

**PP Standing In the Gap: *Elijah, a Man Like Us***

Part 10- *From the Mountain to the Broom Tree*, Part 1, **1 Kings 19:1-10**

1/14-15/2012

**PP** Charles Spurgeon, viewed as one of the greatest preachers in human history, once wrote of his battle with depression, *"I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for"*

Martin Luther fell into such a dark, prolonged depression, that his wife, having had enough, put on a black funeral dress with a veil and met him at the door when he came home. "Who died?" he asked. "God," answered Katherine. "Why this foolishness?" he demanded. "It's true" she persisted. "God must have died or Dr. Luther would not be so sorrowful."

**PP** Abraham Lincoln once said, *"I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed*

Friends, seasons of dark despair have been experienced by many great servants of God  
They are called wilderness or desert experiences in the Scriptures and if you haven't experienced  
It, then it may be hard for you to appreciate the power of it

I can recount two major seasons of depression that I have experienced

People often remark *"Tim, you lost a lot of weight recently. How did you do it?"*

What most don't know, but for those I confided in, was that in the latter part of 2011, I went  
through a season of depression that persisted for several months, one that I wondered if I  
would ever get out of

Some people gain weight in depression, I lost it

It's a frightening experience because you feel like every bit of energy you have is spent trying to  
stay afloat and not giving into despair

I rarely cry, but I found myself several times, minutes before preaching, in my office weeping

It's like being trapped in a pit with no way out, helpless, with no color or joy in life

Yet God used it in my life to bring me closer to Him and refine me a little more for His purposes

Elijah experienced incredible ministry results on Mt. Carmel, yet just a few days later, we will  
find him sitting in the wilderness of depression, no longer even wanting to live

Look with me at how the chapter begins: ***"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed a***

Ahab came home, sat down at the table with his wife, Jezebel, and maybe over a cup of

Phoenician Tea, or likely some harder stuff, Ahab debriefed his day

Look what he tells her, ***"all that Elijah had done"***, not all that God had done

They still had no room for God in their hearts and even more, Ahab didn't share the great  
response of Israel to God, but Elijah's putting the Baal prophets to death

Realize that King Ahab had not stopped Elijah from doing this, instead, he went up to the top of  
the mountain for an early dinner, obeying what Elijah had told him to do

Jezebel's scorn over her husband's weakness was only outdone by her hatred of Elijah

So she took matters into her own hands: ***"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."*** 19:2

Don't you wonder why Queen Jezebel sent a messenger and not a hit squad of soldiers?

Elijah is in Jezreel along with Ahab and Jezebel, and obviously his whereabouts weren't secret

He no longer has to hide, Israel had shouted out their allegiance to God on the mountain

She had him in the city, yet she only sent a death threat, and gave him 24 hours of warning

Not even Jezebel would go against the sudden popularity of Elijah in the hearts of revived Israel

And it is here that we see a larger picture forming, that goes beyond Jezebel and Elijah, to who they represent

Jezebel is the archetypal Satan, manifesting his character: Elijah is a man with a nature like ours. As Jezebel hates Elijah and wants to kill him, Satan hates every Christian, and if possible would kill them.

Friends, Satan is real, he really hates those who love Jesus Christ, and he is a roaring lion breathing out threats and wicked promises of suffering (**1 Peter 5:8**)

Why does a lion roar?

**PP** The bible helps us understand the reason for this: ***“Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?”*** And the rhetorical response is, ‘No’

Lions will stalk their pray quietly, their roars are intended to call for help with a kill

Some who study them will note how the lion will roar to get their prey running in fear, until one of the victims runs away from its herd and right into the ambush of their pride, the group of lions it leads

**PP** Jezebel roared and surely Elijah will do what Peter will later counsel us to do: ***“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Our sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”***  
**1 Peter 5:8-9**

As frightening as Satan can be, he can be overcome by faith in Jesus Christ

He can be resisted, put on a leash by our sovereign God, his power was broken at the cross. Our mighty prophet, who seemed so high above us all, heard the roar, and fled for his life!

***“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.”*** 19:3-4

Isn’t it shocking to see our Elijah, this mighty, fearless man, run from Jezebel?

