

How Are the Mighty Fallen!

1 Kings 19:1-8; Psalm 103:13-14

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Mature Christians and ministers that have been mightily used of the Lord do not fall into the hopelessness and darkness of a room where there seems to be no way out. Right? Wrong! The more we deny this depressed state of mind and soul that can come over the godly and learned minister as well as the growing and maturing saint, the more we make ourselves vulnerable to such attacks of the enemy.

The saints of the past referred to this dark condition of the soul as melancholy, heaviness of heart, dejection of spirit, downcast, sad, or downhearted, but they knew it to be a reality that strikes at times even those who are strongest in faith, most faithful in prayer, and most zealous for the cause of Jesus Christ. I can join with them as well in declaring my sad experiences of fear, darkness, and wanting to give up, due to despair that swept over me as a pastor. David knew what it was to be cast down. Job knew what it was to desire death. Paul knew what it was to feel deserted and all alone. And the Lord Jesus cried out to the Father that the cup of suffering that he was to bear might pass from Him as he faced the horrors that no one could ever face except Jesus Christ.

Such times of darkness over the soul are a reality in the life of many (if not all) Christians. Pretending it doesn't exist will not make it go away. But understanding to some degree why it comes and how the love and mercy of Jesus Christ is a healing salve that can become even more precious to you at such times will lead you to glorify Jesus Christ, your sympathetic Savior who will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 4:15-16). The main points from our text are: (1) Elijah Wants to Die (1 Kings 19:1-4); (2) Jesus Comes in Love and Mercy (1 Kings 19:5-8).

I. **Elijah Wants to Die (1 Kings 19:1-4).**

A. Elijah was among the most notable prophets in Scripture.

1. He was honored by the Lord in being taken (without death) to heaven in a fiery chariot (only Enoch and Elijah were so blessed). Elijah was such a mighty man of God that we are told that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). In fact, of all those great saints and prophets of God from the Old Testament that God might have sent when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, it was Elijah along with Moses that were sent by God.

2. Elijah had been involved in the mighty works of the Lord God—he prophesied a drought that lasted for 3 ½ years; he was fed by ravens beside the Brook Cherith; the Lord provided for him, a widow, and her son from a barrel of meal and cruse of oil that never emptied throughout the drought and famine; the Lord used Elijah to raise the widow's only son from the dead; he prayed for fire that was sent from heaven to consume the sacrifice, wood, altar and water around it; the idolatrous people of Israel were brought to fall on their faces declaring that Jehovah was the one true living God; and he cried out to the Lord and a great rain fell bringing to an end the 3 ½ years of drought.

3. Elijah was fearless in appearing before King Ahab and in standing all alone without compromise for Jehovah on Mt. Carmel. And yet despite his great faith, zeal, godliness, courage, and love for the Lord, we read here of Elijah's fall into fear and depression to such an extent that he wanted to quit and desired that the Lord take his life. Let us see how this came about.

B. After the miraculous fire from heaven and the downpour of rain upon the dry and parched land of Israel, Elijah had run in front of Ahab's chariot from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel (a royal palace about 20 miles away), and this was after having spent the whole day in a great contest against the false prophets of Baal. He

had not eaten. He had not rested. He was on a spiritual and emotional high after the mighty works of God had been manifested. Now we turn to 1 Kings 19:1.

1. After Ahab arrived at the royal palace, he proceeded to deliver all the news that had occurred on Mt. Carmel to Jezebel, especially the news that through Elijah supernatural fire had fallen from Jehovah and the princes, rulers, and people had fallen on their faces, declaring Jehovah to be the one true living God. Then Elijah commanded through the word of the Lord that the 450 false prophets of Baal be executed (1 Kings 19:1). Jezebel was incensed with rage and wrote out a violent death threat to be delivered by a royal messenger to Elijah (1 Kings 19:2). Ahab was a weak king. Jezebel was the real ruler that ruled from behind the king. She was a vicious, idolatrous, vile woman.

