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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**It is Enough....Take My Life**

**1 Kings 18:23-39**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just again, I come before you this morning, I just thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, and I thank you especially for your word. Lord, what a privilege we have to open it up each week, to look into your word and to see what life stories and life lessons you have for us there. And so Lord, we again pray this morning for your Holy Spirit's presence. We know that without your Holy Spirit this is just a book. And so we pray that you would enlighten us, give us your grace, your peace, and your power as we look into your word. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, unless you have been living in a cave, you've all heard by now how the end of the Super Bowl went. Just to give you a brief synopsis, with less than a minute to go Seattle, poised on the one-yard line of New England, Russell Wilson who is Seattle's quarterback threw an almost incomprehensible interception, turning what should have been an almost certain victory into an ignominious defeat. The announcers went crazy, the crowd went crazy, even the

team went crazy at how bad a play this was. They got into a brawl in the last 30 seconds over a play that's going to be discussed and dissected literally for years. And what really interested me about this is I'm a big fan of Russell Wilson's, again the quarterback who did this terrible, terrible play, and I'm a fan of his because he's an outspoken believer in Jesus Christ. And I know that it's very popular to jump on athletes claiming their love for Christ, but to me it's still a public acknowledgment and it's something that takes a certain level of courage. And just because accountants and waiters and dentists and teachers don't normally do it doesn't mean that when athletes do do it, they should be anything but commended for doing it. And so I usually give the benefit of the doubt to anybody who publicly is willing to take a stand for Christ, but I noted something about Wilson that was a little bit discomfort -- discomforting. He had a habit of thanking God for helping him win games. I don't know if you follow it, but if -- two weeks before this they had this miraculous victory over the Green Bay Packers, and this is what *Sports Illustrated* quoted Russell Wilson as saying, "That's God setting it up, to make it so dramatic, so rewarding, so special." And it seemed to me like Russell was saying that God gave him special grace to win the Green Bay game, and that really begs the question. The question is: Does God really care about the outcome of football games? And I think the answer to that is obviously yes. I think that was a

surprise. I mean, it almost goes without saying if God cares about a sparrow moving from one branch to another, he's going to care about something as prosaic as football. It's just that the thing that he's a not going to care that much about is the outcome or the score. A noted theologian Peyton Manning put it this way, he said: "I don't think God really cares about who wins football games, except as winning might influence the character of some person or group." Well said.

What made this Super Bowl interesting from a spiritual perspective to me also is that Russell Wilson was intercepted by a guy who claimed that his ability came from his faith and his prayer life. So you have this situation, irresistible force meets immovable object, you got two different people, two different teams both praying to their God for their victory. And so it raises the question: Does God care about Russell Wilson and his nemesis and the game that they play, and I submit to you that absolutely he does care. Does that mean that either of them play with God on their side? And I say yes, they both play with God on their side. Does it mean they have an advantage? No, absolutely not. And like Peyton Manning said, God is far more interested in their character than in the final score in the game. So we watch something like a Super Bowl and we are just amazed at the outcome and everybody likes to talk about it, but after a couple of days it's faded and

it's forgotten. But to the Russell Wilsons of this world, it is not so easy. This is their career, this is what they do, and this is what they've spent the last ten months of the year preparing for. And you think about all of the practice and all of the repetition, all of the pain that they've gone through, and all of this for one throw in the last 30 seconds of the game that makes it all collapse. I imagine it's very similar to a musician putting on a concert. And you know, a couple of weeks ago we went to hear Elijah and he, accompanied by his brother, did a performance of Tchaikovsky and for some 40 minutes almost nonstop Elijah is there and he's playing his heart out. And I could just imagine if at some point at the height of his performance he suddenly suffered a brain freeze or a hand cramp and suddenly hit the wrong note or maybe even a series of wrong notes, we would say well, that was too bad, but then we'd go home and forget about it. But he would have been devastated. I mean instantly he would have been thinking of all of the hours and hours of practice and all of the blood, the sweat, and the tears that for that one moment would have just gone up in smoke when instead of killing the piece, the piece killed him. Well, mercifully that didn't happen. Elijah was amazing. We appreciated that. But that's what it's like for anyone who's involved in a performance, whether it's athletic or musical. You see, Russell Wilson can't just shake his head and move on like we do. I mean, I guarantee you that he has replayed the last 30

