

March 23, 2014

40 Days: "Elijah and 40 days To the Mount of God" (God's Cure for the Blues)

1 Kings 19

Before we look at our Scripture for today from 1Kings 19 let me give you some information about Elijah:

Elijah was a very influential prophet. He emphasized unconditional loyalty, and whole hearted devotion by the people to God; and the worship of the one true God. His appearance, the way he dressed, his physical abilities, his rugged character, and his habit of dwelling in caves all suggest he was a strong, tough outdoor type personality.

Elijah was opposed to the accepted standards of his day, when belief in many gods was normal. His views were in conflict with those of the king, Ahab. Ahab's wanting to cultivate economic ties with Israel's neighbors led to his marriage to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre. Ahab saw no harm in participating in the religion of his neighbors, particularly the religion of his wife. Therefore he established a center of Baal worship and, influenced by Jezebel, Ahab gave himself to the worship of Baal.

The punishment against Ahab for building the temple for Baal worship in Samaria was a drought that Elijah predicted would come on the land. After the drought lasted three years, the Lord instructed Elijah to go to Ahab with the message that the Lord would provide rain. Elijah then challenged the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah to a little contest on Mt. Carmel. Each side would offer sacrifices to their God without building a fire. That would be left up to the strongest god, who would thereby reveal himself as the true God.

Elijah tells the prophets of Baal they can go first. So they begin to call on the name of Baal from morning until noon-day. Nothing happens and Elijah begins to mock them. He says, "Shout louder... maybe he is in the rest room relieving himself. Or maybe he is... asleep." They shouted louder ... still nothing.

Then Elijah had the people pour water over his sacrifice – not once but three times - so there could be no possibility of fraud or any question or misunderstanding. And as Elijah prayed his sacrifice was consumed by fire from heaven.

Isn't that something? Don't you wish you could do stuff like that? People may say God is going to do this or that. You know they say, I believe in God and I know God is going to ... whatever. But maybe God didn't tell THEM He was going to do ... whatever.

When the people saw this they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD —He is God! Yes, the LORD is God!" In other words, we'll take Elijah's God. And with that the prophets of the false gods were put to death at Elijah's command. And after that Elijah prayed again and God sent rain ending the drought. Here's what happens next:

1 Kings 19:1-4

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. **2** So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them." [Obviously Jezebel is unaffected by what her husband tells her about the events at Mt. Carmel. She didn't admit to the error of her religion. But while she was not affected by these events, Elijah was affected by Jezebel's treat] **3** Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. **4** Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."

Elijah just has this amazing experience. God reveals Himself in a miraculous way and does so through Elijah; and the next thing we know, he goes from the highest high to the depths of despair. Has that ever happen to you? Up one moment, then quickly things change and down the next. Do you know sometimes our biggest crash comes right after a tremendous high?

The word translated "afraid" is a Hebrew word (*raah*) that literally means: to see, look at, inspect, perceive, consider, regard. Fear doesn't really fit the rugged, strong, tough character of the prophet. It seems instead, that after considering the words of Jezebel he ran for his life. Still that's surprising. He believes in the one true God, he has witnessed the power of God; God even sent rain as Elijah prayed. Yet, he's told of Jezebel's words and runs for his life.

Fight or flight; ever hear that expression? When faced with a crisis situation those are our choices, face it or run. Elijah runs. You would think he'd say, "I serve the living One true God, I'm not afraid of what Jezebel says. I'm not going anywhere."

But that's not what happens instead he and his servant travel several days in the opposite direction – from north to south - to Beersheba a town about 100 miles away from Mt. Carmel. Why? Because as James wrote (5:17 NCV), "Elijah was a human being just like us."

Elijah may not have been fearful, but he definitely was depressed and wanted to withdraw and be alone. Elijah had the blues. So he leaves his servant and goes a day's journey into the wilderness. This is what we do when we feel discouraged and depressed. We stay away from people, we want to be alone in our misery, in our wilderness, our dark times of the soul.