Not only did he flee, he ***‘ran for his life’***, straight south to Beersheba

**PP** Beersheba was 95 miles south of Jezreel, at the extreme southern edge of Promised Land. It would have taken Elijah about 6 to 7 days to travel there, maybe less since he was fleeing

Then he ***‘went a day’s journey into the wilderness’***, about 15 miles

I don’t know about you, but when I read ***‘wilderness’***, in my mind, I picture British Columbia, or the Adirondack area, lush, fertile, unsettled forests and pine-covered peaks

Beautiful, untamed, rugged scenery

But what the Bible calls ***‘wilderness’***, is wild, uncultivated terrain that was unable to support life. It is a rocky, dry wasteland often referred to as a place of desolation, a metaphor for depression

Elijah sat down under a ***‘broom tree’***, a large 10-12 foot high shrub that still grows there, and he prayed ***“that he might die”***

This is Elijah, the mighty prophet of God!

Elijah, who fearlessly stood up against the wicked ruling couple, against the wicked 450

prophets of Baal, who chided Obadiah for his lack of courage, who confidently carried that dead little

Just days before, he called down the power of God stunning a rebellious nation into revival, and

now he is a sad, pathetic picture of a man firmly in the wilderness of depression!

Not suicidal as some have mistaken, but a man who had lost the will to go on living!

There is no clue that Elijah is planning on taking his own life, instead he is asking the Lord of life Who alone has that right, to take his life  
Moses asked God to put him to death right on the spot (Numbers 11:15)  
Job who wished that even the day he was born would disappear (Job 10:18-19)  
Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth (Jer. 20:14)  
Jonah asked God to take away his life (Jonah 4:3)

This longing for release and escape is not uncommon when we suffer and very common in depression

Friends, there are always some who look at depression with a skeptical mind

*It's an excuse, just suck it up and be responsible!*

And we would be wise to see that there are many who use depression as an excuse, who are really just selfish people wanting to evade responsibility for decisions they have made

Yet depression can be real, and some of the strongest of people have experienced it

And it has many factors that can cause us to give up under the broom tree, and they tend to cluster together to overwhelm us in depression

## **PP 1-Fear**

Illus I saw a video of a 3 year old girl at a zoo, standing inches away from a large male lion, separated by the protective glass between them. For long seconds they stared at each other in a standoff, when suddenly the lion raged and began furiously scratching at the glass trying to break through to that girl. She stood there, unflinching, knowing she was completely safe

We would surely think this would be Elijah's response to Jezebel's threat but ***"he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life"***

More accurately, ***"Elijah saw and ran for his life"***, either literally or metaphorically

When our eyes begin to focus on the threat, or the obstacle, our faith is soon to follow

Fear is one of the leading causes of depression

It is often the inability to deal with the future that seems so overwhelming

And when we have a fear of what may happen in the future, then we struggle with what the bible calls anxiety and worry

Anxiety is the 'What if...' fear, of what might happen in the future that we cannot control

It is the borrowing of trouble from tomorrow, and it wears on confidence and trust and erodes it from the inside out

Anxiety and worry shift our eyes from our sovereign, good God to the threat that we see coming

Fear itself is not the problem, for God knows that we do and will have it

It is more the response to fear that the Scripture addresses, what we will do when we are afraid

It will either move us to rest in the promises of God, or run toward our own plan of protection

I find it interesting to take note of the progression we see in Elijah: he ran for his life, then he sat down under the broom tree, then he lay down under that tree

Fear makes us run away, until we are so exhausted we sit down, and find ourselves stuck

It's a picture of living apart from the power and sustaining might of the Word of God

## **PP 2-Isolation**

I hardly need to point out, depressed people have found themselves alone, and usually by choice  
He ***“left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness”*** 3-4  
Brief seasons of isolation can be healthy, but that season must end back in community  
Legend has it that this was the widow’s son from Zarephath who was raised from the dead, likely  
not because that was a very young boy, and Elijah would not have left him alone  
How often when we struggle, the tendency is to move away from people  
One cause for depression is the lie that life must be lived alone, that others will not understand  
your struggles, and that they will not love you through them

### **PP 3-Pride**

Pride blinds us to its presence

And it seems awful to say that there is usually a thread of pride in the depressed person, but that is usually what  
For the first time in Elijah’s ministry, we see his focus on himself: ***“he ran for his life”; “he  
Himself went a day’s journey”; “take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”***

We’ve not seen this many personal pronouns ever come out of his mouth before

Yet now, he is the center, it’s about him, and his life, not the glory of God

The depressed person’s world is a one which he or she is the center of the universe

*I’ve failed, I haven’t done any better than the prophets before me, Israel won’t change*

Yet who had ever asked him to do better than his fathers the prophets?

