

1 Kings 19 – From the Mountain to the Valley

Elijah was a man who experienced the mountaintop of leadership. (we saw that last week). On Mt Carmel, he experienced the greatest spiritual victory of his career, calling down fire from heaven to consume the false prophets of Baal.

But – nobody can stay on the mountaintop forever. The Book of James tells us he was a man “just like us.”

Chapter 18 – what a moment. Confetti is falling from the ceiling.

After that victory, what do you think Elijah is thinking?

Perhaps – Ahab and Jezebel would repent

The people would rededicate their lives to the Lord and Israel would get back on the right track. That the faith of God would become the faith of Israel.

But it was not to be - He’s done absolutely everything he could possibly do, and the nation’s leaders weren’t only unshaken, they weren’t even phased. They weren’t even impressed.

And what we learn in chapter 19 is – there are days when even prophets get down.

19:1-2 – she would make his life like the prophets of Baal, whose corpses litter the earth (One Jezebel can do a lot of damage).

Here we see Satan’s rage, and what we earn is, for every ministry, there’s an anti-ministry. If you’ve ever done ministry, you know exactly what I’m talking about. Elijah’s doing ministry, Ahab and Jezebel, they’re doing anti-ministry too. The Holy Spirit’s doing ministry, and Satan and demons are doing anti-ministry. And when the church is on the mountaintop, you can rest assured, there’s going to be anti-ministry. So if it’s peaceful right now, rest assured, wartime eventually comes.

We get tired, but demons don’t get the flu. They don’t get dehydrated. They don’t need a good night’s sleep. The Bible says that angels worship night and day (Rev 12), but the accuser of our brothers and sisters, which is Satan, accuses the children of God night and day. Think: three shifts. So if you’re engaged in the battle with demonic powers, they are exhausting.

So what does Elijah do?

3-5 - Elijah was afraid. And he fled – he fled the scene.

Think about it this way: Mount Whitney is the highest point in the continental United States. But did you know that Mount Whitney is only 100 miles removed from Devils Valley, the lowest point in the continental United States? It’s interesting, that in this vast continental expanse, the highest and lowest points are within 100 miles of each other.

It’s interesting, that the greatest moment in Elijah’s life is followed by the lowest moment in his life.

Mount Whitney – isn’t life like that? Right after some victory, some spiritual high, you dip down into a spiritual low.

I was sharing this with a friend of mine this week and he said, “Like Elijah, I’ve been from the top to the bottom – just that quick” – Mitchael

So Elijah takes a servant with him and they went as far as Beersheba. When you have the time to look at a map of Judah, go to the very bottom town, way down there – way down at the bottom, near the border of Judah – Beersheba. Looks like the last stand of civilization when you see it on a MAP. Beyond Beersheba, is wilderness. And I mean – not a blade of grass – not green anything. Gravel, stones, rocks all down deep into Sinai wilderness.

For some reason Elijah left his servant at Beersheba and went on alone into the wilderness. There was a quiet, humble servant that was alongside Elijah. He was only mentioned once previously, and now Elijah leaves him behind and says, “I’m gonna go it alone.” (18:43)

He reaches a solitary tree, rare in the wilderness – he drops down exhausted. Under that solitary tree, and he cries out, “I’ve had enough! I’ve stood for you, I’ve stood alone – and now all of the other prophets have been killed, and I alone am left – take my life. I’m better off dead than alive (If I could tell you how many men I’ve had tell me that you would be surprised).”

The enemy knows the believer the most susceptible to a surprise attack right after a big victory. (Just travel a few miles to the west, to a little battlefield you’ve probably heard of called “Shiloh,” and you’ll understand that even more. Day 1 the southern army shouted “victory.” Day 2 – “they bowed their heads in defeat.”

How could Elijah witness and experience God so powerfully one moment, and in the next be in complete despair?

How to get depressed in three easy steps:

1. Wear yourself out. (There’s a lot of running here).

From Mt. Carmel to Jezreel – 10 miles. From Jezreel to Beersheba – 120 miles.

