

## Encouragement in Despair

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1 Kings 19

### Introduction:

Adoniram Judson was born in Massachusetts in the year 1788. Radically saved at the age of 20, he later committed his life to live on mission as a missionary to the unreached country of Berma, which is modern day Myanmar (ME ANNE MAR) in southeast Asia. Before he went on the mission field, he fell in love with Ann Hasseltine, and desired to marry her. He wanted Ann to join him on his mission into Berma. Like a gentleman he wanted to first ask her dad for Ann's hand in marriage. Now, when someone gets ready to ask a dad for their daughters' hand in marriage, you would probably expect the future son in law to ensure the dad that their daughter is going to be safe, provided for, and live happily ever after.

But this is what Adoniram wrote to Ann's dad asking for Ann's hand in marriage, *"I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world? Whether you can consent to her departure to a heathen land, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress... to insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this?"*

Would any dads in here with daughters be excited to receive this request? Judson goes on to say..

*Can you consent to all this for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"*

Ann and Adoniram would get married and it would be a life of great difficulty. A life that at the time Judson could have never imagined. The Judson's would go to Berma and would find the fruit of their labor hard to come by. In fact, they did not see their first convert to Christ until their 6th year there. They experienced pain and suffering, that we will see in more detail later, of imprisonment, sickness, and even death.

It was a life of suffering that brought Adoniram Judson to a place of great despair, wanting to give up on his mission, lead him contemplate whether death would be better than life.

In this series, called "Days of Elijah", where we are looking at different stories from the life of Elijah in 1 Kings, we have been talking about how God has a mission for each and every one of us. All of us are on mission as we live our lives to serve Him and advance the Kingdom of God, in our daily lives.

But what happens when as a Christian, you don't want to live on mission for God anymore? When life just gets to be so hard that you have had enough and want to give up? Where do you turn, what do you do when life is just so stinking hard, and you have nothing left? What do you do when you are at the end of your rope? Have you been there?

This afternoon we find the prophet Elijah at a point in his life that leads him to long for death. Elijah hits rock bottom as he comes to a place where he has nothing left for God and the mission that God has him on. But at that moment of despair, we see a gracious, loving God, who strengthens and encourages his servant when he needed it most.

## **PRAY**

**Our story today has two parts. Each part introduces the two main characters our story. In the first Part our main character is Elijah. In the second part of our story, spoiler alert, our main character is God. In the first part of our story, we are going to see Elijah's response to a trial, and in our second part we are going to see God's response to Elijah in his trial.**

**CIT: And in this we are going to see that God graciously gives us abundant strength and encouragement in moments of despair.**

Are we ready? Let's GO!

## **Part 1: Elijah Enters Despair**

***<sup>1</sup>Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.***

In our story today, we are introduced to three characters right off the bat.

We have Ahab: Ahab as we have seen is King of Israel who was a very evil man. He was so wicked that the bible tells us that he "Did what was evil in the Lord's sight more than all who were before him."

Next is Jezebel: Not only was Ahab evil, but his wife might have been more wicked than him. As a foreign woman, someone not in the people of God, the Israelites, Jezebel brought the worship of Baal to the Kingdom of Israel and led the Israelites to worship Baal over their God, Yahweh. In earlier passages she was also responsible for the murder of many of God's prophets. Ok, so this was one evil women.

And then last, we are introduced to Elijah who is the first of two main characters in our story. Elijah, as you know, was a prophet of God during this reign of King Ahab.

Ahab then goes and tells his wife everything that just happened in 1 Kings 18, the passage that John preached from last week, and what the kids recapped for us earlier.

Our passage falls on the heels of the events that took place on Mount Carmel. Last week John preached on the showdown at Mount Carmel. Elijah vs. the prophets of Baal. The Showdown on Mount Carmel was to see which god, Baal or Yahweh was the real true god. So both Elijah and the prophets of Baal made alters to their god. They were then to both pray to their god to set their alter on fire. And whoever's alter went up in flames won and proved that the god they worshipped was the real God. The prophets of Baal went first, but despite their continual cries to Baal, their alter never lite on fire. But when Elijah asked Yahweh, the one true God to send down fire on this alter, God sent the fire as it consumed the alter that Elijah had built. So it was an emphatic win by God. Some of God's people turned from worshipping Baal to Yahweh, and Elijah executed the prophets of Baal. God had won and God's judgment was poured out to the evil Baal prophets.

