

Elijah's Sadness and God's Response

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 December 2014

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Kings chapter 19.!

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.

When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there. And 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. Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, Get up and eat. He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread, baked over hot coals, and a jar of water.

[1:33] He ate and drank, and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.

So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him. What are you doing here, Elijah?

He replied, 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. The Lord said, Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.

[2:46] Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind.

After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah? He replied, 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.

[3:51] 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.

Also anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king over Israel. And anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abel-Meholah, to succeed you as prophet.

Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael. And Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve 7,000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him.

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha, son of Shaphat. He was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the 12th pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, he said, and then I will come back to you.

[5:12] Go back, Elijah replied. What have I done to you? So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them.

He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

The Bible is about real people in real situations, not theoretical people, not theoretical problems. And one of the common, ordinary problems that the Bible addresses again and again is the

condition of sadness.

So in Psalm 42, the psalmist says to himself, why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? And we say, well, I know how that feels.

Those are the words that fit my situation. Here's someone who understands me. God really does understand what I'm going through.

[6:26] Some of you wrestle with sadness more than others. It's your natural temperament, your natural disposition. You were that way before you were saved. And when God made you new and saved you, there was no radical change of that disposition, that temperament.

You're more given to it. Others of you, not so much. Not something that you struggle with again and again and again. But whatever the case, we certainly, none of us, are strangers to sadness, to depression, to unhappiness.

And so the Bible gives us many reasons for our sadness. Gives us many solutions. And so a while ago, we looked at Galatians 4.14 and Paul is writing to those, that church in Galatia, and he asked that very penetrating question, what happened to all of your joy?

You used to be so happy you would give me your very own eyes. And now you have no joy in your heart. What's happened to you? And of course, they had fallen into legalism.

They had shifted the weight of their salvation on to themselves. They had taken it off of Jesus and what he had done and brought it on themselves and what they were going to do.

[7:46] And in the process of doing that, they lost their joy. Several weeks ago, we looked at Luke chapter 24, and there were these two disciples after the resurrection on the road to Emmaus, and they are sad.

They're sad and they're unbelieved. They're stuck in the past. God is moving on. God has done something miraculous and amazing. That very morning, he had raised Jesus Christ from the dead, but their heads are down.

They'd heard it, but they just couldn't believe it because Jesus is dead. They're stuck in the past and sad as can be. Well, today I want to look at another case, the case that we had read for us, the case of Elijah.

And as our brother Stan said, the famous events of Mount Carmel have just happened. And God sent fire, you remember, upon Elijah's sacrifice.

And he had prayed, Elijah had prayed for rain after there had been no rain for three and a half years. And the clouds grew dark.

[8:57] And the wind picked up. And the dams of heaven were broken open and rain came down. Well, that was yesterday. And Elijah is now sad.

He's so sad that we saw in 1 Kings 19.4, he says, I've had enough, Lord. Take my life. Just let me die. He wants it all to end.

So, can any of you understand that kind of sorrow, that kind of depression and hopelessness? James says, Elijah was a man just like us.

Just like us. And so we're talking, when we're talking about Elijah, we're talking about us. We're talking about real problems that we really face.

And so let's look at this case of sadness. And as we do, I want to ask just two questions. Why is Elijah so sad? And what does God do about it?

[10:01] Why is Elijah so sad? What is contributing to his sadness? Well, the very first thing I see is that he's tired. He's tired.

He's physically exhausted. After all the events of Mount Carmel, Queen Jezebel is angry as can be. And she says, that's it, you're dead. Whatever happens, you're going to die.

And of course, Elijah is very afraid. And he runs for his life. And it says he ran from Jezreel, which is in the north, down to Beersheba, which is in Judah. It's a little over a hundred miles.

Running for his life through the desert, afraid, moving. And you know how you run when you're afraid for your life. You never stop.

And so he's exhausted. And I don't know about you, but I don't do my best thinking when I'm tired.

[11:02] And I don't do my best feeling. My emotions tend to go haywire when I'm worn out. And that's where Elijah's at.

Why is he so sad? Well, in part, he's tired. He's physically exhausted. We're physical, spiritual beings.

And we cannot separate our physical natures and our spiritual. And so, he's worn out.

And that means, if we can't separate those two things, that means that it's going to be when we are worn out sadness does have an open door.