And on top of that - he carried twelve stones, built an altar, dug a trench, arranged the wood, cut a bull into pieces

Coach Vince Lombardi said: **Fatigue makes cowards of us all.**

You know you’re tired when you run for your life, go into the woods and then sleep on the ground. You’re just done.

How many can identify? You’re like, “I love Jesus, I’m just tired. I’ve hit my limit.” (Greg – we’ve about gone from can to can’t).

2. Isolate (3) – “you stay here, I’m going on. I’m going to deal with it myself. You wouldn’t even understand what I’m going through.” He doesn’t have a servant because he’s a rich man but because he’s a prophet. This is his staff, so he lets his staff go. He says in essence, “I quit the ministry.”

We cannot go without human relationships for very long. Just ask Tom Hanks, alone on an island, and he names a volleyball Wilson who becomes his best friend.

3. Focus on the negative. What does he say in verse 4? “Take my life, I’m no better than my ancestors.”

What does self-pity do? It exaggerates.

I’m never gonna be any good. Never?

I’m always going to be stuck in this situation.

My life is never gonna get any better.

I’m never. I’m never. (And it goes on and on).

And he think about taking his own life.

What happens? Elijah simply cracks up. (And you and I have no doubt had those moments too).

Read 5-9 – Notice how God deals with Elijah.

He sent an angel (5) –

What does the angel do? Does he come to the burned out Elijah and say, “fear not!” “I bring good tidings!” Does he say, “Repent!”?

No – verse 6 – all the angel did is cook! That’s it. (Contrary to us – we’d identify some spiritual problem, some lack of faith). But he cooked! The angels says, “Get up and eat.”

And I know – I know – this is where angel food cake came from – I’m telling you RIGHT HERE!” HA!

God did not send his angel to chew out Elijah. (And I’m not a professional counselor, but I want to give all of you a counseling tip I promise you will help your family – you ready? Condemning a depressed person doesn’t help.

Remember that. God did not lift up his prophet by putting him down.

Reminds me of what happened when Peter denied the Lord, and afterwards you know what Jesus did? He made him breakfast (John 21).

“Going to bed early and a change of diet will settle many a case of depression” (J. Oswald Sanders).

Listen – you cannot continue to abuse your body and expect your spirit not to suffer. You can’t do it. You cannot keep up this workaholic pace, eating terrible food, hardly resting, never exercising, and expect your spirit to stay healthy.

Jesus was the master of this – Mark 6:31 - And he said unto them, Come apart into a desert place, and rest a while.” (I heard a preacher say one time, “You will either come apart and rest, or you will come apart.”)

Some of you need to make some radical, intentional changes to be better stewards of your temple – the body God gave you. You cannot keep doing what you’re doing to your body and expect your spirit not to suffer.

He renewed him physically. Some R and R.

What else does he do? Verse 7 –

He touches him. You see, it’s not just that we have a physical nature, we have a relational nature.

So when someone’s going through hard times, through discouragement and loss – you say, “I’m bringing supper over tonight” may be your best ministry

Then notice - so where does Elijah go? Verse 8 – Horeb. Do you know another name for Horeb? It’s Mt. Sinai, the same mountain where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments

God fed him, God touched him

He took him to the place where he could experience the presence of God.

You see, here’s what happens – when you get into the presence of God, the experience of worship, God replaces your lies with his truths.

Sinai – he took him to a place of worship (the same place where Abraham took his son to worship, where Moses received the Commandments), where the spirit of the Lord passed by. God comes to us that way.

Elijah’s got nobody – and what he really needs is to be in church. Because often times a few good spirit-filled friends makes all the difference.

When we come together in worship, we’re not just filling up time. And you have to realize – if you’re struggling – you need the church. You need these people. You won’t do well without these people in your life!

So something you may need to hear – “God does not get down on us when we are down. And he didn’t do that with Elijah.