Then Elijah, lack of rest, physically spent, affected by his mental attitude and outlook, sat under a tree so depressed he wishes his life would end. He prays, "I have had enough, LORD, take my life." He was bold and strong in the Lord and the power of the Lord's might, but by himself, not so much. In times like this, God understands

better than the person himself what is needed. In the remainder of chapter 19 we have God's remedy for this common human experience of deep discouragement; God's cure for the blues:

1. Proper Care for the Physical Body (vv5-8)

5 Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" **6** He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

7 Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

8 So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.

It is important when you are discouraged and depressed to get the proper nourishment and the proper rest. An angel touches him and says don't stay in bed, get up. That's good advice. When depressed we tend to spend too much time sleeping, and neglect doing the things we should be doing, which only make us feel worse. Instead, take proper care for the physical body, eat good food, drink water and get the proper amount of rest.

Elijah with the help of the Lord, and through the food provided by the angel, is able to make the long journey, 40 days and 40 nights, about 175 miles further south to Mt. Sinai – the mountain of God. The 40 days reminds us of the 40 days Moses spent on the Mount of God. As Mt. Sinai was a place of revelation to Moses, it would be to Elijah as well. We are praying our 40 days (Lent) is a time of revelation.

2. A Fresh Revelation from God, Hearing From Haven "a gentle whisper." (vv9-14)

9 There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.

But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

10 Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

11 "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. **12** And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. **13** When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 He replied again, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed

every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

When we are discouraged and depressed we need a fresh revelation from God. God reveals Himself to Elijah but not in the usual means which God had previously used to reveal Himself. On this occasion there was only a "gentle whisper." God asks Elijah a searching question, "What are you doing here?" (or literally, "Why are you here?"). The Lord asked him the question previously in v9 and repeats it in v13, and both times Elijah gives the same reply: "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

When we are discouraged and depressed we tend to exaggerate and that is what Elijah is doing here. He was not the only one left. There were other prophets...

1 Kings 18:4

Once when Jezebel had tried to kill all the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had hidden 100 of them in two caves. He put fifty prophets in each cave and supplied them with food and water.)

And remember what the people did when Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal:

1 Kings 18:39

And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!"

He was exaggerating when he said he was the only one left. It was based on impatience and a sense of failure because the worship of Baal had not stopped completely. The Lord speaks to him in a gentle whisper to show him a relationship with God requires patience and bearing with injury, insults, trouble; long-suffering or patiently for a long time. This is a difficult lesson for the followers of Christ to learn. We want it to be easy, it isn't. We want God to speak clearly, more times than not He doesn't. While He speaks louder in our pain, most times it's a gentle whisper, yet God does give us fresh revelation if we seek Him. And with that will come the next part of His cure:

3. A Renewed Mission (vv15-16)

15 Then the LORD told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. **16** Then anoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet.

God's command to anoint certain individuals further impresses upon Elijah the need for patience. In due time Ahab and Jezebel would be overthrown. In the meantime, God has work for Elijah.

When we are discouraged and depressed we need hope, God gives that hope, but you must have faith, trust, patience and a renewed sense of mission. When we are discouraged and depressed we tell ourselves the wrong things; "God can't use me," "I don't feel like serving," "I'm a failure," "I'm not needed." Stop playing the wrong CD, eject and insert correct CD! That God may renew your sense of mission.

4. **A Faithful Friend (vv18-21)**

18 Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!" [Another confirmation that Elijah is not alone, and so...]

19 So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away. **20**

Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!"

Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."

21 So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant.

When Elijah threw his cloak over the shoulders of Elisha both of them understood this as a symbol of transferring leadership and ministry. Elisha would become Elijah's assistant.

When we are discouraged and depressed we need a faithful friend.

So here we have God's cure for the blues:

Proper Care for the Physical Body

A Fresh Revelation from God, Hearing From Heaven "a gentle whisper."

A Renewed Mission

A Faithful Friend