

Elijah, Part 4, Suicidal Depression

Bible Characters

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Our Scripture text is taken from 1 Kings 19 and that's on page 559.

1 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." 3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. (1 Kings 19:1-3)

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

May we pray.

Lord, help me to extract from this passage of Scripture, the message you want your people to hear this very day, for the sake of Jesus, amen.

Now I want you to notice something at the bottom of the page there, regarding verse 3, where it says, "*Elijah saw.*" It's interesting that Hebrew has—all Hebrew words have what are called three radicals, Larry, Moe, and no... three radicals, and that means that every Hebrew word, whether it's a noun or a verb, has three core letters that make it a certain way, and we know this, that when Hebrew became a dead language, as it did, that the rabbis who believed that the Hebrew text, which was all consonants without vowels, interpretively added dashes and dots above and below the letters because they didn't believe that they should alter God's inerrant, infallible word.

Now, it's interesting, where do we get this alternate reading and it's interesting that the Hebrew word, the three radicals (r'h, ראה) or a form of that verb (yr', ירא), could mean "to be afraid" or could mean "to see."

This is why I believe it should be translated "to be afraid" because the people who knew the Hebrew Bible better than anyone else two centuries before Christ, and who were very competent in Greek, translated that Hebrew word with the Greek word for "fear" (phobeō, φοβέω). I believe that Elijah became afraid, and he ran for his life.

Now let's get this in its context. Think about what's happened. Last Lord's Day, we had our third sermon on Elijah, and we saw how he was victorious on Mount Carmel. Profoundly victorious.

You remember what they'd done, that he and the prophets of Baal, and they were also the prophets of Astarte, Ashtaroath, and they're prophesying, and they did what people do in pagan society and you can look usually behind people cutting themselves to a demonic thing in addition to psychological things. And so, they slashed their bodies till the blood was flowing, but nobody heard them. Nobody responded. And so, Elijah engaged in what is very appropriate at times, though you don't want to do it in Mecca, if you're there, is to mock their God. "Maybe he's on a journey. Maybe he's this." And he even uses a word that means to go to the toilet, "Maybe he's occupied in the bathroom." I mean, can you imagine that? That's what he said.

And so, in response to that, they just go into a deeper frenzy more and more, dancing around the altar, slashing themselves, the blood flows, and nothing happened. And then Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, and we looked at that in light of God's explicit statement that it was in Jerusalem that people were to worship. But nevertheless, God honored it.

And he put 12 stones there representing the united 12 tribes of the sons of Jacob. And then he called on the Lord. He had them pour water on it. He wanted to make sure that they knew he was not pulling a trick on them. And so they poured water, a great deal of water, till it covered everything and ran down the trench and then he called on the Lord in a simple prayer and he said, "Lord, please demonstrate today that you and you alone are Israel's God" (1 Kings 18:36-37).

And God answered with fire from heaven that burned up the sacrifice, that burned up the wood, that burned up the altar, and that consumed all of the water (1 Kings 18:38). And so, the people began to shout, literally using God's proper name, which is Yahweh. "Yahweh, he is God! Yahweh, he is God!" (1 Kings 18:39). And then they put to death the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40).

And after that, what we read is this, verse 41 of chapter 18:

Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.' (1 Kings 18:41).

Could Elijah hear that? That's a word of faith. He spoke into reality what he believed God was saying by faith. There's the sound of rain. Was there a sound of rain at that point? No. But God fulfilled the word of his prophet, and so they go up.

And verse 42:

So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel (And my pastor son-in-law, who's sitting back there this morning because he's on his way to our General Assembly in Memphis, he and I went to Mount Carmel in the year 2000, and we saw this event. We didn't see this event, but we saw this place where all this took place. "Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel"), bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. 'Go and look toward the sea,' he told his servant. And he went up and looked. 'There is nothing there,' he said. Seven times Elijah said, 'Go back.' (1 Kings 18:42-43)

Now I'm struck with something. We often pray according to God's will and don't receive because we don't pray with faith, that's sometimes the case (Mark 6:5), because we pray with sin in our lives, that's sometimes the case (Psalm 66:18-20), but there's also the case we pray and we quit in discouragement when we don't see an immediate answer (Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8; Galatians 6:9). Notice it's seven times, which is the number of perfection in Scripture.

