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1 KINGS 19:1-20:43

1 Kings 19:1-4...

Sometimes things come that we expect...and sometimes things come that are very much unexpected. We've spent several weeks with this man, Elijah.

We've seen him as the bold messenger and faithful prophet of God going to King Ahab and proclaiming that it would not rain until he said.

We've seen him compassionate in the house of the widow of Zarephath...supplying her needs and restoring life to her son.

We've seen him strong and fearless on Mt. Carmel as he proved that Jehovah is God...not Baal.

We've seen him with God's mighty hand upon him as he outran Ahab's chariot back to Jezreel.

But, here in **chapter 19** we see something we don't expect to see in the life of God's bold and strong and fearless servant. We see fear! And we see that fear causes us to do strange things.

When Jezebel heard what happened to her prophets, she became enraged and she sent word to Elijah...Maybe her message went something like this... *"Dear Elijah,*

I want you to know that I have heard what happened on Mt. Carmel...and I also want you to know that within a 24 hour period I'm going to do to you worse than you did to my preachers. Lovingly, Queen Jezebel"

Now, what would you expect Elijah's response would be to this?

Well, after what had just happened I would have expected Elijah to maybe chuckle or snicker or laugh out loud. Maybe I would have expected Elijah to fire back a note to Jezebel and say,

*"Dear Jezz. Thank you for your note, but I want you to know the wrath of God that fell upon your false prophets is just about to fall upon you.
Love, Elijah"*

I mean, Elijah had just been part of one of the most well known miracles in all the word of God. But, instead of being confident that the God who had sustained him at Cherith and at Zarephath and at Carmel would sustain him against the wrath of a mean woman, he buckled under to fear, didn't he?

I believe one of the most encouraging things about God's word is that it tells us **all** about God's servants...**warts and all**.

James tells us that Elijah was a man with a nature just like your and mine...And if we didn't know this story about Elijah we would be very inclined to think of him as a "super-saint" with no weaknesses, wouldn't we?

But, **God's servants then and now are just people**. And they all **had** and **have** feet of clay. And we see Elijah's feet of clay taking him running...running from the presence and the anger of Jezebel.

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I want us to think for just a few minutes about what caused Elijah to run and what causes you and me to run sometimes.

What brings us from the mountaintop of victory into the valley of despair? I believe we've all been in that same valley...

First of all if you **focus on your circumstances**, you will find yourself in the valley of despair. **Verse 3** in the **NAS** says "...he was afraid..." I believe the **KJV** says "...when he saw.." **When he saw what? When he saw the circumstances!**

Sometimes we find ourselves fearful of things that aren't even going on. We wake up in the middle of the night worrying about things that **might** happen...and usually the things we worry about never ever come to pass, do they?

But, Elijah knew that old Jezebel would indeed seek to take his life. And when he ran away, it wasn't an imaginary fear that made him run.

Elijah knew Jezebel meant what she said. She had a proven record! She had already sought to have all the Lord's prophets killed and had killed a lot of them...so what would one more be to her?

Elijah was focusing on the circumstances and we cannot focus on more than one thing at a time. When Elijah's focus was on Jezebel and her threat, his focus was off God.

A second thing that happened to Elijah was that he **abandoned his responsibility...**

Verse 3 again says "*And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life...*"

Now, think about this. As a result of the miracle of Mt. Carmel, the people had repented and had proclaimed that Jehovah was God. All the preachers of Baal had been exposed as false prophets...and for the first time in years the people were ready to be taught and to grow in their new found faith in Jehovah!

Elijah was their leader. He was the one who would teach them and disciple them. He was the one who would be their spiritual leader. And what had he done? He had run away!

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever abandoned your responsibility? Has it ever happened in your life that your walk with the Lord was great until you stopped serving where God had placed you to serve?

I want us to think of two reasons God saves you and me. One is because He loves us. And the other is because He has a purpose for us.

And when we know what that purpose is we have the responsibility to fulfill that purpose and when we don't, we have abandoned our responsibility and we are in danger of finding ourselves in the valley of despair just like Elijah.

A third thing Elijah did was he **separated himself from other believers.**

Verse 3 tells us Elijah ran for his life and came to Beersheba and left his servant there and **verse 4** tells us that Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness..."