So after Ahab had witnessed all that, he goes back to the city of Jezreel, where his palace was in Israel, to tell his wife Jezebel everything that had happened on Mount Carmel and how Baal's prophets were killed.

*Verse 2 says So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say,*

*“May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.*

In response to this news about what happened on Mt. Carmal, Jezebel is not phased at all at what God or Elijah did. Her response was not to repent and turn to God but she vowed to kill Elijah. So she sends a messenger to tell Elijah that he is a dead man, and that he will be dead by tomorrow.

When Elijah hears this news coming from the queen he freaks out. He cowards in fear and runs for his life. After Elijah had just witnessed what he saw on Mount Carmel, we might expect him to be a little bolder and more courageous, but we don't see that at all. We see that Elijah becomes afraid and runs for his life.

And not only did Elijah run for his life, he ran as far away as he possibly could. He was getting way out of town. The passage says he went **“to Beersheba in Judah”**

I want you to see this: You see Mount Carmel at the top. To the SE you see Jezreel, where he was at the time of receiving news about the mark on his head. He then went all the way down to Beer-Sheba, in Judea, which is as far south as you possibly can go and still be in the Kingdom of God. But he didn't even stop there. When he got to Beersheba, he then left his servant and went all by himself into the wilderness.



And it is at this point, as Elijah is wondering out in the wilderness, all by himself, that Elijah hits rock bottom.

***<sup>3b</sup>He came to a broom bush, 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.”<sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.***

In the wilderness, Elijah finds a tree, where I can just picture him collapsing there under its shade, as he is physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted, crying out to God to kill him.

Elijah cries out to God, “I have had enough, take my life!”

Elijah doesn’t want to live on mission for God anymore. Life has become so hard and he has had enough, he is at the end of his rope, and has nothing left.

### **Application:**

I mean how raw is this moment but how relatable is this moment as well? We can all relate to some degree to Elijah here. Moments where we cry out to God, “I have had enough.” “I have NOTHING left.”

“God, I am ready to give up on this marriage. I am so tired God of battling this anxiety, this depression, this loneliness. I want to give up. This job God is about to kill me. God, I have had enough of being hurt by others, I am so tired of being let down. I am done with people bullying me at school. God I am so lonely and broken, I am done. I am tired of battling this sickness or going through the sickness or death of a loved one. God, it is killing me!

Have you been at the end of your rope like Elijah was in our passage? I HAVE. And maybe you are at that point today.

### **Illustration:**

Back to our story of Adoniram Judson. As mentioned, while Judson expected his life as a missionary in Berma, to be difficult, he could have never imagined how difficult it was going to be. 11 years after they had first arrived in Burma, war broke out between Burma and the English

government. This led to the people of Burma falsely believing that the Judson were English spies. This belief led them to throw Adoniram into a disgusting prison, that was 40 by 30 foot, with 5 foot ceilings and held him along with 100 other prisoners. Not only that but they were all chained by their legs and ankles. Judson was in prison for a total of 21 months and barely survived. As if that wasn't enough, after he was released from prison, his wife Ann died of sickness 11 months later, followed quickly by his daughter's death.

Like our prophet Elijah, this led Judson to despair. He left like Elijah, to go out into his own wilderness to live life as a hermit in the middle of the jungle. It was there that Adoniram would question his mission and even his faith. At one point, it got so bad, that Judson dug a grave and for days sat beside this grave, staring into it. Where I imagine finding himself in the exact place that Elijah did. Asking himself if death would be better than the mission God had him on. At this time in his life, Judson would write, "God is to me the great unknown. I believe in Him but find him not."

### **Application:**

Maybe you have not had a moment as extreme as Adoniram Judson or Elijah, but we all face moments where we want to give up. Where we have had enough and have nothing left to give. Where it is hard to even put one foot in front of the other. Where maybe we find ourselves questioning whether living life on mission for God is even worth it.

But you know what? There is hope for us. Because our great God does not leave his prophet Elijah in despair. I believe this passage gives great hope to those who find themselves in their biggest moments of weakness. Because our God is greater than the darkest days of our lives.

So, let's turn the page to Part 2 of our story.

## **Part 2: God encourages his despairing prophet Elijah God doesn't leave his children in despair**

So let's enter back into our story. Elijah has just collapsed under the broom tree and cries out to God telling him that he has had enough and to take his life. He then falls asleep.

