

*“God of the Extraordinary AND the Ordinary”*

1 Kings 19

May 10, 2020

Please turn with me to 1 Kings 19. If you read the bulletin on our website, you were probably expecting, as I was, that we would land in 2 Chronicles 20 this morning. But after our study of 1 Kings 17-18 last Sunday, my future son-in-law encouraged me to not pass by chapter 19. And after some prayer and reflection on chapter 19, I could not bring myself to pass it up.

Last week we saw Elijah, the man of God, on Mt. Carmel full of confident faith in God who rained down fire from heaven to demonstrate that He alone is God, not Baal. There God made a name for Himself, turning the hearts of many from idolatry back to the living God as Elijah slew Israel's 450 false prophets of Baal.

But today we are doing to see Elijah, the fleeing prophet, full of fear and discouraged to the point of despair. He's a man with a nature like ours, who loses sight of the greatness of God and begins to drown in a sea of self-pity.

Well admittedly, Elijah's depression doesn't make the most cheerful sermon text for Mother's Day but as we begin to catch a glimpse of the God of the extraordinary AND the ordinary, we will discover that there is an indestructible hope for us as we raise our children in dark and perilous days.

*We can and must fight against the disillusionment of discouragement by remembering that God is able to work through both extraordinary and ordinary means to accomplish His purposes in directing the course of history (and our lives). **When we cannot see what God is doing in the moment, we must live by faith knowing that the unseen hand of God is providentially working out His purposes and plans which mankind cannot ultimately frustrate or thwart.*** God is always at work behind the scenes. His sovereign intervention does not always fall like fire from heaven, but often works subtly and imperceptibly to the human eye. You must have this truth firmly planted in your heart if you are going to win the battle against discouragement.

[Vs. 1-4]

1. **Spiritual maturity does not make one invincible to fear and discouragement (1-4).**

I'm not saying it doesn't help. Spiritual maturity is a great help in our battle against fear and discouragement. The more we know about God, the more truth we have written on our hearts, the more ammunition we have against the lies of the flesh and the devil. But what I am saying is that we are never invincible to discouragement. We never outgrow the temptation to fixate our attention on what's not right in our world at the expense of seeing the God who reigns over all things.

Have you ever seen someone texting while they are walking down the street and they are so focused on their phone that they run right into a car? It's hard not to laugh, yet that very thing *almost* happened to me twice this week.

We do this all the time in our spiritual walk. We get so fixated on our troubles right in front of us that we don't see the greatness of God looming in front of us like a mountain. But this is not a laughing matter because discouragement is like a heavy weight tied to a weary swimmer, threatening to pull him under.

This is precisely where Elijah is. He has literally just come off a mountain top spiritual victory yet finds himself in a deep valley of blinding darkness in response to Jezebel's threat on his life.

Notice in vs. 1 that Ahab does not tell Jezebel what *God* did, raining down fire from heaven to demonstrate His supremacy over powerless Baal. Rather he told Jezebel what *Elijah* did, executing her 450 false prophets. Ahab had agreed to the contest but because he too is afraid of Jezebel, he makes Elijah the scape goat. As a result, angry wicked Jezebel takes an oath to kill Elijah within 24 hours—a serious threat given her previous slaughter of the prophets of the Lord.

So Elijah “was afraid and ran for his life” (3). From the northern kingdom of Israel, he went over 100 miles to the southernmost city of Judah, left his servant there and traveled another day's journey into the wilderness. He is so afraid of Jezebel, that he can't seem to get far enough away from her.

This is the man who just saw fire fall from heaven in answer to his prayer and courageously took down 450 false prophets. But now in utter fear, exhaustion, and discouragement, he collapses under a tree and prays for God to take his life.

Does Elijah really want to die? Maybe but not likely. His whole purpose in running from Jezebel is because he *doesn't* want to die. I think it's more likely that Elijah is allowing the negativity of his discouragement to be overstated just as we often do. *Discouragement loves to embellish the negative.* At any rate, Elijah's perspective is one of hopelessness. Yet God is patient and compassionate toward Elijah, even though his discouragement has pressed him into disobedience.

## 2. God is compassionate toward His discouraged servant (5-8).

**[vs 5-8]** Notice that God is working through both ordinary and extraordinary means to meet Elijah's need. The ordinary is food, water, and sleep (although the delivery by an angel is not so ordinary. And where did the jar come from? Certainly, this is miraculous provision). The extraordinary is that God sustained Elijah's strength for 40 days and nights on this meal. Remember that Elijah is not just sitting around, but continuing his journey to Horeb (Mt. Sinai), another 200 miles south of Beersheba.

It's helpful to observe that God addresses Elijah's physical needs first. In the coming verses God will deal with His heart and perspective, but God does not bypass the physical in dealing with the spiritual. This points to the integrated nature of our being as humans. Our basic physical needs for nutrition and sleep are interrelated with our mental and spiritual need to live in truth. Overcoming depression involves physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects because God has created us as an integrated being.