So Elijah has a servant go look seven times. Verse 44:

The seventh time the servant reported, ‘A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.’ (1 Kings 18:44).

Now when you’re on Mount Carmel, you can look out over the Mediterranean Sea. So, this is a cloud arising out of the Mediterranean Sea.

So, Elijah said, ‘Go and tell Ahab, “Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.”’ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:44-45).

Now Jezreel from Carmel is roughly 17 miles away. So, Ahab’s in his chariot, and now look at this, it’s so weird, verse 46:

The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:46).

A 17-mile race, and he outran the chariot. Why? Was this natural? I think it involved natural elements, but it was supernatural. What happened? The power of Yahweh came upon his prophet. “My God is Yahweh.” And that’s why he was able to do it. He outran a chariot. This is amazing. Think of the exhilaration. Think of the power of God on this prophet and how he was able to outrun Ahab’s chariot and beat him to Jezreel roughly 17 miles away.

Now I don’t know about you, but that’s got to be about the most emotionally high thing that could happen to a human being.

I’ve never run in a race, but I used to run 30 miles a week, which is why I have terrible hips and knees today, because I ran on pavement. And when I quit running, guess what? I had the great blessing that in the King James Version it says, “They that trust in the Lord shall be made fat” (Proverbs 28:25).

But just think of how exhilarating this must be. You know, endorphins kick in when you run and so on. And so, he’s got to be high as a kite emotionally at this point. How up can you be? He’s seen miracle after miracle after miracle. God provided for him at the brook Cherith, and the ravens came and brought him food twice a day, meat and bread, and all of that.

Now look at the next verse, which is our text, verse 1 of chapter 19.

Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. (1 Kings 19:1).

Notice Jezebel doesn't go in person. You think she was a bit afraid of Elijah? Oh, yeah. I would have been afraid of Elijah, and any man that could command this, any man that could conquer the worship of Baal, because Baal was a god of fertility, he was a god of weather, he was a god of lightning, and Elijah had spoken the word and said that there will be no rain and there was no rain for three and a half years, and when the rain ended, it was when Israel acknowledged its God, Yahweh, not Baal. And so, Jezebel is afraid of him.

But notice, when people are afraid, they'll shoot you. When people are afraid, they'll say all kinds of threatening things. And look what she says. And you know what? She pronounced a curse on herself and that curse—we'll see in a few weeks—came true. She said:

May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one of them. (1 Kings 19:2).

Now here is this painted woman, a devotee of Baal, her father had been a priest of Baal, and she has made this threat, "May the gods do so to me." What gods? The gods she worshiped. The gods of the Canaanite pantheon. And she said, "May they do so to me and more so if by tomorrow I don't make your life like one of them."

Let me say something to you: fear is the great faith killer. Fear is the great faith killer. We have to guard our hearts against fear because what does fear do? It disarms us. Fear disarms us. What do you do when you're afraid? You need to affirm God's promises, "God has promised me," and stand on those promises, and confess with your mouth the goodness of God, and rebuke fear in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Elijah failed to do it, and he gave into fear, and he's terrified, and he runs, and look at what happens there as we read down further, verse 3:

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah [that's the southern border of Judah,] When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there. [Man, would you have liked to have been Elijah's servant? I bet that poor man was worn out,] and left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." 5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. (1 Kings 19:3-5)

Now I want you to ask yourself this question: what's going on here? What's going on here is that Elijah, giving into fear, has now become suicidally depressed.

What's suicidal depression? Does that mean you're going to take your own life? No. But it means you want to die, and you ask God to take your life.

If you're not a believer, if you believe there's no life after death, you do what a number of people have done over the years, and you take your own life. You know, belief in life after death is a great deterrent to doing insane and stupid things.