In the second part of this story, we are introduced to the second and most important main character of our story. God. He shows up in a mighty way. In a moment where his servant Elijah needed him most. And this afternoon we are quickly going to see four ways that God encourages his despairing servant Elijah. And in these four ways I am going to word then in a way that they are personal to us, so that you can be reminded of these truths when you want to give up.

### **1. God Intimately Cares for His servants**

*19:5 All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."*

As Elijah is sleeping an angel, sent from God, wakes him up and tells Elijah to get up and eat, and as Elijah gets up, look at what he sees! ***6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water.***

Wow. See the grace and mercy of a loving God in this moment.

I love the Hebrew wording here of what God provided for Elijah. He provided for him “a cake of bread” and a jar of water. A cake! As John Piper says about this passage, “Instead of death, like Elijah asked for, God gives him cake”. And this cake was sitting on a bed of hot coals.

**Illustration:** If you know me, you know I love me a good Ruth’s Chris steak. One of the things I love about it is how they bring out your steak on a sizzling platter. They do this to keep that steak at just the right temperature.

This bread that God gives Elijah, is on a sizzling platter and keeping its temperature.

See the grace and mercy of a loving God in this moment.

God could have left Elijah alone and granted his wish. He could have said, fine have it your way. Justly God could have been angry at Elijah. He could have said, “Elijah, you are in sin, and buddy you need to suck it up! But God doesn’t do that. God instead intimately cares for his servant as he enters into this moment of despair with his servant Elijah, and get this, **EVEN WHEN IT WAS UNWANTED.**

Elijah was done. He didn’t want help. But God is not going to stand by and let his servant suffer alone. He comes to Elijah in his helplessness and weakness and tenderly cares for him. He gives him a cake on a sizzling platter with a jar of water in the desert.

**Application:**

I love this so much because this is so like our God. To intimately care for his children and give them what they need, especially in their moments of despair. God meets us in our helplessness, in our weakness to care for us and give us what we need.

You want to know how I know he will do this? He will, because he has.

In our most hopeless and helpless situation God provided us with what we needed most. When the sin that we committed puts us literally on death row for an eternity apart from God, Jesus entered Himself into that hopelessness. And not only entered into it, he took our place on the cross, so that we could go from our hopeless state apart from God into a **intimate, caring relationship** with him.

And if God did that, church, if God did that when we were not in a relationship with him, how much more will he care for his children, now?

See in this passage how much our heavenly Father loves us.

When you find yourself in those moments where you have nothing left. Take heart! You have a God who loves you intimately, and desires to strengthen you with what you need.

First, we see God encouraging his servants by intimately caring for them.

Second way God encourages his servants

## 2. God's servants can bring their burdens to Him

*<sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.*

In our passage, we see the Lord graciously providing Elijah with strength. And He does this not once, but twice. God wakes Elijah up and second time to feed him and strengthen him and then sends Elijah even further south, to Mount Horeb

Again, to help you picture this moment here is our map:



Mount Horeb is a very important place in the history of God's people. It was there that God revealed himself first to Moses as a burning bush. This is also the exact mountain where God gave his people the 10 Commandments. I am sure you have heard of those.

So, Mount Horeb is an extremely important and holy place for God's people. And God now tells Moses to go there.

It took Elijah 40 days and 40 nights to get to Mount Horeb and once he gets there he goes into a cave and spends the night.

After Elijah wakes up from his sleep, the Word of God comes to Elijah.

*19:9 “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

*10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.”*

*“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* In this moment, the Lord grants Elijah a moment to be real, and lay out to God what is on his heart. God listens to Elijah’s complaint and doesn’t rebuke him for it.

And in this complaint, Elijah kind of starts to have a pity party with God.

I mean Elijah is basically like: “God look what I have done. I have worked so hard, and I have nothing to show for it. I have been so faithful to you, and all I have gotten out of it is people not listening, people are killing Your prophets, and now they are coming to kill me.”

### **Application:**

Do you ever have moments like this? God, I have done everything you have told me to do. I have obeyed you and followed you even when it has been difficult, and I have nothing to show for it.

Again, how raw and relatable is this moment. But in this pity party, God allows Elijah to lay out his complaint before Him. In this we are encouraged to bring our complaints to God. All our pain, hurt, and concerns to God. So when you are at the end of your rope, go to God, who cares for you. As one commentator put it. “Keep talking to God”. Church, don’t stop talking to God, be encouraged that he enters into that pain with you as you “cast all of your burdens on Him, because he cares for you.”

- 1. God intimately cares for His servants**
- 2. God’s servants can bring their burdens to Him**

### **3. God is always with His servants**

After Elijah’s pity party, God says in Verse 11.

