

Encountering God: Discovering Him in Adversity

1 Kings 19:1-21

Introduction and Background:

Elijah was a prophet of God who proclaimed the word of God during the reign of the wicked king Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. In the previous chapter, we see Elijah going up against the prophets of Baal in a contest to see who the true God is. This is recorded for us in 1 Kings 18:16-46.

Elijah had given a great demonstration of faith in God. While the prophets of Baal whooped, hollered, and maimed themselves, Elijah simply prayed to God and God heard and answered his prayer. Elijah then had the people slaughter the prophets of Baal. This was in part reprisal for Jezebel's killing of the prophets of God, but also death was the penalty for the worship of idols as described in Deuteronomy 13.

Jezebel Threatens and Elijah flees

In 1 Kings 19:1-5a, we have the threat made by Jezebel on the life of Elijah and Elijah's reaction to that threat.

It is amazing that the bold, faithful Elijah so quickly turns tail and runs away when threatened by Jezebel. But it also shows his human nature. Even this great prophet, this great man of faith, had times of doubt and fear just like you and I do from time to time. Elijah flees into the desert and falls down beneath a tree and cries out asking God to take his life. Elijah is depressed because he has stood alone against the wicked prophets of Baal and all it has gotten him is the queen seeking his execution. He feels like he has failed in his mission to turn the hearts and minds of the people back to their God. With Jezebel still essentially in control, he felt it would not be long before she had restored the worship of Baal.

- All the incredible things that God had done to him and through him in chapters 17-18

- God fed him during a drought by having ravens bring him food

- Then He brought Elijah to a widow's house where she only had enough food to make one loaf of bread, and God provided them with a jar of flour and a jar of oil that wouldn't run out.

- When that widow's son died, Elijah prayed to God and brought the boy back to life.

- And then in a challenge to some prophets of a false God, Elijah prays to God, and God sends fire down in order to prove that He is God.

- My guess is that Elijah must have been feeling pretty good about himself.

- I get really excited when I get a strike or a spare when I bowl, so Elijah must have been on like cloud nine.

- But Elijah ends up going from this incredible spiritual high point, to an incredibly low point.

- He has these impulses that lead him away from what God's plan was.

- These impulses that sort of led him astray

- Have your impulses ever led you astray?

- Canoeing on the Clarion River when I had no experience or ability to swim.

- My natural impulse led my wife and I to a place where it was dangerous to be.

- Sometimes, our natural impulses lead us astray

- And I think that's what happened to Elijah

- Because after he had those incredible experiences with God, his impulses led him to a sort of spiritual low point

- In fact, it's such a paradox that many Old Testament scholars try to argue that this chapter is out of place, that it's out of sequence

- Because how could a guy come off of those experiences, and then be in the pits and bummed out in the way that we're going to see that Elijah was

- But I think it's in the right order

- And it just shows us how human Elijah really is

- That as a spiritual giant, he still suffered spiritual high and low points

- And that speaks directly to my life because that's where I'm at

- I often describe my own spiritual life as a sort of roller-coaster ride

- That it's this exciting ride – where you go up, and then you're dropped down, only to go back up again

- It's this series of ups and downs, and you just hold on for the ride
- And today, I want to spend some time looking with you at the roller-coaster ride that Elijah experienced
 - We will look at what Elijah's impulses were, and how God redeemed those impulses
- I hope that what we can do today is be real with ourselves, and identify with Elijah, and the situation that he was in.
- But my desire is that we wouldn't leave here in in the bottom.
- That we could see how even at our low points, God wants to redeem us, and we could leave here with the hope that He wants to bring us right back up again because He's got bigger plans for us than letting us just sit in the pit.

God Takes Care of Elijah

In 1 Kings 19:5-8, we find God taking care of Elijah. God sent his angel to comfort and strengthen Elijah for the rest of his journey. He was awakened to find bread and water. This gave him strength for his journey to Mount Horeb. He would travel for 40 days and 40 nights. This is the same time mentioned for Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18) and for Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2,11).

God provides for the needs of his people. This reminded me of the manna that fell from heaven for the Israelites when they were wandering in the desert. It also reminded me of Jesus words from Matthew 6:25-34 that if we seek first the kingdom of God, all these things will be given to us as well.