seconds of that game thousands of times. I guarantee you he has rewound the clock, played the tape, played it over and over again envisioning it working out in dozens and dozens of different ways and the weight of that failure is, for him, absolutely crushing. You see, we get to walk away from it. He has to wear it.

Now, switch contests for a second. Switch contests from the Super Bowl to a far more important contest that took place thousands of years ago on Mount Carmel. The contest is Elijah versus Ahab and Jezebel, and Elijah has scored the final victory, he ends the contest, Elijah won, Ahab and Jezebel, zero. The contest was this, both contestants agreed to put a sacrifice on the altar to see who the real God was and that would be the God who would accept the sacrifice. And we know the outcome. The prophets of Baal are wailing for an entire day trying to get their god to consume the sacrifice, all to no avail. Elijah calls out to God and the entire sacrifice is consumed along with the altar and the stones and the water surrounding it. And Elijah, he cements his victory by having all 400 of the prophets of Baal executed right then and there. And for Elijah this is his crown performance, this is the culmination of three years of preparation. For three years now, Israel has been under this severe drought, a drought that was announced directly by Elijah in the very throne room of Ahab and Jezebel. And now at the height of the drought, Elijah has absolutely

demonstrated the superiority of his God, he's announced the end of the drought and he's prayed in this magnificent rainfall. By every metric, his victory should have been absolute and complete. The problem was Jezebel was not interested in playing by those metrics. Here's what happened. This is *1 Kings 19:1-4*, it says: *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may all 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." 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. 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."*

I don't think you can describe a more stunning change of heart from the profound exhilaration of seeing God's mighty hand perform all of these miracles to an absolutely devastated spirit that now wants to die. I mean, how do you go from the triumph of chapter 18 to this devastating tragedy of chapter 19? What caused one comment made by Jezebel to Elijah to completely unravel everything that Elijah stood for and to reduce him to somebody who wants to die? Well, the first and most obvious cause is what the scripture says:

It was fear. Verse 3 says: *Then he was afraid.* The more obvious question is why? I mean, remember, this is not an overnight situation. Three years have gone by since Elijah announced the drought. And during those years we have to remember there's been a steady stream of miracles that God has used to sustain Elijah. Right after Elijah delivers the news that the drought is going to begin, if you remember, God sent him off to the wilderness and there he was fed for many, many days miraculously by ravens. And when he comes into town, he's met by a widow and she and her son and Elijah live off this miraculously unending supply of flour and oil and while all of those around them are starving, they're being miraculously fed by God. And during the same period, Elijah's met by the widow whose son has now died, and Elijah cries out to God and God miraculously raises the young boy up from the dead, and so Elijah is the product of all of these miracles, he's seen them all been playing out over these years but they're just an introduction to this grand miracle that has just taken place on Mount Carmel. And so we ask how is it that at the time of his greatest triumph when in front of all Israel he's demonstrated the overwhelming power and might of his God that he then subsequently collapses? I mean, consider what Jezebel did. She sends a messenger to Elijah. Why in the world would she just send a messenger? Why wouldn't she simply kill him? If she's going to send somebody to speak to him, why not send somebody to kill him? Well, I suspect Jezebel

understood there's some politics involved. And when your side has been devastated and Elijah has proved himself to be a worthy prophet in the eyes of a nation, it's probably not wise to try to assassinate him, but Jezebel in all likelihood would have loved to have done just that. However, she is politically and spiritually impotent, and so all she can do is really seethe and send him a nasty message. I mean, she's the one who's just suffered this devastating loss of 400 of her prophets and there's really nothing she could do except to threaten him. And so she says: *"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."* Oh, really? I mean, at any other time that might have made some kind of sense as a threat, it might have had some real impact, but coming off this devastating defeat at Elijah's hands, well, it speaks of nothing but desperation and anger. But for some reason Elijah takes it all in and for some reason he's captured by it.

