

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**1 Kings 19:1-8** *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." <sup>3</sup> Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. <sup>4</sup> But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." <sup>5</sup> And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." <sup>6</sup> And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. <sup>7</sup> And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." <sup>8</sup> And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.*

There's a mysterious tombstone at Lockehill Cemetery in San Antonio, TX that marks the final resting place of one Grace Llewellen Smith. The mysterious aspect of this tombstone is that there is no birth or death date inscribed, instead there's this epitaph: *"Sleeps, but rests not. Loved, but was loved not. Tried to please, but pleased not. Died as she lived—alone."* Doing a little digging into her personal history, you can find out that she was married a couple times, but both marriages ended in divorce. In her later years, she lived alone, and then she died alone in a lonely motel room. I would guess that the epitaph on her tombstone was one she had written herself to sum up her own life: *"Sleeps, but rests not. Loved, but was loved not. Tried to please, but pleased not. Died as she lived—alone."*

Do you ever find yourself feeling like Grace Smith must have felt?—you wake up in the morning, but feel as tired as ever, unable to rest your weary mind; you work hard at being kind and loving and generous, but no one seems to notice or appreciate it; you are surrounded by people, but you still feel all alone because no one seems to care about you? If so, not only do you have something in common with Grace Smith, you might also have something in common with the Prophet Elijah.

He also was a man who struggled through discouragement and despair. In fact, in our text, he despaired so much that he wanted God to take his life from him. Perhaps you have found yourself pleading with God for the same at different times in your life. Nevertheless, God's answer to Elijah's despair was not to take his life from him, far from it. Instead, God offered Elijah the cure for discouragement, the same which He brings to you today. So, if you've found yourself feeling like Grace Smith or even like Elijah the Prophet, listen up, because in the words of our theme:

## **God Has the Cure for Discouragement**

Looking inward – we find despair leading to death

Looking upward – we find hope leading to life

Now, if you compared your life to Grace Smith's you would maybe find a lot of similarities. But when you think about the Prophet Elijah's life, it would likely seem that you have nothing in common almost at all. When you read about his life in the Old Testament, he seems more like a superhero than an ordinary person. He had a difficult commission: Preach to the unbelieving Northern Kingdom of Israel. And whereas you or I might balk at such a calling, he seemed to have *incredible* physical and spiritual stamina for the work. While hundreds of the Lord's prophets were systematically hunted down and killed by evil Queen Jezebel, Elijah continued on preaching. When God sent a devastating drought, Elijah camped out by a stream and survived on bread brought to him by ravens. When the

brook dried up, Elijah did not panic, but trusted the Lord's word and went to a village where he stayed with an impoverished widow and her son who were resigned to death. By the Lord's gracious working, during the whole time in their house, the jar of flour and the jug of oil were never exhausted. During this time, Elijah had prayed that the Lord would not send rain so that the people would return to God, and God did not send rain. Then Elijah prayed that God would send the rain, and God ended the drought. It really is a life fitting a superhero comic book and doesn't seem to resemble mine at all.

But as impressive as all of these events were, they paled in comparison to the showdown on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of the false god Baal. That's the event which immediately precedes our text this morning. King Ahab was the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the time, and he married a woman named Jezebel, a Phoenician princess from the rival kingdom of Sidon. She was an idol worshipper, and she went so far as to influence Ahab into making the worship of Baal the state religion of Israel. So, a nation that existed only because the *Jehovah God* had chosen them and led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness and blessed them in miraculous ways was now killing the prophets of God and mandating a religion which practiced even the sacrifice of children.

So, Elijah, that superhero prophet, he appeared at that epic showdown on Mount Carmel. 450 prophets of Baal on the one side and Elijah on the other. Outnumbered and unwelcome though he was, Elijah did not give up. He stood toe-to-toe with them and challenged them to a contest to prove once and for all who was the true God. All day long the prophets of Baal pleaded for Baal to hear them and answer with fire, but nothing happened. Then Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, had gallons of water poured over the altar and sacrifice, called on the Lord, and fire from heaven incinerated not only the sacrifice, but the stones and dirt, and licked up the water in the trench around the altar. The people were awestruck. They threw themselves to the ground saying over and over, "**The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!**" (1 Kings 18:39). But Elijah was still not done. He had the 450 prophets of Baal executed, and he finished the day by tucking his long cloak into his belt and running ahead of King Ahab's chariot all the way to the king's summer palace in Jezreel. Again, not a life that I could seemingly claim to have anything in common with at all.

But here's where the commonalities start to surface. We pick up there with the first verses of our text, "**Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."** She was threatening his life, "I'm going to kill you, Elijah." And what's the response of this superhero prophet? Does he go confront her face-to-face similar to that epic showdown on Mount Carmel? Does he point to the evidence of that confrontation and stand firm on the resolve that "**The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!**" No, he doesn't. We find his reaction in verse 3: "**Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there."**

I might be reading between the lines a bit, but I wonder what Jezebel's real aim was. Was it really to kill Elijah? I question that, because if that had been the case, surely, she could have killed him right away. After all, she sent a messenger to him to deliver the message. I'm quite certain she could have sent a detachment of soldiers with the messenger to finish him off right then and there. Was that her objective? Or was her objective to discredit Elijah? To force the man who had stood so resolutely in His convictions that the LORD was God only to then turn and run from those convictions, causing the people who had made that same declaration at Mount Carmel to see Elijah's wavering faith and start to doubt once more. If *that* was her objective, it sure seems like she was successful. For after proving that the LORD alone was God, now Elijah ran away in fear, sending mixed messages to the people.