Elijah's Impulse: TO GIVE INTO THE ENEMY'S PLANS

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah. She said, "May the gods strike me dead if by this time tomorrow I don't take your life the way you took the lives of Baal's prophets."... Then Elijah walked for a whole day into the desert. He sat down under a bush and asked to die. "I have had enough, LORD," he prayed. "Let me die. I am no better than my ancestors." 1 Kings 19:2,4 (GWT, NCV)

- Rather than trusting in who God is and in His plans, Elijah wanted to give into the plans of his enemy

- Somehow Elijah seemed to have forgotten how God had already delivered Him

- He had a sort of memory lapse of what God had already done

- And instead of trusting in the one who had delivered him so many times before, he instead decided to trust his own impulse

- His impulse that said he was tired of being the only one standing up for God

- His impulse that said he couldn't escape Jezebel

- His impulse that said that he needed to just give up, that he had enough

- These words that Elijah says to God are so true for a lot of us today

- My guess is that there's a lot of us in here who have muttered those words, "I've had enough Lord"

- You're strapped financially, and at the same time your mortgage payment is due, the rain creates a leak in your roof, and you have to get a new roof

- You don't have enough money for both, and you sort of desperately think, "I've had enough Lord"

- You're kids are driving you crazy – you've done everything you can to raise them as best as you know how, but they're being totally rebellious, disrespectful, and their following a path with their lives that you know will lead to life pain

- And after another fight with them, you cry out to God out of frustration, "I've had enough Lord"

- Or maybe you're like me, and you take too much on your plate sometimes. You agree to do too many things. And you want it all to be done to perfection, but you don't have the time or the energy to do it all, and you stress yourself out because not only are you working beyond your capacity, but none of it is getting done well.

- And as you are tired and stressed out, you just sort of whisper to God, "I've had enough Lord"

- If we had the time, we could easily take all morning to go to each of you individually and ask you, "Where is it that you've had enough?"

- What's going on in your life where you feel like you just can't take it anymore?

- I want to encourage you to go ahead and write it down in your notes
- For you personally, where it is that you've had enough
- And I want to tell you that, this is the area that Satan wants to attack the most

Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (NLT)

- The enemy is looking for these weakness in your life in order to tell you, "You can't trust God, just give up"
- Satan wants us to believe that this low place is where it all ends.
- That once we get stuck in the pit there's no way out.
- But that's not at all what God's plan is.
- Even though Elijah wanted to give into the enemy, God has something much bigger in store for him.

God's Redeeming Plan: TO CAUSE A REVOLUTION

- God had plans for Elijah that were bigger than just allowing him to die
- He didn't want him to live in the bottom where he sort of wallowed to God that he had had enough
- God wanted Elijah to move out of that place of self-pity, and to actually literally cause a revolution

Anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, as king of Israel. 1 Kings 19:16a

- This may seem insignificant, but it's actually a big deal.
 - God wants Elijah to change the king of Israel.
- He wants Elijah to cause a revolution in Israel by placing a new king in power.

- This wasn't the first time, or the last time that God has used someone to cause a revolution – to actually change a nation.

“Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city,” they shouted. Acts 17:6b (NLT)

- All Paul and Silas had been doing was teaching about Jesus.
- That the Kingdom of God was for everyone.
- And that there was healing for the broken and acceptance for the outcasts
- That Jesus had died for their sins, and had been brought back to life, so that they could have a new life in Him
- And they said, “This teaching is turning the world upside down. It’s causing a revolution”
- And I believe that God wants to do the same through you and through me
- He wants to move us out of the place we find ourselves in, in order to bring about revolution in people’s lives.
- He wants to have genuine Jesus followers who are honest enough to be able to say “I’ve had enough Lord”
- But who are also courageous enough to bring the life changing revolution of Jesus to the world.
- Elijah sunk even further into the pit with his next impulse.

Elijah’s Impulse: TO BE REWARDED FOR HIS EFFORTS...TO BE IMPORTANT

“Take my life! I’m no better than my ancestors.”...“LORD God of Armies, I have eagerly served you. The Israelites have abandoned your promises, torn down your altars, and executed your prophets. I’m the only one left, and they’re trying to take my life.” 1 Kings 19:4b, 10 (GWT)

- Do you hear the almost whining in Elijah’s voice?
- He tacked on to the reason of wanting to die because he wasn’t any greater than those who came before him.
- And then he gives this sort of expectation to God.

- He's telling God all that he has done for Him, almost as if to say, "what am I getting out of it?"

- Do you realize how absurd this expectation is for Elijah?

- That God should actually be in his debt.

- That somehow, he has done more for God, than God has ever done for Him, and that God owes him something.

- In my experience of working with teenagers and their parents, I know that this is one of the most frustrating tensions in their relationships sometimes.

