
- What causes such a huge reversal of emotion?
- In a word: **Jezebel**

1st Kings 19:1-3

- 1) Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.
- 2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”
- 3) Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.”

- The notorious Jezebel was so powerful that when she threatens Elijah’s life, it almost ends his life
- Look at the next verse, Verse 4:

1st Kings 19:4

- 4) But he himself 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, for I am no better than my fathers.”

- Have you ever been there, in the gloom of despair and defeat when all your hopes and expectations exploded in your face?
- I don’t know what Elijah was expecting
- I know what I would have been expecting
- With the power of God so clearly manifested the day before, I assume that Elijah thought there would be some change
- He was probably looking for some positive response from Ahab with the result that there were going to be positive changes in the Kingdom of Israel
- When he receives the complete opposite of what he thought he was going to get, it totally throws him
- He goes into a funk that spirals down and down
- Maybe the first lesson we can learn from Elijah’s response concerns our expectations and their impact on us
- As I mentioned, he was expecting something different -something more positive
- He was looking for a real turnaround in the spiritual conditions of his “Ecclesia”

- And it didn't happen
- It was "Business as Usual" with Jezebel
- Life is full of disappointments and if we are not extremely careful, our expectations can derail us
- It is not wrong for us to hope for the best and to look to the Lord for that
- Let's take a look at 1st Corinthians 13:7

1st Corinthians 13:7

7) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- I like how it says that, *"love believes all things, and love hopes all things"*
- But, it also says, *"love bears all things, and love endures all things"*
- Have you ever noticed that believing and hoping is sandwiched between bearing and enduring
- God holds us responsible for trusting in Him, for obedience, for love, for endurance, and for faithfulness to do what He has asked us to do

- ***He does not hold us responsible for the results***

- The results are in his hands, not ours
- We can't change people, and we often can't change our circumstances, only God can
- We can change our attitude about how we are going to look at things
- Wanting everything to go our way is not only unrealistic, it is self-centered
- By contrast, Paul said in Philippians 4:4:

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice"

- Did you ever stop and think about where he was when he said that?
- Was everything going his way?
- NO! He wrote it while he was chained to a Roman soldier awaiting trial, which could have meant his head
- He said it while others were seeking to do him harm, even within the Ecclesia
- 1st Kings 19:4 tells us that Elijah fled to Beersheba which is way down in the south
- Beersheba was a desert place, but even that was not enough
- Elijah left his servant there and went another full day's journey into the wilderness where he sought shelter, not in the Almighty, but in a scrubby bush
- It's always a bad sign when you seek to remove yourself from the fellowship of others
- Nowhere in this chapter do we find Elijah calling on the Lord or seeking His direction

- The problem was not that he arose and ran, or went down to the desert to hide
- The problem was that he did so without God's direction and without God as his primary shelter
- We now find Elijah discouraged, depressed, hiding, and failing to minister to his people
- This is what some people call burnout
- Elijah's actions were not the actions of faith or fellowship, but desperation and depression
- James tells us that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours
- Just like the rest of us, he experienced the problem of depression - that mental and emotional condition marked by feelings of discouragement, worthlessness, dejection, guilt, apprehension, and failure
- Life is much like a roller coaster - full of ups and downs
- The tendency is for us to experience happiness, joy, significance, and security according to where we are on the ride
- We all have to ride it, but we do not have to have our lives dominated by it
- We can learn to ride it with a great deal more spiritual, mental, and emotional stability regardless of whether we are in the valleys, on the level places, or on one of the peaks
- Spiritual stability is one of the blessings of our salvation in Christ
- We experience it only as we learn to keep our focus on God and his purpose for us, and as we rest by faith in God's principles and promises
- Continuing on in Philippians

Philippians 4:11-13

- 11) Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.
 - 12) I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.
 - 13) I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
- But, even the strongest of us lose sight of that faith, and get lost or we crash and burn emotionally
 - Elijah had JUST called down FIRE FROM HEAVEN, and he quickly becomes a classic illustration of a depressed person