It doesn't mean that it's always going to come in. But it's much more, it easily comes in. David Brainerd. Maybe you've heard of him.

[12:04] I hope you've heard of him. I hope maybe you've even read some of his journals. He was an early American missionary to the natives here and in the colonial period.

And if you've never read his journals, they're in the library, you should really read them. Well, his zeal, his unstopping zeal is what sticks out to everyone who reads them.

Jonathan Edwards read the journals, saw David Brainerd's life and said, you know what, everyone has to know about this. And so, it was he who published David Brainerd's journal. Well, David was so zealous and his unstopping zeal really puts us to shame.

So, if you're going to have a right picture of David Brainerd, you need to picture someone who is alone, who has his horse, who is coughing up blood, and he's going from the next village to the next village to preach the gospel.

He completely burned himself out. I think he died at 27. But joined to that unflagging, exemplary zeal was serious, chronic depression.

[13:25] And he fought it week after week after week. Just this non-ceasing sorrow that every now and then the clouds would break and you would have joy.

But most of the time it was sadness. And I wouldn't dare say that he shouldn't have pressed so hard. I won't say, well, he shouldn't have done what he did.

He should have taken better care of himself. God made him a candle, gave him that personality, and he burned himself out and none of us here are worthy to undo his sandal.

and so I won't dare say anything against him but at least part of me wants to say, David, shouldn't you have rested just a little bit?

And I wonder, did he cause himself unneeded, unnecessary misery and unnecessary sorrow because after he was to the point of being tired and exhausted and after the point of he's coughing up blood, he's still going, he doesn't rest and he was sick and he was tired all the time and I think in part that led to his chronic depression.

[14:39] So Elijah was tired. We understand that. You understand that. Elijah is alone. It mentions that his servant was with him but the overall impression is that Elijah is a loner.

at least that's very much how he feels. Whether it's entirely true or not, he certainly feels alone and there's not very much difference between feeling alone and being alone and so when God asked him, what are you doing here, Elijah?

He says, I'm the only one left. It's just me. No one is with me. Now again, whether that was completely true, Elijah felt that way.

No one was with him. No one could understand what he was going through. No one was there as he's running that could really relate to this fear and he had stood alone against the prophets of Baal and now he is out in the desert alone.

And so there's this gap, this missing piece and I won't say it's the only reason he was sad but it was definitely a contributing factor to his sorrow.

[15:52] He has no one to share his troubles with. Well, we put loneliness and sadness together, don't we? To be lonely is to be sad.

They go together and he's tired and he's alone and related to that, he felt like the whole world was on his shoulders. It was all on him.

And what I mean by that is he was carrying the full weight of Israel's situation and condition on himself. He was carrying the whole burden of God's work in Israel.

You see what he said, the Israelites have rejected your covenant, they've broken down your altars, they put your prophets to death with the sword and I'm the only one left. And now they're trying to kill me too.

So they've rejected the covenant, they've killed my fellow prophets and now they're after me. And so he's feeling, this is his complaint, this is his sorrow, this is what he's thinking and all that weight of Israel's spiritual condition.

[16:57] He's the only one standing in the gap. He's the only one there to protect Israel. He's the only one. It's up to him, he thinks. The Israelites have destroyed everything and everyone that has anything to do with God and now they're trying to kill me.

So it was all in his mind, he was the last man. It's him or nothing. Israel's only hope, humanly speaking, was him.

Well, do you ever say that? If I don't do it, it won't get done. If I don't fix it, it won't get fixed. If I don't make it happen, then it will be over. And it won't be over just for me, it will be over for everyone who's involved.

It will be over for my friends, for my family, for my company, for whatever. It's up to me. Now there is really and finally, that's only really and finally true of God, isn't it?

He's the only absolutely necessary one. God uses us and God works through us, but none of us are indispensable.

[18:11] None of us, no matter how great we are and how wonderfully God uses us, is in the end indispensable. Just, just think of, of the people that we have lost.

we miss Pastor Bob and the elders miss him in our elder meetings. And there is a hole there.

But, it is not a hole that God hasn't filled, that God can't fill and hasn't filled. The church hasn't come to a crashing end because we're not resting on any man.

We're resting on Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ does not change. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And Elijah had lost track of that.

Elijah had lost track of his smallness and he thought it was more about him than what it was. And that ended up just making him sad and miserable.