2. Elijah fled for his life as far away as Beersheba, 1 Kings 19:3 (about a distance of 100 miles—that is about 25 hours by foot).

a. After arriving in Beersheba, Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness without his servant and in despair cried out to the Lord that he had lived long enough ("it is enough") and prayed that the Lord take his life for he was no better than "his fathers", i.e. the true prophets of Jehovah that had been slain by Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4).

b. In this despondency and under such trying and fearful circumstances, Elijah is shown to be "a man subject to like passions as we are" (James 5:17). The Bible does not hide the sins and weaknesses of its greatest heroes of the faith. They were not superhuman (whether it be Abraham lying to save his own neck and put his wife at risk, or whether it be David who sinned with Bathsheba and sought to cover his sin by murdering her husband, or whether it be Jonah who would not go to Nineveh, or whether it be Peter who denied knowing the Lord 3 times). Elijah was mired in a swamp of despair or "slough of despond" (Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*).

c. Whereas before receiving the threat from Jezebel, Elijah had been like a lion filled with such courage in standing against Ahab and all of Israel, not fearing what man could do to him; but after receiving the threat from Jezebel, he became like a helpless lamb filled with such fear that he fled for his life (like mighty Samson before his fall and like weak Samson after his fall). Fleeing for safety is not necessarily his sin and weakness here (for Jesus commanded His disciples to do the same in Matthew 10:23). His sin was that he was overwhelmed with fear (he feared Jezebel more than he feared and trusted in the Lord). Even though we take steps to protect ourselves as Christians, it is not security systems, locks on gates and doors, the police, or firearms in which we trust, but in the one true living God. In fleeing that which is evil or in standing to face the evil, we do so knowing the Lord is the almighty and sovereign God and all His enemies are like ants beneath His feet.

d. How did Elijah sin? He feared what man could do unto him. He took his eye of faith off the Lord (like Peter looking at the storm and the waves). He deserted his post and fled in panic from the face of Jezebel even though the sound of a mighty reformation seemed to be dawning in Israel. He did not quickly repent of his sin and fell into a pity party. He wanted to quit and give up. He wanted his will not God's will to be done.

e. Although I believe that we sin against the Lord whenever we fear man or circumstances more than we trust the Lord and His love, mercy, faithfulness, and power to rescue us, let me also state that Elijah was more vulnerable to depression, extreme discouragement, overwhelming disappointment, and a dark vale of hopelessness due to a couple factors that Satan will use in your life and mine as well.

(1) **Elijah believed he was all alone in standing against the enemies of the Lord God and His truth** (1 Kings 19:10—God reminded him that he was not alone). We need one another (Galatians 6:2). That is not a sign of weakness—it is a sign that you are human.

(2) **Elijah was physically exhausted** from all of the activity of that day. He had gone without nourishment all day and then suddenly embarked upon a long and hurried journey in a

panic (we are much more susceptible to spiritual attacks when we are ill and not rested or nourished—like Job). The Lord Jesus withdrew from His ministry to be refreshed physically and spiritually—not to be lazy, but to be better able to fulfill His ministry and calling (Mark 6:31; Mark 7:24—the Feast Days of the Old Testament were a week or so of rest from ordinary activities). This is not to say that aloneness or exhaustion (mental or physical) excuse us from all sin that may follow, but it is to say that we should be aware of our weakness in these areas, so that we can better defend ourselves against the enemies’ plots against us (2 Corinthians 2:11). Dear ones, being active and productive (as opposed to being lazy and making excuses for your inactivity) is a duty to God and your fellow man (Proverbs 13:4; Proverbs 20:4). But lawful rest and recreations are to be used to make you more fit for your lawful callings. *Larger Catechism* #135, “What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?” Answer: “sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labour, and recreations” (and since lawful recreations are forbidden on the Lord’s Day, they must be lawful on the other six days of the week).