- Where any time that a teenager does something for their parents, they have a sort of expectation that they should get something out of it.

- And in those moments is when parents tend to respond by saying something like, "I was in labor for 26 hours with you...that's your payment"

- or, "I give you a place to sleep, food and clothes. That's your payment"

- How many of you have ever used arguments like that with your children?

- Because to you, it seems absurd that with all you've done for your child, that when they do what you ask them to that they should expect something out of it.

- Some parents decide to be gracious and give them something anyhow.

- But the parent is not in the child's debt just because they mowed the lawn.

- But how often do we have those expectations of God?

- "Well, I prayed like you told me to, and so you better answer my prayers"

- "I'm giving 10% to the church like you've commanded, so how are you going to compensate for me financially"

- "I'm giving up my day to help the poor, you'd better make it worth my while"

- How often do we do something that God expects us to do, only expecting Him to do something for us in return?

- That's exactly where Elijah was – he had an expectation of how God would reward him because of what he had done for God

- But God again had a different plan

God's Redeeming Plan: FOR ELIJAH TO EVALUATE HIMSELF

Then the LORD spoke his word to Elijah. He asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:9b

We see the interaction between God and Elijah. God first asks him what he is doing there. God did not send him there and apparently Elijah had not taken time to inquire of the Lord what he should do, he just fled to Horeb. Elijah answers God by saying that he had been zealous for the Lord and that Israel had rejected God and put to death all of the prophets of God and that he was the only one left.

- We know that this question is important because God actually asks Elijah it twice.
- And when you are reading the Bible, if the author wants to tell you that something is important, they will usually repeat it.
- And so we find this incredibly important question that God asks Elijah twice.
- He asks him, "What are you doing here?"
- And Elijah actually responds with the passage above where he tells God all that he has done for him with a sort of expectation of what he's going to get in return
- But that's not the answer God is looking for, and so He asks Elijah again
- Because I think God wants Elijah to realize that he's not there for his own personal gain
- He's not there because God is in his debt and needs to reward him
- God asks him this question in order to get Elijah to rethink these expectations he has of God.
- To realize that God is not in his debt, but that he is so much more in God's debt.
- And to remember that his life isn't about what he can get from God, but what he can give to God, and do for God.
- And this is a huge misconception amongst Christians today.
 - Where we want to know what we get from God.
- If I do this for God, what's in it for me?

- If I serve in the church, what am I going to get out of it?
- But God is calling us to examine our motives.
- And to ask ourselves if we're serving for the sake of being rewarded, or if we're doing it because God has done so much for us, and this is the only way we know how to respond.
- If we clean the bathrooms, we are not doing it for the church, for Pastor, or for recognition
- It is Jesus' bathroom and we are cleaning it for Him!

- - Another impulse of Elijah's was to run away

Elijah's Impulse: TO RUN AWAY

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. 1 Kings 19:3a (NIV)

- Now this might actually seem like it makes sense
 - That someone wants to kill Elijah, so he runs away in order to save his life
- I identify with that, because any time that someone wanted to get in a fight with me when I was younger, I would take off.
- It's sort of the Forrest Gump syndrome
 - Do you remember before Forrest when off to Vietnam, his mom told him that if he got into trouble, to just run.
 - And that's what he did.
 - It became a sort of coping mechanism for Forrest.
 - That whenever he couldn't handle life, he would run away.
 - Elijah is in a place that he doesn't want to handle.
 - Remember what he cried out to God, "I've had enough"
 - So, rather than facing a tough situation, Elijah takes the easy way out, and runs away.

- That's such a common response today
 - That when your marriage gets tough, you leave it, you just take off.
 - You and your boss are having different opinions, so you quit.
- You're a kid living in your parent's home, and you don't like the rules they give you, you file to be emancipated.
- There are more and more suicides of high school students who wanted out because they just couldn't handle life any more.
- It's just considered a normal part of life now, that when things get tough, you find a way out.
- - Elijah didn't want to face his problem.
 - It was so much easier for him to run away.
- Here is the bottom line: "God doesn't always call us to do what is easiest"
- And so, God had a different plan for Elijah
- When Elijah wanted to run away, God wanted to bring him back to where he had veered off track.