If I can mix metaphors a little bit here, what happened to Elijah is not that different from what happened to Russell Wilson. You know, he had driven down to the one-yard line, he's looking at an easy victory and for some inexplicable reason he throws an interception in the end zone and everything at once collapses. But this wasn't just a football game. You see, Elijah genuinely believed that the nation of Israel was poised to throw off the idol



worship that enslaved them for the last three years. He was convinced that an overwhelming display of God's miraculous power was going to usher in a revival unseen in Israel for years. And he firmly believed that God was about to usher in a brand new day for the nation of Israel. And when Ahab finally went back and told Jezebel how overwhelming God's victory was, surely she, too, would capitulate. Well, it didn't happen. And when that didn't happen, all the wind just went out of Elijah's sails. And I say that because Elijah himself tells God the reason for his collapse in *1 Kings 19:10*. This is what he says, he says: *"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."* You know in essence, Elijah's telling God: Your whole plan was a failure. Now he tells him in spite of the incredible miracles that absolutely nothing has changed. God, your covenant is still forsaken, the altars are still torn down, the prophets are still being killed and now they're coming after me, and ain't that a kick in the pants? I mean, consider what Elijah is speaking to God. This is what Elijah's telling God. He's telling God: God, in spite of your obvious mastery over the gods of Baal, in spite of your obvious miraculous power that rained down fire from the sky and burnt up the sacrifice, in spite of all of that, you're really no match for

the likes of Jezebel. I mean, even on its face it's ludicrous. But that's exactly what fear can do. And the scripture says: *Then he was afraid.* Now just days before, Elijah had been so energized by the victory that he was able to outrun Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezreel. *1 Kings 18:46* says: *And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and he ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.* This is a guy outrunning a chariot. That's something. And now the intense joy that so energized and empowered Elijah has been completely replaced with joy's opposite, and that is abject despair. It looks like Elijah's has been able to snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory. It's like he's allowed some paper tiger like Jezebel to steal his joy and replace it with a sorrow so deep that he now wants to die. Well, I got news for you, that's exactly what the enemy wants to do in your life and in mine. And to the extent that we follow Elijah's footsteps will be the extent that he succeeds.

Here's my point. I can safely say to any believer in Jesus Christ that you, too, at some point in your life are going to have your own Elijah moment. God even says so. In *1 Peter 4:12*, he says this: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* See, each one of us is going to come to a time where stress, heartache and difficulty is going to come crashing

into our lives, and along with it will come the single greatest ally the enemy has. It's what captured Elijah. *Then he was afraid.* So we ask ourselves, what was it that Elijah could be afraid of? What transformed him with a person so -- from being a person who was so incredibly moved by this miracle that he's able to outrun a chariot to someone who now wants to die? What is he afraid of? Well, I suggest to you he was afraid of the very same things that you and I are afraid of when catastrophe comes knocking at our doors. Number one, that God doesn't really care. Number two, that God is finally fed up with my sin and now he's going to make me pay. Or number three, that God's sovereignty will somehow come up short.