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Do you see what he's doing? He's trying to get away from everybody!

Sometimes God calls us to get alone with Him...and we've already seen that in Elijah's life. But, God has also put folks in our lives to minister to us when we're in the midst of despair. We don't need to isolate ourselves from people who can be a support to us and stand by us and love us and pray for us.

It might be a health problem that causes you to become fearful. It might be a marital problem. It might be a relationship problem. It might be a financial problem.

If you're afraid, I should be there to help you and you should be there for me. If you laugh, I should be there to laugh with you and you should be there to laugh with me. If you cry, I should be there to cry with you and you should be there to cry with me.

I should pray for you and you should pray for me.

There's something genuinely Christian about the people of God sharing their burdens and joys with each other. God's people should not withdraw in times of trouble. And when we withdraw and isolate ourselves from those who love us, we can very well find ourselves in a valley of despair.

That's the reason we shouldn't forsake the assembling of ourselves together! That's the reason we share prayer requests!

The fourth thing Elijah did was **pout**. In fact he found him *a place to pout*. It was under a juniper tree...a broom-tree (**KJV**). Not only did he have him a place to pout, but he had the *words with which to pout*... "**LORD, just take my life.**"

Doesn't this remind you of another prophet? Remember when Jonah pouted before God? What did he say? He said, "O LORD, please take my life from me."

Both Jonah and Elijah pouted because they had focused their attention on the circumstances and not on the Lord. And because of this they were unhappy and thought all they wanted to do was die!

Jonah pouted and wanted God to take his life because his message of salvation had been accepted by his enemies.

Elijah pouted because his enemy, a heathen woman who needed the salvation of God, was trying to take his life.

I guess any old reason to pout will do!

Do you ever pout? Do you ever pout at God? Or your husband? Or your children? Or your friends? You know, I'd rather someone come and tell me, "You made me so mad and let me tell you why..." and get it all out in the open so I can make things right, than to go around pouting and you never know what you've done to make that person mad.

The fifth thing Elijah did was **he forgot who was in charge**. **Verse 4** says that Elijah said, "**It is enough.**"

I believe what Elijah was saying is,

"Lord, I did this for You. I did that for You. I confronted Ahab for You. I called down fire in Your name. I killed

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all the false prophets for You. After doing all this for You I'm about to be killed by this mean old woman. Enough is enough!"

Who was Elijah to decide that it was enough? Who was Jonah to say it was enough? And who are we to decide it is enough? I believe a lot of relationships could be salvaged and a lot of homes could be saved and a lot of jobs could be kept if we would only acknowledge who's in charge and that it is up to Him to decide when it is enough!

So, Elijah found himself in the valley of despair and he

- 1) focused on his circumstances instead of on God
- 2) abandoned his responsibility
- 3) separated himself from other believers
- 4) and he pouted!

So, I said all to say this. If you're in the valley of despair right now, make up your mind that you're not going to stay there. We don't have to live **in the midst** or **under** the circumstances...God wants us to live **above** them!

Let's see what else happened to Elijah...

Verses 5-8...

Well, Elijah laid down and slept under the juniper tree and an angel woke him up and told him to get up and eat. Well, that certainly wasn't the answer to Elijah's prayer that he was expecting, was it?

I mean, he had just prayed that he would die...and instead of dying, he wakes up with an angel telling him to get up and eat and he did. He ate freshly baked bread and drank from a jar of water.

So, I guess Elijah thought, "Well, I'll just go back to sleep and maybe I won't wake up this time."

But, he did!

The angel of the Lord came again and woke him and fed him. And this time he said, "Get up and eat because you have somewhere you need to go. God isn't ready to take your life. God isn't through with you yet. When God is through with you, He'll take you to heaven in His way.

You've still got places to go and things to do and people to whom to preach and prophesy and you don't have the strength to do it...but God does!"

And **verse 8** tells us he went in the strength of that forty days and forty nights. Forty is always the number of trial and testing.

The flood came because of 40 days and 40 nights of rain.
Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights.

And here Elijah was to go in the strength of the food God had supplied for him for 40 days and 40 nights...because God had a purpose for him to accomplish.