[19:22] Well, finally, Elijah's sad because he had lost hope. He'd lost hope. And this is related to what was before. He feels like he's alone. He feels like it's all up to him. And now, where is he at?

He says, I'm as good as dead. It's all over for me. So, sadness clustered around this. I'm alone. It's really up to me. And now, I'm as good as dead. So, what hope is there?

Therefore, there's no hope. So, just put yourself into Elijah's shoes. Elijah's just had this epic battle. Have you ever wanted to have an epic knock-down, drag-out battle against some sin, against some problem in your life?

You just think, if I could just have one big battle, one big brawl, and I can defeat it once and for all.

Well, Elijah just had this epic, big battle against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and it didn't produce national repentance.

It didn't produce national repentance. It made Queen Jezebel angry, furious with him, and almost cost him his life. And so, he looked at what God had done through him on Mount Carmel, and he said, if that doesn't work, then what's going to work?

[20:42] It's all over. Nothing will work. If that didn't work, if a miracle from heaven didn't work, if killing all the prophets didn't work, then what hope is there?

He doesn't see any possible way of this getting better. And because of that, he's sad. Can you relate to these things?

Where you had these hopes, and you thought, if I could just make some progress here, if we can just get this fixed, if we could just take care of this, then it will be better, and time and time again, it's thwarted.

And we're saying, there's no hope. If this problem doesn't get fixed, if this sin doesn't get taken care of, then there's no hope. Well, that's all contributing to Elijah's sadness.

And we spent a lot of time there because I want you to see that Elijah is just a man just like you. He didn't wear a cape, he didn't fly around, he wasn't above it, his problems are your problems, his faulty way of thinking is often our faulty way of thinking.

[21:52] And so I want you to put, I want to put you in his shoes because if you're in his shoes, then you're going to be able to relate to how God helps him. If you're not where Elijah is, then God's help for Elijah isn't going to do you any good.

So I want you to see that he's just like you, his thinking is just like yours so often. So how does God help him? How does God help Elijah?

Well, remember Elijah is tired. That's part of his problem. He's tired. He's physically exhausted. So what did God do?

Put him to sleep, gave him food and water, put him to sleep again, gave him more food and more water. The Lord Jesus himself in a pre-incarnate appearance as the angel of the Lord came to Elijah and provided for his physical needs.

He came to Elijah with food and rest. There's a very, very practical lesson for us. And so when we are sad, we need to ask ourselves, we need to stop and we just need to ask ourselves, am I tired?

[23:13] Am I just tired? Have I been eating right? Do I need to rest? Do I need to take a day off and go walk in the sun?

Do I need to go to Potato Creek and relax for a day? In Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan, the author, is talking about giant despair and giant despair had a secret weakness.

And we say, oh, what is the secret weakness that this giant has? What spiritual secret are you going to tell me to help take care of despair and depression and sadness?

What's that great secret? And Bunyan says, well, whenever the giant despair is out in the sunshine, he loses the use of his arm.

And he goes into a fit. And we say, well, is that some sort of spiritual truth? Is there some sort of secret hidden meaning? No. John Bunyan is simply saying what we all know to be true.

[24:17] A lot of times it just helps to be out in the sun. It's hard to be sad when it's sunny out. And my only point there is to say that our emotions do have a physical component to them.

Elijah's did. He needed food. He needed drink. He needed sleep. And God gave him food and drink and sleep. And it helped. So maybe the best thing that you could do is to take four days off in a row where you unwind and you rest.

And sometimes that's all we need to do to put our problems in the right light. Our problems grow very big. Bigger than what they really are when we're tired.

But getting the proper rest puts our problems in the right size. So, what does God do to help? He takes care of Elijah's physical needs.

Now, second, remember, Elijah is alone. He doesn't have a partner. He doesn't have a companion. And so, what does God do? I love this.

[25:26] He gave him a friend. He gave him a companion. 1 Kings 19 ends with Elijah and Elisha having a going away party and then walking off, so to speak, in the sunset together.

So, God gave him Elisha. Someone like him. Someone who could understand. Someone who had his heart. Who could relate to him. Who was right there with him.

And so, for the frustration of everybody's sense and the confusion of everyone's sense, Elijah and Elisha have been forever connected. And we say, which one did what and which one's who?

They're together. They're friends. Well, how do you live in a fallen, frustrated, confusing, hard world?

