

## **WHEN FEAR TOTALLY OVERCOMES US**

I Kings 19: 1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

After great victories God gives us, after exhaustion from pouring out our souls in service to God, each of us may well face fear and depression. We are spent. We've had enough. We are vulnerable, just as Elijah was, after victory on Mt. Carmel. Elijah was every bit as human as you and I are. We all have feet of clay. We are all subject to fears that lead us into deepest fearful depression. James wrote in James 5: 17, "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." When fear leads us into depression, our depression is an invisible sickness in many ways. A broken arm or leg is obvious, but a broken soul, and we all can have broken souls; such a soul is not always visible at first.

Some of us are poor comforters to the depressed. We give out our cure. "Get up, quit feeling sorry for yourself; get going." That's a misunderstanding of what Elijah's depression was, what causes it, and how it should be dealt with. It's a lie that Christians never get depressed, and if they do, they should be ashamed. One pastor, Tony Rose said, "I held that view for some time until God sent depression my way with free shipping. I have been a pastor for 31 years, the last 25 years at the same church. The suffocating darkness of depression has been my unruly traveling companion off and on for 28 years. I know the torturous havoc it creates in our minds and our emotions." Great men, Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, Richard Baxter, that great Puritan, John Bunyan of Pilgrim's Progress, and Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers; all suffered depression.

Charles Spurgeon said, "I often feel very grateful to God that I have undergone fearful depression of spirits. I know the borders of despair, and the horrible brink of that gulf of darkness into which my feet have almost gone hundreds of times...If those who laugh at such melancholy did but feel the grief of it for one hour, their laughter would be sobered into compassion." Richard Baxter said, "Troubled souls represent God badly. To think of God as one who seeks and delights in man's ruin, is to make Him as the devil." Fearful depression like Elijah seldom travels alone. It has brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, first and second cousins. Fearful depression often breeds evil conceptions of God in our minds, it ignites draining experiences of obsessive thinking, and it awakens a sleeping monster that leads to a depressed soul, an over-sensitive and a self-condemning conscience. Listen to Elijah! He says to the Lord, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." With a fearfully depressed mind, none of us can see God or life in its truest sense. Our darkened understandings eat at the core of our beings. We have fearful doubts about the most deeply held spiritual

convictions we have. In depression, we allow the devil to steal our spiritual stability. John Bunyan in prison, wrote, “God wasn’t playing when He let depression hit me. Neither was the devil playing in tempting me. Neither was I playing when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me.” Let’s learn seven brief memorable lessons from Elijah that can save our very lives when the devil seeks to drive us into fearful depression. What can we learn from Elijah, to spare our lives when fearful depression comes? Let’s learn these lessons as we face our Jezebels. What are these 7 bullet points to teach us how to overcome fearful depression?

### **OUR VICTORIES ARE ALL CONTESTED VICTORIES UNTIL JESUS**

**RETURNS.** (I.) Notice verses 1-2. “Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets (of Baal and Asherah) 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.” Jonathan Edwards said, “When the church is revived, so is the devil.” What happened on Mt. Carmel showed all Israel that Jehovah alone was God. All Israel was ready to unite against the forces of evil. Neither Ahab nor Jezebel were willing to accept defeat. Jezebel swore by her defeated gods she would get revenge and have Elijah dead within 24 hours. The threat of death can make many a great man fearful. The threat of death made Peter deny his Lord three times. Jezebel was beside herself with rage. She took an oath, swearing by her gods. Secondly,

### **OUR BEHAVIOR CAN MARKEDLY CHANGE WHEN WE LISTEN TO FEAR RATHER THAN LISTEN TO THE LORD**

(II.) Notice v. 3. “Then Elijah was afraid.” There are two men or two women in each of us—the one who walks in God’s anointing and victory, and the one who runs scared, who runs for our life. Elijah outran Ahab in his chariot under the power and the anointing of the Lord. What happened to his power, courage, and boldness that led Elijah from fearlessness to utter fearfulness? Was it the same man? It was, for Elijah on Mt. Carmel was God’s man standing in God’s strength. Now, in Jezreel, on Jezebel’s turf, like Peter warming himself by the enemies’ fire, Elijah was burned out, physically exhausted, and seized by sudden fear. (Prov. 3: 25) From that moment on, Elijah’s finest hour was eclipsed by Elijah’s worst moment in all his life. What happened? Think of it! For three years Elijah had not made a single move without hearing from the Lord and obeying every single instruction God gave him. Now, listening to his sudden fear, Elijah was running ahead of the Lord in order to save his own life. When we get out of God’s will, when we turn away from the Word of God, the will of God, and the promptings of the Lord, we are liable to do almost anything, even foolish things, and we can fail in the very areas where we have once been the strongest. Elijah momentarily ran away, not only from Jezebel, but away from God’s will, away from being a man of God, to becoming Elijah, a mere man. Hours earlier, Elijah was anointed, elated, and running to Jezreel with energy from