Even when Elijah gives up, God refuses to give up on Elijah.

Elijah needed clarity – because his stinking thinking has led to confusion.

9-11a

Now why does God ask Elijah, “What are you doing here?”

Does God not know? Of course he knows.

What you see here is, when God asks a question, it’s never to give him information. It’s to give you insight. (God asks that question a second time in verse 13).

What’s going on here? Elijah just has it all wrong. So God asks him some questions to get Elijah to verbalize how problem so God could help him correct his confusion. (It’s what a good counselor does).

And here it is – verse 10

So I’ll read these statements, and you tell me what is right.

I have been very zealous for you. True

The Israelites have rejected you and have killed your prophets. True

I am the only one left? False!

What happened – Elijah believes some half truths. His memory is selective.

Spiritual depression is a vampire that feeds upon the lies all the half-truths we tell ourselves.

So here’s what we do – “there’s no one who cares like me. Nobody understands. I’m all alone.”

Martin Seligman talks about something called “learned helplessness” (negative thinking – the source of discouragement and sometimes depression). And he says it stand on three legs:

1. You look at the world through personal glasses

Listen to Elijah: “I’m the only one left.” Notice: exaggerates the situation, and throws a pity party.

Maybe you’ve done that - exaggerating them, making them bigger than they really are.

We insist that the problems of life are too big to be solved.

By making our problems bigger than they (we in essence) make God smaller than he actually is, we convince ourselves that our situation has no hope.

“Elijah – you’re not the only one left.” No you’re not – remember Obadiah in the last chapter and the 100 prophets he hid in two caves? You talked to Obadiah just a couple of days ago. Did you forget?

You see – when you’re in confusion, you don’t get the story straight – you get it twisted.

2. You look at the world through pervasive glasses (everything is wrong – it’s widespread).

This is the internal deception that says if one thing that goes wrong it will color your whole world.

A young person says, “If I don’t pass this test, then I’ll fail and won’t graduate, and if I don’t graduate, I’ll never go to college,” and the party goes on and on.

Elijah is thinking that way – everything has just gone up in smoke. So let me just die right now.

3. You look at the world through permanent glasses - It's always going to be like this, so why try to change it?"

Listen to Elijah: “I’m no better than my ancestors. Just like them, I’m a dead man. My problem is unsolvable

When you're regulated, you can control your emotions. When you're dysregulated, your emotions control you. (You know what I'm talking about?)

It's why we need to remind ourselves daily – my problems are great, but He is bigger.

Paul Galanti spent six and a half years as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese – was reflecting what he's learned since then, and here's what he said: "There's no such thing as a bad day if there's a doorknob on the inside of the room."

There's no such thing as hopelessness for the people of God – that door knob is hope leading us to a brighter tomorrow.

God is my rock and my shield, an ever-resent help in times of trouble. It's why we need to be in scripture, and fellowship, and prayer daily.

God is God of the future – and even here, he has a plan for the future that involves some people we're going to read about.

But he is so jaded that he doesn't open himself up to the possibility that God will do things differently than what Elijah can envision.

So look at the different ways God comes. First, as an angel preparing a hot meal. Then he touches him – no sermon, just nearness.

But then, when he gets to the mountain, something happens:

11-13a

It's not that God never appears in those other ways. He had worked in various ways in the past:

Wind – sometimes he appears in the wind. In Noah's day, "god sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded" (Gen 8:1). But in this moment, God was not in the wind.

When we think of fire, we can think of the burning bush, or the fires that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. But here, God was not in the fire. Then came the earthquake (like the one at Sinai when Moses was called there hundreds of years before and the whole mountain trembled). But God wasn't in the earthquake.

So if God was not in the wind, the fire, or the earthquake, how was he to come?

The Bible says, "he came as a gentle whisper." (KJV – "a still small voice"). I remember teaching on this some time ago, and someone said, "You know, we've sure got lots of loud preachers. How about some quiet ones?"