Yet what I want to draw to your attention is God's compassion in making provision for Elijah in his discouraged state. God doesn't withdraw. He doesn't berate Elijah. He draws near to Elijah. Yet it's vital to see that though God is caring and compassionate to his discouraged servant, He is unwilling to leave him there. As with Elijah, God will confront our stubborn discouragement through His word to realign our perspective with what is true about God.

## 3. God confronts our stubborn discouragement to realign our perspective with what is true about God (9-14)

**[vs 9-14]** By God's providence, Elijah ends up in a cave on Mt. Sinai, the very place where God revealed Himself to Moses and the children of Israel and established the covenant with them. And ironically, what Elijah needs the most is a renewed "revelation" of the Lord—He needs to see the Lord.

The Lord gently confronts Elijah's discouragement when he asks him, "what are you doing here?" God had not sent him to the wilderness. Instead of running to God for refuge and rescue, Elijah has run as far away as he can from the troubles that threaten him where God had called Him to serve. Elijah's response has some truth in it, but it is essentially a complaint of self-pity. He's saying, "I took a stand for God's honor when no one else would. Israel was completely wayward. I'm all alone. And now what I get in return is threats against my life." Even though Elijah had taken down 450 false prophets of Baal, the hostility of Jezebel left him disoriented thinking that the war against idolatry had been essentially lost.

- Had Elijah been very zealous for God's glory? Yes.
- Has Israel broken covenant, torn down God's altars and allowed God's prophets to be killed? Yes.
- Was Elijah the only faithful worshiper of Yahweh left? No. We will discover in vs. 18 there are 7000 who did not bow to Baal. Whether Elijah knows that or not, the outlook is bleak.
- Was there a "bounty" on Elijah's head? Yes.

It's not that these things are not true, but they are not the whole story. Nowhere in vs. 10 does Elijah factor in the supremacy and power of God over all things. Elijah is at Mt Sinai and has blindly run into the tailgate of truck. Notice in vs. 10, Elijah is fixated on the negative only!

There are certainly times when it is right for us to grieve what we see happening in our world, but *it is never God's will for us to persist in the discouragement of a distorted perspective that has lost sight of God's sovereignty.* Even when discouragement is based on real facts, its power is rooted in one's perspective. ***The power of discouragement is rooted in the absence of God's rightful place in your perspective.***

God's will is for you to view even the bleakest circumstances through a God-shaped perspective of faith. And the only way to do that is by infusing your perspective on your circumstances with the character and promises of God. That is, telling the whole truth about the situation!

So what is the particular truth about God that Elijah needs to be confronted with here? Elijah needs to learn that God's plan has not been thwarted and His ways are inexhaustible. The Lord passes by him with wind, earthquake, and fire, all of which are ways that God had manifested the holy dread of His presence in the past (Ps 18:7-15). God had revealed Himself to Moses and Israel at Mt Sinai with fire and earthquake (Ex 19:16-19). But this time God was not in the spectacular. God was going to work in a much different way, in a way so subtle that it would go unnoticed to human perception—like a gentle breeze. In a sense God is saying, "Elijah, I will finish what I have started and I will do in such a way that will evade the wisdom of men."

After displaying to Elijah the multifaceted ways in which God is free to work, He again confronts Elijah's discouragement in vs. 14: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" But Elijah gives God the exact same answer of half-truths and self-pity.

All of us know what it is like to feel "stuck" in discouragement. But I'm going to use term *stubborn* discouragement. Not to be hard on those who are discouraged but to shed light on the path to freedom. If we are honest, we'd admit that we get stubborn in our self-pity. While we are unhappy with our life circumstances, in that moment we want to be in the pit of self-pity because we want life to be about us and we want the "right" to complain that God, people, and life have not served our happiness.

When it comes to self-pity, we are not stuck as much as we are stubborn. Listen—you can climb out of that pit and you *need* to! You cannot honor God there. And the way out is leading your perspective back to the truth by acknowledging what is true about God and repenting of turning your face away from Him.

You must master your perspective with the truth. You must take on the responsibility to *insist* that your soul yields to a God-shaped perspective. This is the *only* way to truly live victoriously over discouragement. There's a level of self-talk required here. I'm not talking about psycho-babel or

shallow positive thinking. I'm talking about sound, theological truth-preaching to yourself. I'll help you with it on Sundays, but you have to be the preacher every other day of the week: "*God is faithful, God is good, God is sovereign over this mess and has all the wisdom necessary to work out His purposes and take care of me in the process! God has not forsaken me. Evil will not triumph in the end regardless of how things look now. God is worthy of my trust and my worship and my obedience. Lord, if you could part the Red Sea and the Jordan river and provide manna in the wilderness, then surely You can intervene in this situation. If You could demonstrate your power through Gideon's weakness and honor David for honoring You on the battlefield with Goliath, then certainly I can trust You to help me do what is pleasing in Your sight. If You could work through the prayers of an ordinary man like Elijah, then surely I can trust You to work out Your plan even if it's behind the scenes in ways I cannot see!*"

We need to pray this way so that faith and truth lead our perspective rather than being taken captive by fear, discouragement, and self-pity. The character of God, the promises of God, and the presence of God are the rungs on the ladder by which we climb out of the pity of despair.

