

## “BENEATH THE JUNIPER TREE

Read 1 Kings 19:1-9a

Have you ever wanted to give up? If so, you're not alone. At a low point in his life, the prophet Elijah felt the same. Slumping beneath a juniper tree, he said, **“I have had enough, LORD. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors,”** 1 Kings 19:4.

How could Elijah sink into such despair? He was a prophet of God. His very name expressed confidence in the Almighty—ELIYAH in Hebrew, meaning “My God is Jehovah.” Yet, this was the same prophet who ran for his life from wicked Queen Jezebel; and prayed for death while lying beneath a juniper tree in the desert. Why?

Elijah was a great prophet; but he was also a human being with human weaknesses and frailties. James wrote, **“Elijah was a man just like us,”** James 5:17.

Frankly, I find this very comforting—not Elijah's weakness but his humanity; the fact that he needed God as much as we do. When things did not go as Elijah expected, he gave up. He thought “what's the use?” But we do the same, don't we?. One comment from Queen Jezebel terrified Elijah. One comment from a doctor, *“It's cancer;”* or from a spouse, *“I want a divorce;”* or from an employer, *“You're fired;”* can terrify us. So, when we find ourselves slumped beneath a ‘juniper tree,’ what should we do?



### Remember What God Has Done For You in the Past

When depressed, did Elijah remember what God had done for him in the past? Honestly, I don't know. If he remembered, he may have brushed the past aside as irrelevant to his personal circumstances. Regardless, while we hurry to criticize Elijah, are we not like him in this regard too? In the middle of some crisis, some need, have we not forgotten God's past dealings with us; or considered His past dealings irrelevant to our current circumstances? As a result, we run. We hide. We slump beneath a juniper tree, wondering who will help us, and insisting no one can.

When lying beneath our juniper tree, we should be asking: “Has God ever failed me in the past? Has there been one day when God has not fed or clothed me, provided for me, or kept my heart beating the 115,200 times it beats each day? And if things have not gone as I expected, hasn't God always had a purpose in this too—whether saving me from my own foolishness, or giving me a far greater resolution than I could have requested or imagined? So, am I going to lie here beneath this juniper tree, feeling sorry for myself? Or am I going to get up, brush myself off, and live the confident, triumphant life God gave me in Jesus Christ?”

In fact, more than anything else we should remember what God has done for us in Christ. For if God did not withhold the life of His own Son, but sacrificed Him to atone for our sins—will He withhold any other blessing from us; a loaf of bread, a change of clothes, a source of income; a

happy marriage? No. Focusing on God's past dealings with us will empower us to stop asking "what if" and to start confessing "no matter what."

### Remember to Eat

As Elijah lay beneath his juniper tree, an angel of the LORD told him, **"Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you,"** 1 Kings 19:7. So, Elijah ate the food God provided, was strengthened by it, and enabled to complete his journey from the juniper tree to Mount Sinai.

Surely, there is a lesson here for us. When depressed, people often stay away from church. They say, "I just don't feel like moving, listening, praying, singing, or being around other Christians." While this is understandable, it is not advisable. Staying away from church only feeds our depression, not our faith. Indeed, when we stay away from God's Word, we are staying away from that which the Savior called "the one thing needed;" and what Paul described as "the power of God for salvation."

If you are depressed, you absolutely need to feed on God's Word. So, leave your juniper tree behind and go to church. Or, if you can't leave your juniper tree, take it with you to church. Overcome it with another tree; the tree on which the Son of God died to save you from your sins.

### Remember That God is Working

Elijah's basic premise was: "LORD, I did my part; but You failed to do Yours." Or in Elijah's own words: **"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, broken down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too,"** 1 Kings 19:10, 14.

What was wrong with Elijah's assessment? It wasn't factual. Elijah was not the only prophet of God remaining in Israel. According to 1 Kings 18, a man named Obadiah had hidden one hundred prophets of God in caves. Elijah knew this, but in his depression he may have felt alone—the only person living with his kind of problems. But Elijah was wrong about something else too. Unknown to him, even when everything and everyone seemed to be out of control, God was quietly working through the "still, small voice of the Gospel," accomplishing His great purposes.

And so God told a surprised Elijah: **"I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him,"** 1 Kings 19:18. In other words, there is never a time when we have a valid reason for sitting beneath a juniper tree, thinking, "Sharing God's Word with others is not worth the effort." It is worth the effort, because Almighty God is always working through His Word; always building His Church; always controlling the world; always accomplishing His great purposes for our lives.

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