



You would think that God's dramatic self-revelation on Mt. Carmel, his clear triumph over the prophets of Baal, and the people's readiness to destroy the idolaters would be the pinnacle of Elijah's prophetic ministry. He has persevered through years of drought and prophesied to a king who wants him dead, but when Jezebel threatens to kill him it appears to be too much for Elijah.

In 1 Kings 19:1-8 we see Elijah's true emotional state. Even the greatest servants of God have their human limits, and Elijah is no exception. After everything God has done through him to demonstrate the truth to the people of Israel, Jezebel still has authority, and it all seems pointless. Jezebel is going to kill him and nothing has changed in Israel. Fleeing into the wilderness, he lies down and begs God to take his life. Instead, God provides for him in his hour of need, beginning with the basic requirements of food and rest.

God's deeper provision for Elijah comes in 1 Kings 19:9-18 where Elijah encounters God at Mt. Horeb, where Moses had first received the Law from God. Twice God initiates conversation with the question "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Each time Elijah responds with a description of the dire circumstances from his perspective. God's question could be a reprimand, but his responses to Elijah's complaint suggests otherwise.

God's first response is both a demonstration of his power and an invitation to stand in his presence. Elijah seems to get it pretty quickly, at least to a point. He understands God's power in the wind, earthquake, and fire, and waits until the "gentle whisper" or "still small voice" to exit the cave and stand before the Lord. He stands silent, seemingly recognizing that the priority is to know and walk with God. The power to persevere comes out of our love for and worship of God. When God addresses him again, Elijah provides the same complaint, but probably with a different tone in his voice.

God responds again, but this time with specific instructions indicating his intent to judge the people's sin and help Elijah with his sense of isolation. God knows their sin and he will address it in his time and on his terms. Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha will be his instruments of judgment. At the same time, God understands Elijah's isolation and reminds him that he is not alone. The 7,000 who have not bowed to Baal are representative of more in the nation like Obadiah and his hidden prophets, who remain true to the Lord. It is not Elijah's responsibility alone, and the Lord's proclamation will continue long after he is gone. Remaining faithful to God's point, he experiences the rewards of walking with God and the anticipation of God's reward to come.

Discussion Questions

How do we try to persevere in our own strength? How does that usually turn out?

What about the gospel both challenges us and empowers us to be more than we are in and of ourselves?

If persevering comes down to loving Jesus in both life and death, what can we expect when we remain faithful to him and his mission? (What did Elijah receive?)