And here he is. Elijah is a believer. Elijah knows that Yahweh is the one true God, and there's no other and Elijah doesn't take his own life, but he wants it—he wants to take his life. If he had no fear of God, he probably would have taken his life, just as King Saul did, who fell on his own sword and didn't finish the job (1 Samuel 31:4-6; 2 Samuel 1:6-10). And so here he is, suicidally depressed.

I want you to hold your hand there because we're going to come back there in a moment and turn over to the book of James for a moment. James chapter 5. This is a great truth we need to remember. James chapter 5 and we read these words on page 1,885. Verse 17, "Elijah was a man just like us."

What does that mean? The King James says, "of like passions as we are."

What does that mean? It means I can identify with Elijah. Can you identify with Elijah?

Do you ever get down in the dumps? Do you ever get disappointed in life?

And notice what he says:

He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (James 5:17-18).

And you know, this is in the context of what? What is this passage of Scripture here, James 5:17 and 18, what's the context? What kind of prayer are we encouraged to pray here? Anyone look at it? What precedes this?

Prayer of faith for healing (James 5:14-16). Do you believe that God wants you to be in health?

I believe he wants me to be in health (Psalm 103:1-5; Proverbs 3:5-8).

Do you believe that God wants to give you enough money that you can take care of your own needs and have enough left over to take care of those you're responsible for and give some away?

I believe that (Proverbs 3:9-10).

Do you believe that God wants to bless the work of your hands?

I believe that (Psalm 1:3).

You know, you can't read the Bible from Genesis to the end of Revelation and fail to understand that God's will, **normally, ordinarily**, is that you be healthy, wealthy, and wise. That's God's normal will.

Is there any fine print in the contract? Gotta be careful. You know, you ever sign on all these clicks on the internet? You know, "I've read this, and I agree." You've gotta realize there's some fine print in the contract.

Where do you find the fine print in the contract? Anybody want to venture a guess? All the promises of the book of Proverbs and all the promises throughout Scripture, because God says to us in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20:

As many as may be the promises of God, in Jesus Christ they are yea and in him amen. (2 Corinthians 1:20).

What place can you find the fine print in the contract in the whole Bible? Anybody got a word? Take a guess. Is there a book that was written to show us the fine print in the contract?

It's Job. It's Job. Because Job-like experiences will happen to all of us at times, and we'll be bewildered and we'll say, "O Lord, what's going on here?" And you know the problem with Job is he never knew who the real enemy was. We're never told that Job knew of the existence of Satan because the existence of Satan is revealed in the prologue and in the epilogue, but in the book itself, Job is completely ignorant of this.

You ever gone through—like people get mad at God and they say, "Lord, why are you doing this to me?" As if it's all God, when the reality is that our world is a great contest between Satan and the Lord.

And that's the contest that took place at Mount Carmel because all of the gods of the pagans—they have an existence, but they're not gods. They're demonic spirits under the lordship of Satan himself.

And so, what I want to say is that sometimes in life, we go through a period when we don't understand what's happening, "Why is this happening to me, Lord? Help me! Help me, Jesus! Help me!" We may pray seven times, no answer.

But sooner or later, God will reveal himself, and he'll reveal his plan, and he'll restore you where you were.

The thing is we have to pray in faith, we have to pray trusting the Lord, and remember that Elijah was a man with similar emotional makeup as we have. What does that mean? When we turn back to 1 Kings, chapter 19, and there on page 559, reading at the top of the page:

He came to a broom tree, sat down under it, and prayed that he might die. 'I've had enough, Lord,' he said, 'take my life! I'm no better than my ancestors.' (1 Kings 19:4).

Let me tell you the root of this. You want to know what it is? He had great expectations. He believed that the moment that he was victorious over the prophets of Baal, revival would come to the nation.

Did revival come to the nation? No, it did not. What happened? This wicked queen, this devotee of “where is the prince,” she’s referring to the prince Baal (‘iyzebel, אִיזַבֵּל, meaning “Where is the Prince,” referring to Baal). “Where is Baal?”