Well, let's look at the first point first: God just doesn't care. You know, it may not be phrased that way, it may be that you think that God answers the prayers of others more than he answers yours. It may be that you think that your particular catastrophe doesn't rise to the level of his concern. God says that's simply not true. You know, if he cares about football, surely he cares about you. This is what Jesus said in *Matthew 10:29*, he said: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*" Now I've said it many, many times, when you have that

feeling that God just doesn't care about me, what you have to do is go back to the cross. If you're looking to proof that God loves you, go back to the cross. And the fact that you are here, the fact that you acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is proof that the Holy Spirit has touched you, has opened your eyes and given you a new heart and a new spirit. You know, Jesus made the most obvious of comparisons when he said in *Romans 8:32*: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

Now perhaps your catastrophe has caused you to see God as finally fed up, God's finally said I'm done with this, I've had it, and now he's going to let you have it for some sin or transgression that you may have committed. Now there's no question that some catastrophes are simply the outcome of bad decisions or sinful decisions that we've made. You know, if I'm speeding and I get a ticket, I have to -- I don't have to look far and wide to see if God is punishing me. It's my own actions. My own actions have consequences. And perhaps your catastrophe is part of God's discipline in your life. Well, if that's so, understand something, God saw your entire life over 2,000 years ago while he was paying for your sin on the cross. So God doesn't get frustrated or angry or filled up to the very brim where he just says, "I'm done with you" like humans do. You see, if you are one of his own, he is

committed to shaping and molding you into the very image of his own Son; and sometimes that involves the painful consequences of sinful actions. But understand something, it is never the result of God lashing out at our behavior. This is what God says in *Hebrews 12:5*. He says: *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* See, being disciplined is a good thing. You know, if you are under God's discipline, make no mistake about it, his Holy Spirit will be convicting you. You will be certain of what it is you've done and what you need to do to make it right. Jesus said in *John 16*: *"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."* You see, it's the devil who loves to oppress us with this free-floating, non directed sense of guilt and failure. That's not conviction; that is oppression. The Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and the sooner we learn to distinguish between

the devil's false conviction and the Holy Spirit's genuine conviction, the healthier we will be.

Now the third issue is -- it seems to be the one that Elijah is dealing with here, the third issue is that somehow or other God's sovereignty seems to have somehow come up short. I mean, Elijah states right off the bat that he's confident that he's done the very best that he could do. In *1 Kings 19:10*, he said: *"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts."* You know, God, it's Israel who failed here. I mean, it's almost as if Elijah is saying, "Look, I gave it -- I know you gave it your best shot but look, God, it's pretty obvious it didn't work." Again, *1 Kings 19:10*: *He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."* See, Elijah doesn't think he's been overlooked by God and he doesn't really think that he's being disciplined by God. He only knows that things didn't work out like he thought they would. I mean, the vision that he had of revival sweeping down Mount Carmel has been dashed. Jezebel has not been moved. And now all is lost. Again, *1 Kings 19:3*, it says: *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. 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."*

Let me suggest a fourth possibility for the catastrophe that is overwhelming Elijah. It's a real possibility that took place or will take place not just in Elijah's life but in Russell Wilson's and in yours and in mine. God for his purposes was crushing Elijah, like he crushed Joseph, like he crushed Peter, like he crushed Paul. *Psalm 34* says: *The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart.* And sometimes, folks, it is God who breaks that heart. Commenting on this scripture, author John J. Parsons writes this: "Brokenness is the means through which God performs some of his deepest work within our hearts." A.W. Tozer once said: 'It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply.' Likewise Alan Redpath once wrote, 'When God wants to do an impossible task, he takes an impossible individual, and crushes him.' This seems to be the divine pattern. Plainly put, God (and only God) can 'deconstruct' the self so that life's priorities, focus, and passions are redirected to him alone, the true source of life."

See, there was nothing random about this crushing. It was specific, it was targeted, it was directed by God towards Elijah

for one very specific reason. It's the reason why God crushes anyone. Let me just repeat it: "God (and only God) can deconstruct the self so that life's priorities, focus, and passions are redirected to him alone, the true source of life." See, Augustine once said: "Such is each one, as is his love." What he meant is that all of us become what we love the most. You know, if you love money the most, you're going to become greedy. If you love power the most, you're going to become dictatorial and demanding; if you love food the most, you're going to become a glutton. If you love God the most, you will become exactly what he wants you to be, not because God so desperately needs our love but because loving him is the healthiest thing we could ever do. You know, perhaps Elijah loved his plan for reviving Israel more than he loved God. Perhaps he loved his ability to stand as God's prophet more than he loved God himself. Perhaps he loved that raw display of God's power and that spectacular miracle that took place on Mount Carmel more than he loved God. I don't know. But I do know this: In the midst of Elijah's absolute despair, God told him something very specific. After Elijah had poured out his heart to God about Israel's failure to revive, God said this to him in *1 Kings 19:11*. It says: *And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after*