And when did any of us ever have the power or the responsibility to change others?

His task was to do all that the Lord had commanded, God’s job is to change the hearts of Israel

When we begin to forget our place in God’s redemptive work, the sense of failure is coming

I know, because I have experienced this repeatedly

It is dangerously easy to develop a Messiah complex, and to draw people to ourselves rather than  
to Christ, and we won’t even see it until our it all comes crashing down around us

Pride blinds, and it is lethal, it will lead us to the broom tree in the wilderness!

### **PP 4-Fatigue**

Elijah was exhausted

He had just walked over 100 miles, likely fast

He just headed a national revival, and he had just put 450 wicked prophets to death

No matter how righteous the motive, responsibility for others’ deaths wears on your heart

Vince Lombardi famously said *“Fatigue makes cowards of us all”* and it echoes a Greek  
proverbs that said, *“You will break the bow if you keep it always bent.”*

Our bodies cannot sustain endless, frenetic busyness, work or ministry

Those of you in care-giving fields need to constantly remember that to pour out without being  
poured in will empty you of strength, and this often leads to the broom tree

Finally Elijah collapsed into sleep, and take note, God let him sleep

He didn’t chide Elijah for sleeping when there was work to do, or being lazy, or struggling

Neither did he let him sleep his life away, something the severely depressed person is prone to do

He woke him up with an angel, fed him fresh-baked flat bread, still popular among the Bedouin  
people of that area, and then let Elijah go back to sleep...he was exhausted and famished

Friends, depression affects the body, and the body influences depression

Today, the most popular understanding of depression is the biochemical hypothesis, suggesting that it is caused by serotonin deficiencies in the brain  
Yet this explanation conveniently avoids and eliminates the spiritual causes of depression

Look again at what God gives Elijah, who is emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausted: Bread and water, not meat, not wine, and some would say it's because Elijah needed the carbs There's a better reason and it's found in what bread and water point to, rather 'who' they point to They are symbols for the person and power of Jesus Christ, Who is the **'Bread of Life'** (John 6:35) and the source of **'Living Water'** (John 7:38)

Now suddenly we are seeing the spiritual roots underlying even these physical symptoms Elijah, you ran from Jezreel to Carmel, 18 miles, because the 'hand of the LORD was on' you But you ran in the power of your fear from Jezreel to this bush, a distance of over 110 miles You just tried living by your own power, and it has left you exhausted without the will to live But I am the **'Bread of life'** that can give you the power to do all I ask you to do And I will give you **'Living Water'**, that will pour you so full of my hope and joy that it will run out of you to those all around you  
So **'Arise and eat'** (5 and 7), let me fill you with the strength and hope that you need

Much depression occurs because we forget that we cannot live apart from Jesus Christ We have no power unless we abide with Him!  
So the food was placed **'at his head'** (6), not his feet for action or his side for power, at his head because Elijah forgot the truth he had learned in his training  
The Lord is Yahweh, the covenantal, faithful God, and He is Elohim, the sovereign, mighty King of all kings  
Elijah needed truth to govern his thinking, because he was living out of a cluster of lies

Friends, we are out of time, yet there is so much more to learn from this  
We will pick it up next week, Lord willing, and see the hope we have in our God  
Elijah found himself in the wilderness of depression under the broom tree of hopelessness  
Are you there?  
God will bring you out, so learn well the lessons of Elijah and we will pick it up from here next week to see what God does for our struggling gap stander

**PP** Let me close with something Martin Luther once said: *"In heaviness we often learn lessons that we never could attain elsewhere...affliction is the best book in my library, the best leaf (page) is the leaf of heaviness."*

Pray