

"Fear, Flight, Fatigue, and Future"

20.June.10

1 Kings 19: 1-15a

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"Where is your God?" taunts the cynic in Psalm 42. "LORD, why have You forgotten and rejected me?" pleads the psalmist (*Ps 42:9; 43:3*). Who among us does not "pour out their soul" to God sometimes? (*Ps. 42:4*)

The families and loved ones of the 11 men killed when that oil platform exploded in the Gulf; surely many of them yelled aloud, "God, why have You forgotten us... where are You?" The people desperately impacted by Hurricane Katrina several years ago; surely many of them cried out, "God, it is enough!" The families, friends, and loved ones of those killed or wounded in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; surely they, too, cry out, "God, why do You taunt us with such loss?" Many of us have occasions like those of the psalmist as well as those of God's prophet, Elijah.

Prior to today's events, Elijah repeatedly confronted King Ahab and Queen Jezebel with God's Truth. But they were not willing to hear it. Their despotic rule cut at the heart of the Hebrews. So much so that the Hebrew people had ceased worshiping the God of heaven and moved to worshiping the gods of Baal. Elijah desperately confronted Ahab and Jezebel. Naturally, over time, the King and Queen quickly grew weary of his persistence against their gods. So one day the Queen will issue a threat. Elijah will find himself on the "most wanted list"! He is lost, frightened, scared to death...

Queen Jezebel is livid with God's triumph over *her* god and the 450 prophets—and naturally then, also at Elijah. So Elijah flees in fright, emotionally and spiritually drained. One could say he has run out of courage, crying out to God on several occasions during his flight. Then, God speaks to him in the wilderness...in the cave, "Come out, Elijah. What are you doing here?" (*19:9, 13, 15, adpt.*) However, Elijah is not swayed. He cries out again, "It is enough! Take my life,

LORD. There is no more meaning for me. Let it end here!" (19:4, *adpt*) Twice Elijah begs God to end it all (19:10, 14).

Elijah is so beside himself that not even God's angels can soothe his spirit. They appear twice to nourish him, telling him there is still hope; God is present. Moreover, God Himself appears to Elijah, prodding him to come out of the cave; that God still has work for him. What amazes me in this story is the depression into which Elijah has cast himself comes after he just witnessed God's victory...

As the story goes, the gods of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel faced off against the God of Elijah; a contest designed to determine which is more powerful. Ahab and Jezebel are absolutely certain *their* gods and *their* prophets will take the victory. The contest ensues. God Jehovah wins. All the Baal prophets are destroyed. Is this enough to embolden Elijah to press on for God? Apparently not. Even witnessing God's victory seems no match for Queen Jezebel's threat to kill him within 24 hours. So what does he do? He puts his belief in *Jezebel*, rather than in God. He believes that now God cannot protect him from one really angry woman!

For me, all this begs the observation that anyone, at any given point in their life, even if they have seen God's power, can let their faith be shattered by a few words. Any one of us can let our fear crash our faith in God to rescue us.

Elijah has now let that happen to him. He is in what one might call "cave mode." His mind, heart, strength, and courage are hiding in a cave... Yes, he was still free from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Yet his *spirit* is imprisoned in a cave. His mind is closed to God. He thinks only of himself.

It reminds us of one particular situation with Peter. Peter is in a boat. A ferocious storm appears. He and his colleagues notice a figure coming to them on the water. Peter soon recognizes it as Jesus. Jesus calls to Peter. Peter gets out of the boat. If we fail to remember, for a while he actually walks on water, basking in the power of Jesus. Yet soon he takes his eyes off the Lord and begins to sink into the cold, threatening water.

In today's Bible story a similar thing happens to Elijah. When Elijah was at Carmel witnessing the power of God defeating all the prophets of Baal (by wind and storm and fire), he was on "cloud nine." But *now*? After the threat from Queen Jezebel, Elijah takes his eyes off God, sinks into the wilderness, and finally into a dark cave at Mount Horeb.

Every now and then even we ourselves can begin sinking in the cold water or hiding in a dark cave. It becomes difficult for us to remember that even as we cry out, "God, where are you?" God is with us. Though we perhaps cannot feel that presence because our cave is too dark or the swirling waters are too powerful, the Presence is still with us.

One writer puts it this way, "How near we can be to God's glory when we feel so far away from it—if we will only be as open to God as God wants us to be!" (*Ronald S. Wallace, Readings in 1 Kings, p. 132.*) Sometimes we just get so wrapped up in the "big-ness" of our activities that we seem to forget the quiet moments of prayer and worship. Vigorous activities in a church are not all that is needed to advance the Kingdom. One commentator says this, "God does not necessarily herald the progress of His kingdom with noise and hustle and bustle or with spectacularly successful Church programs and efforts." (*Ibid.*)

Sometimes "less" really is "more," as it was for Elijah, standing at the entrance to that cave—when he heard God not in the thrashing whirlwind, not in the roaring earthquake, not in the dazzling fire, but in the stillness. God had to ask Elijah more than once, "What are you doing here [in this cave]?" Sidebar. In ancient Hebrew, the grammatical structure of this sentence gives the sense that the person being spoken to is considered to be outside his province; in a place where he, or she, has no business being. (*"The Interpreter's Bible," Vol. 3, p. 163*) Put perhaps another way, God is saying, "Why are you in this cave, Elijah? You have no business being here. You still have a future. You still have work to do for My Kingdom!" God *still* had God's hand on Elijah's life—always had; always would.

So powerful was this story, that when James, the brother of Jesus, wrote his letter to encourage early believers, he said, "Elijah was a

human being like us..." (James 5:17a) Elijah had a nature like ours. He faced struggles, just as we do. Yet eventually he did much for the kingdom. So can we, in spite of our caves and our wilderness-es.

Friends; regardless our fears and the times we just run away in fear, we are to know that God says to us, "Come out! What are you doing in there? You still have a future. I have more work for you to do."

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow...!"