Brothers and sisters, you need a friend. You need a friend. Ecclesiastes is all about living in a fallen, frustrated, confused, hard world and its practical, nitty-gritty wisdom will keep your sanity when things seem so insane.

[26:38] And Ecclesiastes says, two are better than one because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who has no one to help him up.

If two lie down together, they'll keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Therefore, though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

And a cord of three strands is not easily broken. Are you sad? Share it with a friend.

Share it with your heavenly friend. But I'm speaking of an earthly friend now. So are you depressed? Then share it with your friend. Lean on your friend. If that's your spouse, and it should be, lean on your spouse.

Tell it to your spouse. If it's another lady, if it's another guy, then sit down and say, this is where I'm at. I don't see what's going on.

[27:40] I'm sad. I'm just frustrated. I need help. Will you help me? I need you to walk with me. Sadness grows. Sadness is like a mushroom.

It grows in caves. It grows in darkness. It grows alone. And so, it doesn't grow well with others.

It can exist with others. We can have a happy, smiling face and a party and still be sad in our heart. But sadness doesn't naturally grow in the presence of others.

So if you're going for a walk in the sunshine, go with your friend. If you're having a good meal, share it with your friend. So God gave him food and rest.

God gave him Elijah. God gave him a friend. And third, and most importantly, God lifted up his head. And said, he gave Elijah a whole new perspective.

[28:36] His divine perspective. God said, I'm not done yet. This isn't over. I haven't, I'm not discouraged. I haven't given up yet. I have more plans than just you, Elijah.

So, what we have here is an interesting, almost reenactment of Israel going to meet the Lord. Remember in Exodus, they come through, they're threatened, and Israel escapes out of Egypt, and

they make their way to the mountain of the Lord.

And you remember what happened, and Elijah does the same thing. He's threatened, he escapes, he makes his way to the mountain of the Lord to meet with the Lord. And you remember what happened, if you remember, in Exodus 19, what was the coming of God like when he met Israel on that mountain?

well, you remember he came in the storm, and he came in darkness, and he came with fire, and lightning, and an earthquake, and remember the people themselves quaked, and they said, you speak to him, we don't want to speak to him, we'll do whatever he says, and everything in God's coming to Israel said, if you don't obey me, you're going to perish.

Elijah makes his way to the mountain of the Lord, and that's I think what he expects.

[30:05] He expects God will say, you're right, Elijah, there's nothing left for Israel, it's finished, everything is lost, there's nothing left to do but to bring judgment.

It's clear their disobedience and their rejection is manifest, and there's nothing else to do but to judge. There's no salvation possible, and the wind comes.

The wind that had once struck that mountain comes, and the earthquake hits, and the fire comes down. But what does it say?

The Lord was not in the wind. The Lord was not in the earthquake. The Lord was not in the fire. and then a whisper, a gentle whisper.

And God came, God came in gentleness to his poor servant. He doesn't break the bruised reed. He doesn't destroy him.

[31:12] He comes in a gentle whisper, and he gives Elijah hope. I'm not done here. going to anoint Hazeel, going to anoint Jehu, going to anoint Elisha.

They're going to be my servants. They'll do my bidding. And I'm not finished yet. I haven't given up yet. Judgment will come upon Israel for her sins, but know this, there are 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal, have not kissed him.

So what is God doing here? He's giving Elijah some divine perspective. He's lifting Elijah's head up, and he's saying, look at what I'm doing.

Look at where I'm going from this point forward. And that's what we need so much of the time when we're sad. We think this is where we are, this is where we're going to be, there is no hope, there is no way forward, but our God is not a God who ever stands still and says, well, this is as good as we can get it, so let's just suffer through it.

If you're sad and you're hopeless, like Elijah, lift up your head and look at what God is doing. See, Elijah was looking at things through his very narrow personal perspective, and as he thought more and more about himself and more and more about his danger and more and more about how hopeless and helpless he was and how that situation in Mount Carmel didn't work out and his world got smaller, and smaller and darker and darker until he could say, I'm as good as my ancestors, I might as well be in the grave.

[32:53] He built his own tomb. And God comes and says, he clears the way of the rubble, he rolls away the stone, and he says, look at what I am doing.

Look at things from my perspective. God and that's what needs to happen to us so much of the time when we're sad. So much of the time we're stuck and we're saying, this is as good as it gets and God isn't going to do anything, and we say, I don't see God doing anything.