*11 “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”*

Ok, God is about to show up. This is an incredible moment! But what’s interesting here is not only that God comes/reveals Himself to Elijah, but how he reveals Himself to him.



So let me paraphrase these next couple of verses for you. Elijah is out standing on Mount Horeb and then all of a sudden a powerful wind rips through the mountains. It caused mountains to break and shattered rocks, but unexpectedly God was not in this violent windstorm.

Next, there was an earthquake. And as everything starting shaking around him, I am sure Elijah thought, ok here He comes. But God wasn't in the earthquake either.

Next there was a fire. I mean God showed himself to Moses on this exact mountain in the fire of a burning bush, so this must be God here, right. But again, it was not God.

And then, after all that, violent windstorm, earthquake, and a fire, comes a soft, gentle whisper, and God unexpectedly was in that whisper.

### **Application:**

God may not reveal Himself to us in the way that we expect, or even the way that we would want Him to. God does not always use the remarkable/extraordinary to reveal Himself.

### **And it is tempting for us when we are in despair to not believe that God is with us.**

Sometimes we struggle to see God when we are in despair. But even though God's presence may not be as obvious as a violent wind storm, an earthquake, or fire coming down from heaven, it doesn't mean that God is not with us. Because we can be assured that He is with us.

It may not be some great and mighty sign, though he does show Himself in those ways, it may be in the quiet whisper of his voice. In the quiet whisper of his Word.

Brothers and Sisters, God is with you, even though you don't always see it. His still small voice is always available to us, in his Word. A word that promises over and over and over again, that will NEVER leave or forsake his children.

- 1. God intimately cares for His servants**
- 2. God's servants can bring their burdens to Him**
- 3. God is always with His servants**

Fourth,

- 4. God's servants are not alone**

*19:13 Again God asks,*

***“What are you doing here, Elijah?”***

We see the same dialogue we just witnessed play out in the exact same way. <sup>14</sup> *He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.”*

Did Elijah get it? Sometimes it takes while to get things through our heads...

But even then, God continues to be gracious with his servant. God then encourages his servant Elijah in a fourth way.

God tells Elijah to go and appoint these three people

- Hazael king over Aram
  - Aram is the foreign enemy of Israel, but God is still in control of who rules!
- Jehu is to be the next King over Israel as it is going to be time for Ahad to be removed and punished.
- Elijah is to be the next prophet after Elijah

Elijah is to appoint, Elisha to come and be the next prophet of God. At first, your like, does this mean Elijah's time is coming to an end and going to die after all? NO. Because as we see in the next several chapters, and see as we conclude the series next week, Elijah still has ministry to do. But in Elisha, God is going to provide encouragement and support to Elijah. Help is on the way for Elijah!

And not only is encouragement found in the relationship with Elisha, but God encourages Elijah that there are many others following God as well.

***18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”***

God's people are not all killed, like Elijah falsely claimed, there are thousands still following after God. Elijah is not alone!

**Application:**

When we are in despair, it is of great encouragement to know that we are not alone. And like Elijah is going to have in Elisha, we need the help of others!

**Application:**

Church don't isolate yourself! Especially when you are going through a difficult time. God has given us the encouragement of each other to help us! So don't draw away, but instead pull yourself into the community God has given you!

**As we conclude:**

After God encourages his prophet Elijah, look what happens,

“Verse 19:19, “Elijah left there and found Elisha”

Elijah was back on mission for God.

God supernaturally pulled Elijah from the pit of despair. From wanting to die and quit, to right back into the game of ministry.

**Illustration:**

Adoniram Judson was in despair, as he stared into the grave. But like Elijah, God did not leave him there.

Adoniram Judson was at the end of himself in that jungle. But look at what he says about those days. "There is a love that never fails. If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived."

Judson left the jungle and by God's grace jumped back into the mission that God had for him, in Berma.

In that mission he would end up translating the whole bible into Burmese. He would live to see 7,000 people baptized, and 63 churches established. Today, Myanmar (MY ANNE MAR), modern day Burma, has more than 600,000 baptist church members and 3,513 churches.

Praise God that Adoniram Judson did not allow despair to win and give up on the mission that God had given him.

And by God's grace may we not allow the despair of this world, keep us off the mission God has for us. And when you want to give up be reminded that

- 1. God intimately cares for You**
- 2. You can bring their burdens to God**
- 3. God is always with You**
- 4. You are not alone**