And she was angry, and she spewed out angry, hateful words that were designed to destroy Elijah emotionally. You know that in warfare is a great secret, psyops, psychological operations. You want in psychological operations to defeat an enemy in his mind because when an enemy is defeated in his mind, he loses the will to resist. He thinks, “I can’t,” and that’s a great tool. And she spoke these hateful, terrible, negative words.

Do you know that the power of life and death is in the tongue?

“The power of life and death is in the tongue, and they that love it will eat its fruit.” (Proverbs 18:21)

She spoke a word, a negative word, that got inside Elijah and made him afraid, and that fear caused him to forget all of the wonderful, amazing things that God had done for him. They just went out of his mind.

You know one reason why I remember dates? I keep a journal. Why do I keep a journal? Because sometimes I get discouraged. Sometimes I get down in the dumps. Sometimes I say, “Lord, why is this still going on?”

And I’ve got a journal that I started keeping of answered to prayer and it’s fascinating to read that journal, all the answers to prayer that I’ve seen over my life, financial answers, healing answers, all those things. Since I review what God has done in my life, it strengthens my faith.

But Jezebel’s negative word got inside Elijah, and he forgot all that God did, and he prayed a prayer that God never answered. Have you thought about that? What did Elijah ask God to do? “Kill me! Kill me, Lord! Take my life! It’s enough! I can’t take it anymore! Take my life!”

What did God do? If you read further into 2 Kings, you discover how Elijah was one of two people who never died. You know the Lord Jesus died? You know that Adam died, and Eve died, and all these people that we read about in the Bible, they all died, and some people who died were raised to life. But there are two people in the Bible that never died.

Who are those two people? Who are they? Enoch is one (Genesis 5:24), and Elijah is the other. Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11).

Wow, there's more we could say about Elijah, and God willing, we'll say it next week, but I just want you to see something here: the power of faith, the power of speaking our faith out loud, the power of praising God no matter what we're going through, rooted in the assurance of his precious promises, understanding that sometimes we're going to go through a season of drought, we're going to go through a season of great disappointment, and we're going to wonder, "O, Lord, how long? How long? But Elijah prayed, "Lord, take my life." And that's a prayer God never answered. Wow!

You know, I'm so glad that when I pray that God takes my prayers and turns them into a blessing even if they're prayed wrongly.

You know, when I ask God for this, God will give it to me unless he has something better for me. Have you ever thought about that? Where's your faith?

May God grant us to remember Elijah was a man of like passions, like emotional makeup as we are.

You ever get down? You ever get discouraged? You ever say, "Lord, what are you going to do here? When are you going to act?"

Elijah went that way and the big deal here, what really set him off; it wasn't simply the negative words of this witch because she was a worshiper of a demonic god, Baal, it wasn't the words of this witch so much as it was his disappointment in God.

Are you disappointed in God today? Did you dream of some great and wonderful thing only to discover that didn't happen? You know, think of

where Elijah had been. He was there on Mount Carmel. He had seen the great victory of the Lord over the Baals, over the Ashtaroth. He had seen that, and he had seen the miraculous answer to his prayer three and a half years after he had prayed that the heavens would stop to demonstrate that Baal is a fake and a phony god. A demon has reality, but it is not a god. And then three and a half years later, God sends forth rain and proves that the Lord, Yahweh, he is God and only he.

But he thought, “Now we’re going to have national revival. Now we’re going to see people out in the streets turning to the Lord and abandoning their pagan worship.” Have you ever felt that way?

You know, I’ve seen exhilarating moments in my life and I prayed earnestly with great expectation that we would see real revival come because you know and I know that God is judging America, and there’s no hope for the United States of America but God sending real revival, changing the hearts of people so that the masses rise up and trust in the Lord and pursue the Lord. That’s the only hope for America.

And we pray, and we pray with expectation, “Lord, change this nation,” and we have a big prayer meeting, and we do this, and we do that. I’ve been to big prayer meetings where we prayed with great expectation and for one reason or another, it didn’t happen.

I remember when we, in 1997, we brought Billy Graham’s son, Franklin, to Alexandria, Louisiana to hold a crusade, and I was the Ministerial Chairman of that crusade. And the last day of the crusade, I was behind the curtains, and I was pleading with God, “O God, pour out your Holy Spirit in this city of Alexandria, in central Louisiana!”