- We find in his thinking, words, and actions many classic symptoms of depression - withdrawal, moodiness, fear, self-pity, feelings of worthlessness, loss of confidence, anger, irritability, painful and wrong thinking, and physical exhaustion to name some of the symptoms
- Depression is a devastating, debilitating malady that affects the total person - spirit, soul, and body
- And it negatively impacts us spiritually, emotionally, and physically
- Elijah had experienced a great victory on Mount Carmel with a long-time goal accomplished
- God was proven to be the true God, the people had worshipped the Lord as the true God, and the Baal prophets had been put to death
- But times like this are also a very vulnerable time; a time where anyone can easily be let down
- Elijah had expended a great deal of energy - both physical and spiritual
- It was truly a mountain-top experience, but now he needed to watch out for the valleys that inevitably follow
- As soon as Jezebel heard of the victory of Elijah, she sent her threat to him and his expectations for revival and reformation were dashed into pieces
- Being disappointed, Elijah got his eyes off the Lord, became fearful, and ran for his life down to the desert
- He was alone, he was tired, exhausted, and in the wilderness by himself without food and water
- Of course, he was not really alone because the Lord was there, but he felt totally alone, helpless, fearful, hurt, a complete failure
- But, the Lord was there and even sent His angel to minister to him
- I'm impressed about how gently God deals with Elijah during this time
- God didn't chastise him or criticize him for losing his faith only days after the faith-strengthening event on Mount Carmel
- God was patient and loving with Elijah
- It's almost like he says, "And, oh, by the way, there are 7,000 still around who haven't bowed their knee to Baal."
- God wanted him to know that not only was he not alone – Not only was God with him no matter how far out into the wilderness he went – but he was also not alone from a human standpoint either

- God truly understood the depression that Elijah was in, and does an amazing job of providing REAL help

1) Before he deals with Elijah's spiritual condition, he rejuvenates Elijah physically with rest and nourishment

1st Kings 19:5-6

- 5) And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat."
- 6) And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.

2) He then gets Elijah to face his true condition, to face the real problem

- Twice God asks him, "*Why are you here?*", in other words, take stock, think about what you have been doing
- Personal reflection, meditation, self-examination are keys to the process
- I love the old saying that says, "***Seek the headwaters of the River of Pain***"
- Ask yourself, "***Why am I here?***"

3) He gets Elijah up and active and involved in ministry again

1st Kings 19:15

- 15) And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.
- When feeling down, depressed, don't give in to the temptation to mope around and do nothing
 - Doing nothing only reinforces the depression
 - By the same token, you do need proper rest, and you should never use activity as a narcotic for the pain

- For all of us, rest, relaxation, and solitude with the Lord needs the balance of involvement in work and ministry, but always out of a spirit of faith and service, never just for activity's sake

4) God provides Elijah with a companion

1st Kings 19:19

19) So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him.

- Elijah was trying to do too much himself
- He had to learn to share the work load and burden with others
- Sometimes we have to learn to share our load or even allow others to take our place
- God understood what Elijah needed to get him back fully functional again
- God cares about each one of us as much as he cared about Elijah
- God will work gently and lovingly with us to carry us through our down times as well
- Because the down times WILL come
- And God WILL be there for us!
- We now turn our attention to these Emblems
- Soon we will turn to Luke 22 and read about our Lord's final meal with his disciples
- I would like to close by turning your thoughts to the end of that chapter
- Consider the last day of Jesus

Luke 22:39-44

39) And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.

40) And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."

41) And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed,

42) saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

43) And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.

44) And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

- Jesus understood what it felt like to be betrayed and forgotten
- He hung on the cross because the people hated him so much they wanted him dead
- As he closed his eyes his own disciples had abandoned him
- Even his most fervent follower had denied he even knew him – Three times!
- Jesus knew sadness and depression
- But, in his lowest moment he turned to God and said,

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”

- And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him...
- Jesus knew that no matter how low a valley you might be in at the time
- God is always there for you, and will be there to comfort and strengthen you
- May we each have the wisdom to do the same
- When we find ourselves feeling all alone and defeated, instead of saying,

"It is enough; O LORD"

- Let us instead have the faith to say,

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”