God alone. Now, Elijah was cowering, fearful, weak, depressed, and running for his life. When we are operating under the anointing of the Spirit of God, we as God's vessels, are unstoppable. But when we look at the waves as Peter did, we are no longer walking on the water. We are sinking like Elijah. Even the apostle Paul in Romans spoke of the inner struggle of sometimes not being under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Paul said in Romans 7: 15, "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Thirdly,

**OUR RESPONSE TO DANGER WILL EITHER BE TO STAND IN GOD'S ANOINTING, OR TO RUN SCARED WHEN WE LISTEN TO THE ENEMIES' THREATS.**

(III.) Notice v. 3. "Then Elijah arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah." Warren Wiersbe says, "Beware of human reactions after holy exertions." About all we desire when we have poured out our souls for Jesus is for someone, even one person to say, "God showed Himself strong in your life today." It's human. Yet the Lord Jesus reminds us that what a master says to a faithful servant. In Luke 17: 9-10, Jesus said, "Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." Believe it or not, victories are not always long lived. John the Baptist, shortly before he was beheaded, this great man of God, after all his victories, shut up in prison, had his worst moment. He sent word by his disciples to Jesus saying, "Are You the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus didn't rebuke John's doubtful question. He knew what we as men and women are made of. He answered in Matthew 11: 3-6 saying, "Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended in Me." After John the Baptist's disciples left, Jesus didn't reprove his forerunner's doubts. No, rather Jesus said in Matthew 11: 11, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist." After John the Baptist was beheaded, in Matthew 17: 12-13, Jesus said, "But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also, the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He was speaking to them of John the Baptist." Beloved, don't think we are greater than Elijah or John the Baptist.

What did Elijah do? He was afraid and ran for his life and came to Beersheba. We all do this at times. We run when we ought to stand. Elijah did this. In Paul's warfare passage in Ephesians 6: 10-20, four times he calls us to stand. That's our posture when the enemy attacks us. Don't run, trip, stumble, walk, just stand. Standing in the face of the devil's threats is progress. Elijah, like many of us, ran. Jezebel promised to kill Elijah, but be certain that no man, not even Satan himself,

knows the future. Only God does. Satan guesses what will happen. He comes against us personally, even as he has come against our whole church this February, because he is afraid of what God wants to do through us. When Paul spoke in I Corinthians 2: 8, about the mystery and secret wisdom of God decreed before the ages for our glory, he said, “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” As Satan overreached and entered Judas to betray and mastermind the crucifixion of Jesus, all he could do was play into Jesus’ hands. Making Elijah run was meant to ruin Elijah, but all the enemy did was to grant us great encouragement from this mighty prophet. God didn’t forsake his man and He won’t forsake us. Fourthly,

**OUR REASONING WHEN WE ARE EXHAUSTED OFTEN CHOOSES ISOLATION, WHEN WE NEED HELP THE VERY MOST.** (IV.) Notice v. 3.

After arriving in Beersheba, Elijah left his servant there.” The safest place for any child of God is the place God tells us to go, and there to do what God calls us to do. On Mt. Carmel, Elijah needed his servant. Didn’t he need him now? All we know for sure is that Elijah without a command from the Lord, traveled 90-100 miles from Jezreel to Beersheba, and left his servant there, isolating himself without any helper near him. He didn’t say, “Stay here until I return,” or “I am releasing you from serving me for your own safety, for if Jezebel comes after me, you will be safer away from me.” One thing is sure. This servant was not informed as to where Elijah was headed, so he couldn’t inform Jezebel’s posse. All I want to say to each of us today is—be willing to travel with others. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. Don’t be afraid or ashamed to ask for help. Elijah now was utterly alone, going into the wilderness. He was clearly by himself. A person’s character often emerges when he or she is utterly alone. Now we get to see Elijah all alone and at his worst moment. God would not fail His prophet now. Fifthly,

**OUR ISOLATION IS NOT ONLY A CHANCE FOR GOD TO SPEAK TO US BUT IT IS A CHANCE FOR THE ENEMY OF OUR SOULS TO LEAD US TO DESPAIR EVEN OF LIFE.** (V.) Look at verse 4.