So we read this story, but what are we to make of it? I think it may be this: God can appear any way he chooses – in a way that's just right, for the hearer.

Moses (comes up to the very same spot, and asks the very same question – "Show me yourself." And he gets a fire.

And Elijah goes up to the very same spot and says, "Show me yourself," and he gets a whisper.

God knows us so well – he knows just what we need! (It's why he's God).

The key is – however God chooses to speak to your heart, are you sensitive and listening for the voice of God?

For Elijah, God comes as a gentle whisper.

That's significant. Because to hear a whisper, you have to be very quite, you have to lean in to hear what is being said. Without leaning into God, we can't hear him, right? So to truly hear from God, we have to

stop talking, turn down the noise, lean in to him, draw close to him, and listen for His word.

I was talking to one of our brothers this week about his morning devotional routine, and why it's critical to his Christian walk. And he said something so wise:

Before there can be public victories, there has to be private victories.
Mike Emmanuel

He said, "Starting my day with devotion builds strength and momentum in my life. For when the challenges come." (And he used this illustration: the hardest thing about getting a truck unstuck is getting it out. But if you budge it, you're good to go. So I have to start my day the right way – I get up, walk at 4:30 and do my devotional. And it creates momentum.

What I heard Mike saying was, he wants to be managed – not by his emotions – but by spiritual strength.

So back to the story . . .

13b-14 – why does God keep asking this question? He's having dialogue with Elijah. Verbalizing his circumstances helps him gain clarity.

Elijah shows us why he's discouraged. He says, "I have been zealous for the Lord of hosts" – which means, "I had the right plan, I executed it perfectly – what's wrong with you, God" – and secondly he says, "I'm the only one left."

And the reason we see right there that Elijah is despondent is – he's put God in a box. He knows exactly how God should be, he knows exactly what God is, and yet God shows up in this humbling multiplicity of forms – to show us, "you can't put me in a box." For example, the fact that Elijah puts God in a box leads him to

Here's his problem: over optimism. You see he thought, "This is the plan." He's ready to set up the tent and start a revival meeting. I do this on Mt Carmel, and now God's got to respond this way. Here's what he has to do – he has to overthrow Ahab and Jezebel now. He either has to overthrow them spiritually so that they change in their heart, or he has to overthrow them physically, so they are removed from the throne. And now he's disappointed.

But here's the thing: God has not let him down.

Elijah's plan has let him down. And he identified God with his plan.

You see – every time you think God is going to have to show up as a fire, he'll show up as a whisper on you, and every time you think he has to show up as a whisper, he'll show up as a fire.

He shows up on the mountain as a fire to Moses, he shows up on the mountain as a whisper to Elijah.

God says, "I'm not a tame God. You can't put me in a box. And Elijah, your disappointment is really your fault."

So he said a couple of things – "Elijah my Kingdom always has a future. The wind and the earthquake and the fire were just God making a statement – I can take anyone out anytime I want, however I want – wherever I want – I decide who's going to be king, here or there, and that includes Jezebel. And my covenant depends on my faithfulness, not anybody else's.

Elijah is despondent because he has put God in a box. (Be careful with over optimism – you'll live continually devastated)!

He was overly optimistic and how he's devastated. (For instance, if you think your children will never have problems – and they do – you'll be disappointed. And when you are, whose fault is that? You need to

adjust your view. You can't control anything. So are you going to love them, and roll with what you can't control, when the problem comes?)

15-18

God says, "What do you mean you're the only one left – I've got all kinds of people. I've got Hazael over here I'm going to use, I've got Jehu – I've got 7000 who have not bowed to Baal" (which means they have not kissed his idol.

"Anoint Hazael, and I want you to do this with Jehu, and anoint Elisha. I've been working all along – what makes you think I don't have a plan, Elijah? Just because it's not yours?"

You see what Elijah has done? He's put God in a box.