After God reveals Himself to Elijah, He reissues His call of obedience to Elijah. Notice, God doesn't get into responding to all of Elijah's complaints. It's not answers He gives Elijah, but rather an opportunity to again bring God into His vision and a call to respond with obedience. Notice God's response to Elijah's complaints is a call to action both times. In vs. 11, He said, "**Go,**" position yourself to see Me. In vs. 15, the Lord said, "**Go,**" return to the work I've called you to. The point is this: *Obedience to God is more important than our short-sighted human assessment of the matter.* God is not bound to justify His ways or to explain Himself to us. But He is gracious enough to confront our stubborn discouragement so that we can walk in the truth and confidence of who He is and the mystery of His providential working in all things. Like Job who was never privy to what was happening behind the scenes of his suffering, what we need is not mere answers to our questions, but a true vision of who God is and the assurance that He is with us.

Memory Verse: “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence” (Psalm 42:5).

4. **God works not only in extraordinary, spectacular ways, but also through the seemingly ordinary events in which His unseen hand is imperceptible to mere human eyes (15-18).**

What we are about to see in vs. 15-18 is that God will work sovereignly and silently behind the scenes with His hand of providence in ways that will be undetected by the average person. **[vs. 15-18]**

This is remarkable! God is to bring about changes in leadership on both the international and national stage as well as raising up a new spiritual leader. On the international stage Hazael will become king of Aram, which is Israel’s enemy, and God will use them to discipline Israel for their idolatry (2Kings 13:3). On the national stage, God will raise up Jehu as king of Israel to put to death Jezebel and the remaining worshipers of Baal (2Kings 9-10). And in the spiritual realm, Elisha will carry on the work of Elijah and see it through to the end so that at the hands of these new leaders, along with a godly remnant of 7000 ordinary Israelites, God would eradicate Baal worship from Israel.

In essence, God has said to Elijah, “I will finish what I started. I’m in charge, not Jezebel and not you. Don’t underestimate my ways.” Human beings will have their foibles and their rebellions, but they will not frustrate the unseen hand of God.

Throughout this series we’ve been reminding ourselves that God is able to do the extraordinary. Yet it’s equally important to recognize that God is not limited to only working in extraordinary ways either, but often works through the seemingly ordinary events of life. Sometimes we think that if God did not answer my prayer in some extraordinary way, He hasn’t worked. Yet God often works our His providence through the seemingly natural course of life when it appears that man is determining the course of history yet is never outside of the unseen hand of God’s providence. Be encouraged...

5. **God is certain to carry out His plans even beyond our lifetime (19-21).**

Chapter 21 closes with the calling of Elisha through whom the work of God would continue. **[vs. 19-21]** The final episode in chapter 21 is beautiful picture of Elisha’s absolute devotion to the Lord. He sacrifices the oxen with the wood of the plow (which is his livelihood) and kisses his parents goodbye, signifying an abandonment of his former life to serve the Lord with a whole heart. Just as the 7000 had not *kissed* Baal out of allegiance to Yahweh (vs. 18), so now Elisha *kisses* his parents goodbye out of allegiance to serve Yahweh. Furthermore, Elisha *abandons* (*azab*) his livelihood and family to serve as Yahweh’s prophet (19:20) in contrast to Israelites who had *abandoned* (*azab*) Yahweh to worship Baal (18:18; 19:10, 14).

God was not yet done with the ministry of Elijah, yet Elijah needed the encouragement that God was certain to carry out His plans even beyond Elijah’s lifetime. The same is true for us. God vindicates the righteous and avenges evil, sometimes in this life but always in the next.

Prayer Challenge: “**Lord, I stand against the discouragement that tempts my heart to despair, choosing to live by faith and not by sight, being confident that Your hand of providence is working where I cannot see to accomplish Your good purposes that are sure to stand in the end.**”

Mother’s Day: Let me conclude with a word of encouragement to our moms today. I urge you to pray for God to do extraordinary things in the lives of your kids, yet I also encourage you to not overlook the significance of how God work through ordinary and seemingly mundane moments in which we cannot see His hand shaping the lives of our children.

*Don’t grow discouraged* when every day seems the same and progress seems slow in the growth of our children’s character. Be faithful to God’s ways and assume that He is working beyond what you can see in their hearts. Pray for them. Pray with them. Read the Bible together. Make worship the music of your home. Embrace the frustrating moments of discipline by helping them see their need for Christ and the grace He provides. Love and Respect your husband. And remind yourself that there is never a menial task whether washing dishes, going to work sleep-deprived, or changing diapers when it’s done with the eyes of your heart fixed on God.

*Don’t grow fearful* when you see the way of the world our children must live in. Oh yes, we must prepare them to suffer for doing what’s right in God’s

eyes, praying that the fear of God will be their anchor and the love of Christ will be their rudder. Yet, never relinquishing confidence that God's providence will never fail to work out His righteous purposes in the end.

*Finally, don't grow faint-hearted.* For those whose hearts break for their children who are not walking with the Lord, keep praying for God to open the eyes of their heart, trusting that God will work now where you cannot see and continue to work in response to your faith even beyond your lifetime.