How can I have hope? If everywhere I look, I don't see God doing anything, and why isn't he doing something? If that's the way that you're thinking, then let me just say, you're starting at the wrong end.

You're looking at things, you're asking the wrong question. You're asking the wrong question. If you don't see God doing anything in your life, if you've tried and tried, and you've had your knockout, dragout battles on Mount Carmel, and there's been no change, there's no change in your family, no change in your spouse, no change in your life with that sin, don't ask, why isn't God doing anything? That's the wrong question. The Bible says God is always doing something. He is always working all things together for good, for those who love him.

[34:21] He's always active in our lives. The Bible says he always does good to his servants.

There's never a moment when his eyes and his mind and his heart are not upon his servants to do them good, to bless them.

The Bible says he works all things according to the counsel of his will. So when you look at your life and your situation and your world, you need to see, yes, those things are happening, but God is working in and through them to work all of them according to his will.

And so God is doing something in your life. He is. you might not be able to see it, but the Bible says that is happening.

So instead of asking why isn't God doing something, we need to ask why am I not seeing what God is doing? Am I looking in the wrong place?

Am I looking for the wrong sorts of things? Is my vision too small? God is always acting. He's always after your good. He's always after your holiness.

[35 : 31] holiness. And so what is he doing? What is he teaching me? If it's not the instant removal of this problem, then what is he teaching me?

What is his purpose? If his purpose is not to radically change the circumstances in the situation, does that mean he has no purpose just because I'm not getting what I want?

No, we say, what am I missing? What is God doing that I'm not seeing? Where am I blind that I need to have this word come in and open up my eyes?

Where I need the Lord Jesus to come in and lead me in paths that I've not walked? He's at work. He hasn't given up.

He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless. And so we will be holy and blameless in his sight. He isn't going to give up.

[36 : 29] Jesus gave himself up for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own eager to do what is good. So Jesus Christ is not going to stop until we belong to him and we are eager for good works and we're purified and we were saved from all lawlessness.

And Jesus doesn't grow weary or tired. God doesn't lose heart. Things are going exactly according to his plan.

It might not be yours but it's his and he's not frustrated and he's not exhausted. Isaiah says don't you know?

Haven't you heard? And we say oh yes I know and I've heard. But again we need to tell ourselves and believe it. Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God.

He won't grow tired or weary. His understanding no one can fathom. You're perplexed by what's going on in your life. He's not perplexed by what's going on in your life.

[37 : 40] And he doesn't grow tired. He gives strength to the weary doesn't he? And he increases the power of the weak. Even youth grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

Why will they renew their strength? Because he is this overflowing fountain of strength. He doesn't grow tired. He doesn't grow weary. He doesn't stand still in confusion. He's going forward.

He's pursuing his plan. He's pursuing his purposes. And so you're tired. You're alone. You feel like it's all up to you and nothing is working out. Put your hope in the Lord.

Put your hope in the Lord. He isn't done with you yet. And so the words of Isaiah are Psalm 46:10. Be still and know that I am God. Elijah wasn't God.

It wasn't all up to him. Just because things hadn't worked out the way Elijah thought they would work out didn't mean that God was done. God was on his throne.

[38 : 43] And so if this is where you're at, and I should say the next time when we are there, take heart, look up.

It's not all up to you. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has won. He has conquered. And Isaiah 42 says he doesn't falter.

He won't falter and he won't grow discouraged until he establishes justice on the earth. Jesus this morning is not discouraged.

He isn't faltering. And if Jesus is not discouraged, you shouldn't be either. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you how it clearly portrays the situations that we find ourselves in and yet doesn't leave us there, but gives us hope, gives us understanding, gives us clarity.

[39 : 54] So I pray that you would help us to think about ourselves and our lives and our situations from your perspective. Not in unbelief, not asking all the wrong questions, but asking the questions that are true.

And I pray for those who are walking in darkness and they don't understand what's going on in their lives.

Lord Jesus, break in and give them light. Show them the folly and the sin of their actions and give them faith to trust in you.

We pray that you would glorify yourself, God. Father, glorify yourself from what we've heard. Help us to take it and to put it into action and as we do, give us a greater vision of your glory and your honor and your power and your grace and your wisdom that as we see and as we believe, we would also worship and sing and rejoice in you, that you would have more glory from our lives than you do now.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.