God's Redeeming Plan: TO BRING ELIJAH BACK TO WHERE HE HAD VEERED OFF TRACK

The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 1 Kings 19:15 (NIV)

- God is asking Elijah to take responsibility for departing from God's plan.
- God is calling him to go back to the place where he strayed from God's plan before he can go forward.
- Before Elijah can move on to what God has for him to do, he has to go back to the place where veered off track of God's plan.
- This is actually a pretty common practice amongst people going through 12 step programs.
- The idea of having to take responsibility for where you've wronged others, and going back to take responsibility for where you've veered off track in your life

- - One of the character defects that addicts often describe to themselves, but which I believe is universally human is the feeling of being a victim. By first identifying our problems in relationships and our part in them, then by making a list of those we had harmed, and then making amends to them – we pretty much clear ourselves of the idea that the world is “doing it to us”

- As long as we are a victim, we can excuse all kinds of bad behavior on our part. “I only drink because my boss picks on me all the time”, “I only had the affair because my wife doesn’t understand me.” It’s only when we begin to take personal responsibility for our choices in the past, present, and future, that we are able to be free.

- God’s plan for Elijah is that he could take responsibility for having veered off the track of God’s plan.

- That he doesn’t place the blame on Jezebel for wanting to kill him

- Or even on God for not taking care of him in the way he thought God should

- He was the one who chose to veer off track of God’s plans, no one made him do it, it was a choice that he made.

- God makes Elijah go back the way he came before he can continue forward with the plans that God has for him.

Elijah’s Impulse: AN EXPECTATION OF GOD TO MOVE IN THE EXTRAORDINARY

See 1 Kings 18:20-40

- Tell the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal

- Elijah taunts the prophets (vs. 27) “You’ll have to shout louder than that,” he scoffed, “to catch the attention of your god! Perhaps he is talking to someone, or is out sitting on the toilet, or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!”

- He had them dump 12 barrels of water onto the altar that Elijah made

- Elijah prayed a simple prayer “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make known today that you are God in Israel and that I’m your servant and have done all these things by your

instructions. 37 Answer me, LORD! Answer me! Then these people will know that you, LORD, are God and that you are winning back their hearts.”

- Elijah had gotten used to God moving in extraordinary ways

- And my guess is that part of the reason that Elijah is in the pits here is because when Jezebel wanted to kill him Elijah probably just assumed that God would move in the extraordinary in order to save him

- Like God had done so many times in the past

- But God didn't, and so Elijah ran.

- But, like every other time, God had a different plan for Elijah.

God's Redeeming Plan: FOR ELIJAH TO SERVE HIM IN QUIET, ROUTINE, HUMBLE OBEDIENCE TO HIS WILL

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. 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. 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NLT)

God then tells Elijah to stand on the mountain because he was about to pass by. First, there was a great wind that tore through the mountains and shattered the rocks, but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Third, there was a fire, but God was not in the fire. Finally, there was a gentle whisper. Elijah went out to hear God. The voice again asked Elijah what he was doing there. Elijah gave the same answer once again, but this time with a different tone in mind. The first answer was almost an accusation that God had left him to face the enemy alone. The second answer reaffirms the truth, but acknowledges that God had been with him all along.

God is mighty and powerful. He had demonstrated his power in the showdown with the prophets of Baal and now he is showing his power in the wind, earthquake, and fire. But God's voice was quiet and gentle. This made me think of Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

- Elijah had been looking for God in these huge ways, God showed up in a gentle whisper.
- And Elijah had to learn that God doesn't always show up in the huge, life shattering ways.
 - But that sometimes God shows up in the quiet, routine of life.
 - And for me, that is so relieving.
- Because I tend to be the person who thinks that if God is a part of something that I'm doing, that it's going to be in the windstorm or the earthquake that He's going to move
- And when I expect to see God do something big and He doesn't, I get bummed out.
- I decided that I am going to create a file in the back of my file cabinet that I am going to label, "WHY" – to remind me why I'm in ministry.
- And every time that I get an encouraging note or letter, I will put it in there.
 - Recently, I was reading through some of those notes.
- And I realized that not one person said something about a big event that I had put on.
- Most people wrote about things that I wouldn't ever have thought about.
- I recall one person who I had only had 1 conversation with years ago wrote me a note to tell me that even though we had only really talked that one time, that I had left a huge impact on her life.
- And as I was reading these notes, I wasn't realizing how great I am, but that God moves and works in my life during what I perceive as ordinary moments.
- But I realize that every ordinary moment has the potential to become a supernatural moment, if we let God work in it.
- And so, God wants to work through us as we serve Him and glorify him through the routine of our day.
- We've got to learn to look for God working in the quiet, ordinary parts of our day.