I don't know at our age, how many years any of us have left. But I know if the purpose God has called us to had already been accomplished, He would have taken us all on home to be with Him.

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And since I can see you here in front of me, I believe God still has something for you to do...and for me to do, as well.

Maybe you've been sitting on the sidelines too long. God says, **"Get up and get moving. The journey's too great for you...but not for Me. I'll enable and empower you to fulfill My purposes for you."**

You may say, "What can I do? What is God's purpose for me?" Well, I want to tell you ministry comes many forms.

God's purpose for you may be for you to be a prayer warrior.
God's purpose for you may be for you to be an encourager and comforter to folks.

Maybe God has brought you through a tough time in your life and you see someone else going through a similar situation...maybe God's purpose is for you to go to that person and simply say, "I understand...I've walked in the same place you're walking now."

Verse 9...

Here in these verses we see Elijah going and getting in a cave and living in that cave until one day he heard the voice of God saying,

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Now, I believe **God** knew exactly what Elijah was doing there. God wanted **Elijah** to think about what he was doing there, didn't He? Let's see what Elijah thought...

Verse 10...

Do you believe Elijah is having a pity party? **Of course he was.**

Look at what Elijah was thinking...

He had done great things for God. He had been zealous for God. He had been out preaching and doing all the things God had called him to do and no one but Elijah was doing this...in fact, Elijah was the only man of God left and not only that but Jezebel was mad at him and was seeking his life.

And I want you to see how God responded to this...

Verse 11 (read just the quote from the Lord)...

God didn't say, **"Well, if following after Me has put you out that much, Elijah, I just won't use you anymore."**

No...God simply said, **"Elijah go up and stand on the mountain."**

The Lord God Jehovah was getting ready to demonstrate to Elijah a mighty truth that I believe we can apply to our own lives.

Verses 11-13...

The first thing I want us to see is that **God's work isn't always sensational.**

God told Elijah to go up on the mountain and stand there before Him. But, **verse 11** goes on to say, "Behold the LORD was passing by!"

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Elijah heard a great and strong wind blowing through the mountains. It was such a great and strong wind that it was breaking the rocks in pieces...and Elijah must have thought, "Surely this is the Lord." But, **verse 11** tells us the Lord wasn't in the wind.

Then Elijah saw and felt an earthquake, and Elijah must have thought, "Surely this is the Lord."

Then Elijah saw a fire and Elijah must have thought, "Surely this is the Lord."

But, God wasn't in the wind. And God wasn't in the earthquake. And God wasn't in the fire. Now, there were times in the Old Testament and the New when God was in these things.

Sometimes God's work is sensational.

Sometimes He's in the wind and earthquake and fire business, but most of the time He isn't.

Sometimes God stops the mouths of lions, but sometimes He doesn't. Sometimes God's people were thrown into the fiery furnace and weren't burned nor smelled of smoke...but church history records thousands of people's names who were burned at the stake.

Elijah's ministry up to this point had been very sensational. But, God hadn't called Elijah to a ministry that was to be always sensational. Sometimes God's work is sensational...sometimes it's not.

And God wanted Elijah to just be content and quiet enough to hear the sound of gentle blowing.

There's a little verse over in **Isaiah 31** that has always meant a lot to me.

"And your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left."

And I've always pictured this to mean that God whispers in our ear, "Go this way," or "Go that way." But, in order for you and me to hear that gentle blowing...that word whispered in our ear...we must be quiet and we must not be always looking for the sensational.

Sadly, there are preachers out there today whose entire ministry is built on the "sensational." And they have great numbers of people attending their meetings. WHY? Because the "sensational" feeds the flesh.

And not only do we see that God's work is not always sensational...but we also see that **God's judgment comes on His schedule and not ours.**

Getting back to Jonah once more...remember what God did while Jonah was pouting? He sent a plant to shade him from the hot desert sun, but then God also sent a worm to eat that plant, didn't He? God showed Elijah and He showed Jonah and He also shows us that His judgment comes on His schedule...not ours!

Verses 13-18...

If you look at the response of Elijah in **verse 10** and **verse 14**...they are identical. It's almost as though Elijah had rehearsed these words over and over and over in his mind and they just come pouring out at the drop of a hat!