*the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave, and behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

Now I mean I don't know, I can only speculate, but it certainly seems to me that God was specifically telling Elijah that he is not the mighty and special miracles that made up Elijah's public ministry. He wasn't in the wind, he wasn't in the earthquake, and he wasn't in the fire. Instead he insisted he was in the still, small voice that any one of us can hear if we simply care to listen. You see, I look in scripture and I can see the pattern of God crushing out of those that he loves those other loves that get in the way of a love for God. We see Joseph and we see him loving his own human goodness, his own self-sufficiency, and then we see God crushing that out of him through his kidnapping, through his imprisonment and through his rise to power. We see Peter's confidence in himself and his own ability shattered by his denial of Jesus. You know, shortly after bragging that he would never leave Jesus, Peter does that, and he does it by denying him three times and he is devastated. Oh, we see him being served breakfast by a risen Christ, and in the dialogue that ensues, Jesus goes

right to the heart of the matter. And what matters here is Peter's love for God. This is *John 21:15*, it says: *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to Him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."*

That's the question. Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Now, do you think that Jesus is really just sitting there pining for Peter's love or do you think Peter himself needs to learn what love matters most? Again, "when God wants to do an impossible task, he takes an impossible individual and he crushes him." We see it in scripture all the time. We see Paul blessed by God with a brilliant mind in training and then blessed again with the revelation from Christ himself knocking him off his horse. And yet as brilliant and as gifted as Paul was, he, too, had the same tendency to love that which is not God. In his case it was his own giftedness, it was his own ability, and God had the same

determination to strip him of that false love. How? By crushing Paul. Listen to how Paul describes the experience in 2 Corinthians 1:8, he says this: *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. Sound familiar? 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. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. See, Paul was absolutely and utterly crushed. God was stripping him of the false love that kept him from the one true love we all need, and that is the love of God.*

*Deuteronomy 4:24 says: For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. God is jealous, but not in the way that we understand jealousy. See, we understand jealousy as this fallen sinful desire to possess something we don't really have. But God has none of that. God possesses it all. He is completely and totally self-sufficient within the trinity, yet, yet he is still jealous. He wants for us that which is the very best for us, and that which is the very best for us is to love the very best there is, and that just happens to be God. See, God can't help but to be jealous for himself because he alone is the one thing every one of us need to desire. And to be in love with him is to be in love*

with the best. And to crush out of us anything short of that love is not to crush us but to insist that we love in a way that we won't love on our own. God is determined to lead us to a love that we don't naturally gravitate towards ever since the fall. And it's a love that we will not go to without some measure of pain, but it's a love that yields so much joy and peace and pleasure that all those who've experienced that love will uniformly tell that it was well, well worth of pain. You know, you say you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. What if you can't just lead the horse to water? What if you have to drive him? I mean, what if his own fallen sense of his thirst is so backwards that he doesn't even know how to crave real water?

Isaiah 55:1 says this: *"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you -- the sure mercies of David."* You know, God is asking us, why do you invest so much of yourselves in that which isn't real? I mean, he puts it in terms of food and he's saying about -- he's speaking of his amazement that we spend

money on that which is not even real bread.