“But Elijah himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. (Much like our scrub junipers) 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.” Never say that you are above any temptation, including the desire for God to take your life. Martin Luther knew depression could sometimes prove deadly, since depressed persons may become weary of life and preoccupied with death. Such was the case with his friend, Jonas Von Stockhausen, who fell into a deep depression. To help ensure Jonas’ safety, Martin Luther gave the following instructions to his wife: (1) Ensure that his surroundings are not so quiet that he sinks into his own thoughts. (2) Do not leave him alone for a single moment. Solitude is poison for a depressed person.) (3) Leave nothing around with which he

might harm himself.” Many counselors today do not give such sound advice by any clinical standard. We are all children of dust, frail children of dust and feeble as frail. In Elijah’s deepest depression, he finally did what he should have done when he got the threat from Jezebel. He finally prayed. But when we are running in fear, we may do as he did, and not pray wisely. He said to God, “I’ve had enough, so get it over with. Take my life. I’m no better than my fathers.” God never asked him to be better than his ancestors. He never asks us to be better than others. When we compare ourselves among ourselves, we are not wise. (II Cor. 10: 12)

Listen, you and I are not above such praying as Elijah. Even the best of Christians can become so depressed we want to die, and the devil can even tell us we are not converted. He is a liar. If you are a leader, you are especially vulnerable to fearful depression. Paul himself said in II Corinthians 1: 8-9, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia, For. we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.” Beloved, know that we are all capable of extreme depression when we are overworked, overtired, and without sleep or sabbath time. Some of the best of God’s people have prayed like Elijah did. Jeremiah did. (Jer. 20: 14-18) Job did. (Job 3: 1-10) Never point the finger at a depressed person, or as Elijah, an oppressed person. There is a great difference in being an oppressed believer and being a demon possessed Jezebel. Remember, like Elijah, fearfully depressed people don’t always pray what they should in lonely or unguarded moments. Also, know there are myriads of causes for depression, physical sickness, lack of sleep, chemical imbalances, glandular maladies, exhaustion, tiredness, emotional or psychological causes, childhood traumas, or depression can be a spiritual problem of hiding out from God as Jonah did. The Christian psychologist, Dr. Clyde Narramore said, “Every person is worth understanding. We all have damaged emotions.” Sixthly,

**OUR MOST VULNERABLE MOMENTS OF BEING EXPLOITED BY THE ENEMY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN BY GOD, FOR GOD SENDS US DIVINE HELP IN MYRIADS OF WAYS.** (VI.) Notice verses 5-7. “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.” Yes, the devil does exploit our tiredness when we need sleep, sleep, sleep, and rest, rest, rest. It is in the devil’s evil nature to attack whoever threatens him, his deceived followers and his minions/demons. Satan seeks revenge. We are all targets of the devil. The enemy hates us all. Some of us may today be his high-profile targets. Satan has his times of tempting but

they are God's times of testing us, preparing us for future service. I love verse 4 of George Keith's Hymn, How Firm a Foundation. "When through fiery trials, thy pathway shall lie, My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply, The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design, Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine." In the middle of Elijah's deep sleep, he was touched by an angel, who had made a cake for him and he had a jar of water. Elijah was exhausted and he slept again. Again, he was touched by this angel who again told Elijah to eat for the journey was too great for him. God knew Elijah needed a companion to cook for him and be with him to guard him as he slept and slept. The nearest translation of angel here is literally, "the angel of the Lord." Who was this helpful stranger, this angelic visitor who knew how to cook? Who met Peter at the beach, cooking fish on charcoal? Numbers of times in the Old Testament, we find what is called a theophany, an appearance of the Lord as an angel. I believe Elijah's help that day was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate form. And I promise you—Jesus says, not I will come at your bad times, but He himself has said, (Hebrews 13: 5-6) "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So, we can confidently said, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do to me." Seventhly, and lastly,

**OUR STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD FOR EACH OF US IS ONLY FOUND IN THE FOOD THAT GOD PROVIDES FOR US.** (VII.)

Notice verse 8. "And Elijah arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God." Beloved, this angelic food, this heavenly food from the angel of the Lord was no ordinary breakfast, dinner or supper. This is a reminder to us, beloved, that as long as we are in these bodies of ours, we still need food, whether it's normal food or food God sends through an angel. That's why the first petition in the Lord's prayer is "Give us this day our daily bread." The Lord knew where Elijah was headed, to the mountain of God, to Mount Sinai, one of the most sacred places in Jewish history. God knew the distance was 250 miles from Beersheba to Sinai. But I tell you today, without the bread of heaven, without God supplying our needs, the journey ahead for each of us is too great for us. We need God's strength to reach our goal. And I promise you, God will spread a table before us in the wilderness. If you are a discouraged servant like Elijah today, if you are afraid, depressed, running, without sleep, and hungry for hope, grab Psalm 23: 5 and hold on for dear life. The Lord is my shepherd. We read, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Imagine two meals and enough nourishment in those two meals of heavenly cake and water, to go forty days and forty nights. Never forget, even though Elijah was living in fear and depression, and running scared for his life, not in the middle of God's will, but in the center of his own fear, he knew God hadn't forsaken him—God didn't forsake him, and He won't forsake you. Lean hard on Jesus, beloved. Lean hard. Eat and drink His Word. Memorize His Word, and then in the strength that His Word supplies, you'll make it on your journey. Amen.