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What he's really saying is, "Lord, why in the world haven't You done something? I mean, Your altars have been torn down. Your covenant has been forsaken. Your prophets have been killed. I'm the only one left and now they're trying to kill me..."

That's why I'm here in this cave, Lord. I'm just sitting here feeling sorry for myself and wondering why in the world haven't You done something!"

Well, God is going to do something...but He's going to do it in His time and not Elijah's time. God said, "**Now Elijah, I want you to get up out of this cave and take a trip...I want you to go down to Syria.**"

Now, I want you to know this. Syria wasn't any more a friend to Israel back then than they are now. But, sometimes God works in mysterious ways and we don't understand the "whys" and the "wherefores" or the "therefores".

Elijah asked God,
"Why haven't you done something?"

And God said, "**I wasn't ready yet. But I have a rod, Hazeal, who is going to be the rod of My correction against Israel. So you go anoint him king.**

And then I want you to come and anoint Jehu king of Israel. Hazeal and his folks are going to take care of the Israelites, and Jehu is going to take care of Ahab and Jezebel."

And then I want you to anoint Elisha to take your place."

(In fact, the judgment Elijah was fearing from Jezebel would be the very judgment Elijah would bring upon Jezebel through Jehu...and we'll see that next week.)

And then God told Elijah that Elisha would take care of those that Hazeal and Jehu don't get to. We won't see all this happen in our study of **1 Kings**, because it actually doesn't come to pass until **2 Kings**...but it does come to pass!

See, it's always best to leave judgment up to God. God was saying, "**Elijah, you just do what I say, and leave the rest up to Me and all your questions will be answered...but they'll be answered in My timing and in My way.**"

One last thing and we'll be through with **chapter 19**...

God's work is not always sensational...
And God's judgment doesn't always follow our time schedule...

But, finally **God's servants are never really alone.**

Twice, old Elijah said, "God, I'm the only one you've got."

Verses 19-21...

God said, "**Elijah, I've got seven thousand just like you hid off in a cave.**"

The point I'm trying to make is this...
Many times we really do feel all alone serving God.

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Sometimes we feel like we're the only ones serving God at our **work**.
Sometimes we feel like we're the only ones in our **family** serving God.
Sometimes we feel like we're the only ones who really care what God thinks...and really want to see others come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when we feel that way, it's oh so tempting to have a pity party like Elijah, isn't it?

Listen...

You are very important to the work of God. **You really are**. You may not think you do very much but I promise you, you **are** important in the work of God.

But, while you are important to the work of God...**you are not indispensable to the work of God**.

Moses died and the whole nation was dejected...and God said, "**Here's Joshua**."

David died and God said, "**Here's Solomon**."

Paul died and God said, "**Here's Timothy**."

God always has somebody else. You are never alone. And even in those times that you cannot see any **human help** around, you're **still** not alone.

When Stephen was being stoned, he surely didn't have any human help, but he looked and saw the heavens open and the Lord Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God.

(And Stephen's stoning had a huge impact on one man standing by holding the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen. Saul of Tarsus would become Paul the apostle!)

The Lord promised that He would never leave us or forsake us. And He won't.

Chapter 20 tells us how Syria came against Israel. It tells how Syria was defeated. And this wasn't because God had changed His mind.

One reason was because it wasn't yet God's perfect timing for Syria to defeat Israel. He had already ordained who would be the king of Syria who would come against Israel and be victorious and he had not yet come on the scene.

Another reason I believe is because as bad as Ahab was, God, in His amazing and wonderful grace, was extending more and more time to Ahab to repent.

The bottom line is that **chapter 20** spells out the beginning of the end of King Ahab's career.

I believe the life of Elijah speaks to you and me more in his failures than in his successes, don't you? I mean, I don't believe there's a one of us who is in any danger of being called by God to go and raise a widow's son from the dead...nor of being called by God to go against 450 or 850 false prophets and call down fire from heaven.

But, I do believe all of us travel through valleys of despair. I believe all of us feel sorry for ourselves from time to time and think we're the only ones serving God. I want to tell you, **God would be in a heap of trouble if I were the only one He had**.

Even in Elijah's failures he was loved and directed and protected God. And even in our failures He loves and directs and protects us as well.