I want to make an analogy here that may be a little bit dangerous because I want to address the foodies in our congregation. I know that there's a lot of you in this church that are absolutely committed to changing the way that you cook and the way that you eat, and I know that in our diet there are two things that give taste to food, that is sugar and fat, and I know that many of you are committed to removing those things from your diet and in so doing, you have introduced yourself to food that people like me see is insipid and tasteless. Now, those of you who have gone down that road have found a new way of relating to food that has opened up for you tastes that you'd never knew you had. I've even had some of that food and I've been surprised at how good it was. Not quite good enough to make me change my ways though, I still happen to love the taste of hydrogenated oil, enriched white flour and sugar. In fact, I've yet to find anything that could equal a fresh Ring Ding and a cup of coffee with artificial sweetener and creamer. But again, I'm open to trying anything. Here's my point. My point is that almost everyone who has gone on to that type of food, well, they had to get there by crushing their previous love for foods that they now consider unhealthy. So it is with the love of God. You see, we all start out loving God because he's useful. I mean, after all, he died so that we could live. He lived the

perfect life and then he offered up that life for our life of sin. There's nothing more useful than that. I mean *1 John 4:19: We love him -- why? -- because he first loved us.* See, we start out loving God because he is useful but we end up loving God because he is lovely. And in between those two states, God is shaping and molding us into the image of his Son who loved him for his loveliness. He's also growing and nurturing our capacity to love as he loves, and that is a love that is willing to trust in the middle of a catastrophe. Sometimes that involves crushing out of us secondary loves that rob us of that ability. Now for Elijah it may have been the love of his role as God's prophet. Or not. Maybe it was an out-of-bounds love for the nation of Israel. Or not. I mean, we only know some facts and the fact is that Jezebel rejected Elijah's victory, she threatened his life, and he completely collapsed. You see, something he loved more than God was taken away from Elijah by God, and Elijah wanted to die. You see, Elijah's catastrophe is a window into yours and mine.

There's a whole lot more that we can say about God's dealing with Elijah, we'll be looking at that for the next couple of weeks. But understand something about the nature of catastrophes. You know, Russell Wilson suffered a minor catastrophe compared to Elijah, but it was a catastrophe. Maybe he was thinking God is the useful one who can help me win football games, and God is crushing that out of

him. I don't know. I mean, the only one who truly knows that is God and Russell Wilson. We do know that God is willing to crush that kind of secondary love, and that crushing is never without pain. *Hebrews 12:11* says: *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* In Russell Wilson's case we can already see the yield of that peaceable fruit. *Western Journalism* had this headline a few days after Wilson's loss. It was this: "Russell Wilson Threw The Interception That Lost The Super Bowl, But His Amazing Response Is Turning Heads." It went on to say this, it says: "Despite a tough loss, Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson was not hesitant to thank God 'for the opportunity' to play in the big game. Wilson tweeted the following Sunday after the Sea Hawks heartbreaking 28-24 loss to the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLIX, he said, "Thank you God to the opportunity. We'll be back. I will never waiver on who he has called me to be." Well said, Mr. Wilson.

So I guess my question this morning is how about you? Have you ever wavered on who God has called you to be? Perhaps you find yourself in your own personal catastrophe. Maybe you don't think you've been overlooked by God, maybe you don't believe you're being punished by God for something that you've done overtly, yet you believe somehow or other God's sovereignty has somehow allowed a

Jezebel or two to impact your life in a way that you just can't handle. Maybe God is crushing you. Maybe God through these circumstances is asking of you the same three questions he asked of Peter: Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?

At the end of Elijah's meeting with God in the wilderness, God asked him the question that Russell Wilson seemed to answer very well. *1 Kings 19:13: And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"* So what are you and I doing here? You know, through good times, bad times, and sometimes catastrophic times, we are here to be who he's called us to be. Let's pray.

*Father God, I just thank you for a love that is so deep, so broad, and so real, that you are willing to love us even though we love you back simply because you're useful. We love you back because you have loved us first, and yet, Lord, you are willing to nurture in us the love that is the true love, the love for you that results when we are crushed, when we have all of the other loves that we are so quick to go to driven out of us by a God who wants us to love the very best, and that just happens to be you, God. Thank you for being willing to love us in that way. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*