Elijah's Impulse: TO BE ALONE

- He wanted to sort of sulk in his own misery

When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there.

1 Kings 19:3b (NIV)

- For Elijah, the benefit of being alone is that no one is there to speak truth into his life.

- That no one's going to tell him that he's veered off track in his life.

- He can sort of sulk in his own misery, and no one's going to tell him that he's being lame.

 - And so he can sort of just stay in that quarry of misery and depression.

- Withdrawing from others is actually a very common reaction for people struggling with depression.

- Depressed people will often cancel some of their favorite activities, they won't return phone calls, and they'll do whatever it takes in order to avoid being with other people.

- And this is Elijah's impulse

 - To go into this sort of withdrawal from others

 - So that he can be alone and sort of sulk by himself

- But again, that wasn't at all God's plan.

In 1 Kings 19:15-18, God gives Elijah his further instructions. Elijah's time had not yet come and his mission as God's prophet was not complete. God told him to anoint the next political and spiritual leaders of His kingdom. He was to return the way he came and anoint Hazael king over Aram and Jehu king over Israel. He was also to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet.

God also told him that there would be a remnant of faithful Israelites, who had not bowed down to Baal, numbering 7000. It is amazing that Elijah thought that he alone was standing for God, and there were over 7000 that had remained faithful! Sometimes we feel like we are alone in the world, but we must first remember that God is with us and second that we are not alone in our faithfulness to God.

God's Redeeming Plan: FOR ELIJAH TO INVEST IN SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE

Anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abel Meholah as prophet to take your place...Elijah found Elisha, son of Shaphat. Elisha was plowing behind 12 pairs of oxen. He was using the twelfth pair. Elijah took off his coat and put it on Elisha...Then he left to follow and assist Elijah.

1 Kings 19:16b, 19, 21b

Elijah finds Elisha plowing in the field and anoints him to be the next prophet of God. Elisha asks to go and say goodbye to his family. Elijah rebukes him in away because these "goodbyes" could often last for weeks. Elisha slaughters a yoke of oxen and gives a feast for Elijah and then bids his family goodbye and leaves to begin his "apprenticeship" to Elijah.

- When the only thing that Elijah could think about was how horrible his life was
 - God wanted him to begin thinking about someone else.
- Because here's the reality, and I think this is incredibly important, so if you hear nothing else today, hear this...
- You only stay down as long as you are focused on yourself.
- When you take the time to invest in someone else's life your life becomes bigger than yourself because you're leaving a legacy.
 - Example: Ripples in a pool from throwing a rock in.
 - Think about someone who made a difference in your life and they are no longer around, perhaps they have gone on to Glory.
- "But you're still feeling the ripples"
- Are you taking the time in your life to invest in someone else?
 - It takes a huge risk
- You might not think that you're ready to do it

- The reality is that as long as you are one step ahead of someone else, then you're ready
- And I want to encourage you today to take that risk and begin to pray for and look for someone you can invest in
- Get involved in children's ministry, youth ministry or men's and woman's ministry, prison ministry, Trader ministry...
 - Bereavement Ministry, Divorce Care, Lay Counseling, Recovery Ministry, etc. are areas that are needed.

Elijah Ultimately Learned that GOD CARES ENOUGH ABOUT YOU TO MEET YOU WHERE YOU'RE AT, BUT LOVES YOU TOO MUCH TO LEAVE YOU THERE

- God met Elijah in his low point
 - When he was in the pits
- But God didn't want to leave Elijah there
- Not the 8 easy steps to defeating depression
 - Or the 5 simple ways to cure the blues
- But the reality that when you are at your lowest, God will meet you there
- And He wants you to trust Him enough to allow Him to take you out of your lowest place and misery
 - Will you trust Him enough to allow Him to do it?

Conclusion:

We have seen Elijah, the prophet of God, fleeing for his life, falling into a depression and despair, observing the power and might of God, hearing the quiet voice of God, and returning to continue his ministry for the Lord.

We have discovered that God cares for his people and provides for their necessities.

We saw that God often speaks to his people in quiet tones and whispers.

We have learned that we are never alone when standing up for God; even if all of mankind falls away, God is still with us.

- Let me leave you with this last thought...

Final Thought:

God has a plan for us that is bigger than ourselves. Will we give into our own impulses, or follow His redeeming plan?

Pray and allow God to take you out of your adversity...

Just tell Him where you're at...be honest with Him...and let Him know that you want to trust Him to be with you and ultimately deliver you out of the pit.