And when Elijah is told by God, "Go and anoint Hazael," Hazael was a pagan king. There is absolutely no evidence that he was a believer or ever became a believer, but God said, "I'm going to do some terrific things in the world through Hazael."

And I've got all kinds of people out there you don't see because they're not like you – they're not theologically correct, they don't have everything together. You've put me in a box, and as result, you are despondent, but you're paying a price for your own narrowmindedness.

You know to paraphrase Elizabeth Elliott in her book, "Through the Gates of Splendor,"

God is God, and if he is God, then there is no place safe except in his will; and that Will, will always be - immeasurably, unspeakably, infinitely-beyond any of your largest notions about what he is up to.

(Because if you think you've got it all figured out. Guess what? You don't.)

But look at who God's gonna call.

Hazael's not a believer – he's a pagan king. But God says, "I'm going to do some unexpected things through the last person on earth you would consider to accomplish my plans."

His assignment is to anoint Hazael, and Jehu, and Elisha – because this may in fact be what the gentle whisper was about.

This is why I don't think we get the "why." Because God's ways are much higher.

So he's struggled – fatigue, stinking thinking, disillusionment with God –

But notice the last thing God does – **he gives him a job!**

"Go back to doing what prophets do – speaking the Word of God, anointing rulers, training up future leaders - get back to your assignment. Pity party's over!"

(I talked to a mom who once told her adult daughter who came home because she just went through a divorce – go up to your room, you can cry all week. Get it all out of your system and let it go. A week from now come Monday, we're going to figure out how to move on).

So if you feel down, depressed, hopeless? If you are still breathing, God's not done with you!

Because here's what you've got to see – the ultimate victory over evil in your life and mine, will not be solved by one mountaintop experience. It will come over time and will extend beyond Elijah's life, and yours and mine.

I remember a moment – it had rained several days – had to travel – and I got up in plane, and we broke the cloud barrier, and I had to pull down the shade. And it hit me – the sun is always shining. Always. It's just

sometimes we forget that because we let clouds rob us of the truth. God's always on the throne. His sovereignty is never challenged. His kingdom always has a future. And there's a place for you.

You see – Elijah had underestimated some things – God says, “There's 7000 looking to me, and many of them are looking to you, counting on you, inspired by you. I don't need you up in the stands, I need you down on the field, back in the game.

You can't help your feelings, but you can choose your thoughts. You can decide to focus on the goodness of God.

Let's pray together

Take a moment – think about one part of your life that feels hopeless, and every time you go there your spirit starts to go down. It drains you. What's that one place that just sinks you when you think about it?

Now do something. Pray, “Lord, renew a right spirit within me. When my heart goes there, let my thought turn to you. Father, let your Holy Spirit minister to my spirit.” Pray that now.

I pray that we just be honest. If you're hurting, let's confess that – yes, I feel hurt, yes I feel abandoned, yes I feel discouraged, I feel overwhelmed, I feel out of control right now, and yes I feel depression in my bones.

If that's you – would you lift your hand right now?

Lord – minister to these brothers and sisters.

First – expose to them the lies that are keeping them down. Expose them!

Help us realize – you are the lifter of our heads. May we fully trust in you, Lord! To give us hope and a future.

Help us understand that there are always two spirits at work – a Jezebel spirit of fear and defeat, and a Holy Spirit of hope and a future.

May we fully trust you and find comfort in you, Lord!

(I truly believe that God lets us hit rock bottom sometimes is because he loves us too much to let us go under all the way – and he lets us be humbled so he can lift us up.)

The things in this world will never satisfy – taking them away is an act of mercy.

So today – look up to Christ. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!

(If need to talk about your soul, that's what we're here for – baptism, talk to somebody – the old is gone, the new is gone.)

Thank you for the possibility of new life, Lord.

Additional Verses:

Can anything happen without the Lord's permission? (Lamentations 3:37).

God has the power to do as he pleases among the angels of heaven and with those who live on earth (Daniel 4:35).

My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please (Isaiah 46:10).