And boy, do I see the family resemblance there between myself and Elijah. How often don't we do the same? When we go to church on Sunday, our visible public confession being that we believe what is being taught here, that we are Christians by the grace of Jesus Christ. But then what about Monday through Saturday? Do our daily lives—at work, during our leisure time, driving in the car—does that line up with our Sunday morning confession? Or are we running far from it? What about our marriage vows? When we stand before the Lord at the altar and promise to be faithful in all things until death, what do our daily marital practices resemble? Is it even approaching faithfulness? Or do we run from those promises into the arms of lust and anger and separation? We're a lot like Elijah here, and while our faithlessness is certainly damaging to ourselves, think about what it proclaims to those around us.

Elijah must have realized how foolish he had been, because here's what happened next. Picking up at verse 4: ***"He himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*** Kind of a strange thing to run away from death at the hand of Jezebel only to then beg for death from the hands of Jehovah God. Yet, listen to his reasoning, ***"I am no better than my fathers."*** He saw the burdens and responsibilities to which he had been called as God's prophet, and at the same time he knew all too well his weaknesses. He couldn't help but stare straight at his failure, and the burden looked far heavier than his ability to carry it. So, he was ready to give up. ***"Now, O LORD, take away my life."***

This is how the devil operates, isn't it? In the midst of temptation, he will try to convince you, *"It's ok, it's not a big deal, you can always repent later."* But after the law strikes at your heart and you feel the guilt of what you've done, the devil suddenly changes his tune and says, *"Look at what you did! There's no hope for you. There's no retreat. You can't repent of that, God doesn't want you anymore, you can't go back now!"* My favorite Disney movie is *"The Lion King."* In it, Simba's dad dies, and his evil uncle Scar tells lies to Simba and convinces him, *"YOU DID THIS! You killed your father, everyone's going to blame you, there's no going back now."* And so, Scar says to Simba, *"Run away, and NEVER come back."* And Simba does run away.

As for Elijah, staring straight at himself and his own weakness as he was, Elijah ran away. And he had become convinced it would be better for the Lord to just kill him then and there. He was discouraged. He was distraught. He saw nothing but despair and death. And at those times in our lives when we are stuck staring in at ourselves, at our disappointments, at our weaknesses, at our sins, at our failures—we will find nothing other than what Elijah found, despair leading to death. Looking inward, we might even convince ourselves that we've fallen too far, that there's no going back, and that there is no forgiveness for us. Looking in at ourselves will ONLY reveal these lies.

**Looking inward – Elijah found only despair leading to death. *"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*** Elijah prays for death, and Jehovah God gives him life. He does not put him out of his misery and feed *him* to the worms. Instead, He feeds *him*. He feeds him with two meals that sustain him miraculously for 40 days. Verse 5: ***"And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God."***

Elijah prays that Jehovah God would kill him, and ironically, Jehovah God would not kill him, ever. He refuses to let him die at all. When you think about the rest of the life of Elijah, the man who prayed

for death, when God determined his days were complete, the Lord brought him directly up into heaven with a whirlwind and the chariots of fire, so that Elijah, the man who prayed for death, might never even taste it. There we go again, superhero Elijah, whose life doesn't seem to resemble mine at all. Even in the hour of death, my life will have nothing in common with his.

Except that's just not true. In James' epistle, the Holy Spirit testifies about this superhero prophet. James writes, ***“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”*** (James 5:17-18) There's that miracle again, which I referenced earlier, Elijah prays for *no* rain and then *for* rain, and God listens to him each time. But hear again what the Holy Spirit declares about through the mouth of James, ***“Elijah was a man with a nature [just] like ours.”*** God declares that there is no difference between you and me and this superhero prophet. He was just like us! So how did he accomplish all of these things? It wasn't because of who *Elijah* was. When Elijah looked at inward at who *Elijah* was, he despaired and wanted to die. But looking upward, Elijah had hope and He had life. Looking upward He saw the God *was* able to accomplish all of these things.

When we focus on ourselves and our disappointment and our weakness and our lot in life, again, **looking inward – we find only despair leading to death. But looking upward, we find hope leading to life.** For looking upward, we see the God who does not desire that we should die, who does not desire that we or any should perish, but that we turn to Him in repentance. (cf. 2 Peter 3:9) And staring straight at our sins, and looking up to God and repenting of them, He is faithful and just to forgive us. (sf. 1 John 1:9) Even if the devil has you convinced that you've gone too far, that there's no going back, God declares that rather than death, He gives you life. And indeed, *you* shall never die. For whoever lives and believes in Jesus Christ shall never die. (John 11:26)

Looking upward, you can see the true superhero Prophet. The one who went into the wilderness for His own 40 days and 40 nights without any food to sustain Him. There He battled against Satan and emerged victorious. He went up to Elijah's old stomping grounds and declared the reign of God with men. He faced the powers that be, and He did not run away. He went to Jerusalem and was opposed, and God did *not* spare His life. But He was faithful unto death, even the death on the cross. All of this, for you. And by now, you obviously know this true superhero prophet is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and your personal Savior. Through Him, God has acted decisively and has called you into His Holy reign. Through Him, you've been called to be the people of God. Through Him, you've been given life which will never end.

And you know what that means, don't you? It means that whatever happens in this life, whatever we see in ourselves that disappoints, that discourages, that leaves us in despair—it cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Rather than looking inward and finding only that which leaves us defeated due to our sin, let us look upward to the One who has given the victory over our sin. Look up to the one who has made it so that your tombstone epitaph doesn't need to speak about unrequited love or dying alone. Rather, yours can say, *“Sleeps, and truly rests. Deserved NOT love, but was loved indeed. Tried to please, and was found pleasing in the sight of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Died as he/she lived—together with the Lord.”* These words are true of you even now, so there's no reason for discouragement or despair. Look up to God, for He is your life and your hope and your peace. Amen.

***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***  
(Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh  
12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Trinity  
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