II. Jesus Comes in Love and Mercy (1 Kings 19:5-8).

A. I fear many sound and faithful Christians have a rather harsh view of the Lord Jesus Christ in the way He treats failing, fainting, and falling saints. It’s as if there is only the smile of kindness, love, and mercy when the Christian has rightly performed his/her duty, but when he/she falls, faints, or fails there is a stern and unsympathetic frown firmly fixed upon His face as if to say, “I cannot stand to be in your presence because you have failed me.”

1. Dear discouraged, fearful, depressed, and fainting Christian, the Lord Jesus does not approve of your sin or mine; but He will not forsake you (even though it appears that He is fast asleep in the ship and doesn’t care). He may test you to drive you to Himself to show you that it is not your strength or even your faith that upholds you (but rather His love, mercy, and power); but He will come to you with infinite love and care as He did here with Elijah.

2. Consider what the Lord Jesus (“the angel of the LORD” 1 Kings 19:7) **DID NOT DO** to a faltering and fainting Elijah—**He did not** jump all over Elijah with accusations and threats—**He did not** show to Elijah a harsh, stern countenance—**He did not** berate Elijah and cast him away while he was already so low—He picked him up (so must we do).

3. Consider what the Lord Jesus **DID** for a faltering and fainting Elijah—**He prepared a meal** for him and awakened him to eat and drink—**He allowed Elijah to rest** and then awakened him again with a second meal. Before the Lord corrected Elijah’s self-pity on Mt. Horeb, He ministered to his physical needs (for Elijah was a man—not an angel).

a. This reminds me of the meal the Lord Jesus prepared for Peter and some of the other disciples (John 20) that had left their posts and fled in fear, even denying the Lord Jesus 3 times. The Lord Jesus tenderly called them to have a meal with Him after they had fished all night and had caught nothing. He did not berate and condemn Peter or Elijah. By His sweetness, tenderness, compassion, and sympathy, the Lord Jesus wooed Peter and Elijah unto Himself.

b. There is a time to be firm and stern with the obstinate, but not with the fainting (Jesus did not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax). Jesus does not call only the strong to eat and drink of His body and blood by faith in the Lord’s Supper, but in love and mercy calls the weak, the fainting, and the struggling Christian to come to Him and to find an all sufficient grace and power through Christ’s death and resurrection.

B. Remember: God saved you and Jesus redeemed you already knowing the worst about you. Nothing can be hidden from His all-seeing eyes, and yet He set His everlasting love upon you and even gave up His only begotten Son to pay your eternal debt of sin.

1. Nothing can separate you who belong to Jesus Christ through faith alone

from God's love. Nothing (Romans 8:33-39)! When you fall into discouragement and all hope seems to have vanished, and you feel like giving up in your faith to follow Him because of the extremely hard trial and affliction through which the Lord is taking you—He is with you—He loves you—You will pass over to the other side—He knows that you are but dust (Psalm 103:13-14).

2. The shouts and derision in the mind of the Christian that has fainted along the wayside is not the Lord Jesus, but is the enemy. When he reminds you, "You are not good enough! You do not deserve God's mercy and love!" Remind him that Jesus is good enough and you are loved for all eternity in Jesus Christ. God would have to first stop loving Jesus before He could stop loving you who are in Christ. The Lord Jesus comes alongside you, reminds you of His unfailing love, of His death and resurrection for you, and draws you to repentance.

3. It is not difficult to believe God loves you when you are walking in faithfulness and obedience to His commands (when with Elijah on Mt. Carmel you see the mighty hand of God at work). However, it is precisely when you faint and falter (like Elijah) that you are especially tempted to doubt the constant, never-ending, never-changing, and everlasting love of Jesus Christ. It is then that you must walk by faith (not by sight) in the promises of God who cannot lie.

C. What should you learn in the School of Christ through such times of failure, loneliness, and fear that lead to being cast down?

1. You are able to relate to and comfort others (sympathy).
2. Others may see that in the midst of darkness, you have not quit. You have persevered.
3. The Christian life is walking by faith not by feelings.
4. Finally, you learn that it is Christ, not you. It is His grace, not your strength that upholds you. You are but dust (clay pots).

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