I was pleading with the Lord earnestly. Nobody could see me. I was behind Franklin Graham, behind the curtains, and I was pleading with God, “Lord, pour out the Holy Spirit; we’re so desperate in central Louisiana!”

And I was deeply disappointed. What impact did that crusade have on our city? Well, some churches grew. Those that had brought people there, those people were turned back over to the churches that had put their name down, that that church had brought them. But you know what?

There was no phenomenal growth in the church of Jesus Christ in central Louisiana in the wake of that.

Was I disappointed? Was I discouraged? Sure. And I think that's what really hit Elijah. He had great expectations that this victory would come, and it didn't. And so, in his discouragement, Satan provides a wicked witch to speak a word of curse into his spirit, and it caused him to have suicidal depression.

I want to address myself to those who may be watching on the internet now.

Have you ever been so depressed that you considered taking your own life? I've buried at least three people who've taken their own lives. I'm going to say something to you that a lot of people won't agree with, but it's this:

If a person takes his or her life, that does not automatically mean they've gone to hell, and I think that's an important truth, because you may have a loved one who has taken his or her life; and I want you to say that taking one's own life will take you to heaven **if you are a real believer** because the Bible makes it crystal clear that no one who has ever really come to Jesus can ever be lost. "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and him who comes to me I will never cast out." (John 6:37 We're preserved in Jesus. We're held in the hollow of the Father's hand and the hollow of the Lord Jesus' hand, and none can pluck them out of our hands, Jesus said:

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one." (John 10:27-30)

So, to die by your own hand is not a ticket to hell but, and this is an important but, **if you're not a believer and you take that action** and think, "I'm going to end the pain in my life," let me describe for you what it's like.

The moment that you fire that bullet into your brain or into your heart or in the case of King Saul falling on his own sword, the moment you do that, instead of the pain disappearing, the pain only intensifies. It gets greater and greater as the darkness begins to come in on you, as you begin to feel

claustrophobic, as you begin to feel alone and desperate. And the pain is searing. The pain that you inflicted on yourself to take your own life is searing. And it grows, and it grows, and it grows, and it grows in a place of suffocating darkness, the outer darkness.

So, I plead with you today, if you're watching this, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to help you. He will help you. All who call on the name of the Lord will be delivered. He will deliver you. He will help you. Call on his name.

And if you live near here or you're watching this and you want to write to me, I will write you back. I will counsel you because there's hope. While I live, *Dum Spiro Spero*, while I breathe, I hope. That's the motto of the state of South Carolina. While I breathe, I hope. While you're breathing God's air right now, call on the name of the Lord and ask him to help you. He'll deliver you.

I want you to know, whomever you are, you may have murdered someone yesterday. You may have committed all kinds of vile acts. You may have stolen a lot of money. Many people may have suffered because of what you've done, but I want to tell you that this day, this very 16th day of June in the year of our Lord 2024, you can be clean today. You can be whole today. You can have a sound mind today. You can walk out of this place or wherever you are, knowing that God reigns, and you can know that wonderful comfort that only those who are Bible-believing Christians know:

All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

I don't know how people survive in a crazy world like this, where there's so much death, so much sickness, so much overpowering evil in every place. I don't know how people survive. I don't know why more people don't take their lives, frankly, because the hope that the believer has is a hope for this world and the world to come, that God will take care of everything I'm facing. He'll feed me. He'll clothe me. He'll hear and answer my prayer.

So come to the Lord Jesus Christ today. He will not turn you away. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," said the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:28).

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would take these words extracted from the life of Elijah, a man just like us, a man who could experience exhilaration one moment and then be in utter despair the next because he's disappointed in you.

Lord, all anger ultimately is anger at you, our disappointment in you. Would you free us today? Would you give us as we sing the closing hymn, reaffirm our own faith in you and your exceeding great and precious promises, and would you grant to us that faith and that repentance that only you by the Spirit of God can give, that we may walk out of here today refreshed and renewed because our God reigns? In Jesus' name, amen.