



FINDING HOPE DURING DIFFICULTIES (Sermon)

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Key Text: 1 Kings 19

1. Introduction

The life of every human being can be marked by two different moments: days of happiness or days of misfortune. These differing moments integrate into our lives and we cannot forecast the coming days through wisdom nor human power.

Days of misfortune can be scary and stressful causing a lot of people to be so forlorn they finally dare to accuse God of being responsible for, or the source of, their suffering.

Today, many are undergoing difficult moments in their lives. They are facing stress and wondering how they will get assistance. This suffering and search for assistance is experienced by people all over the world without differentiation of race, culture, or social status. Consequently, many experience chronic diseases and psychological troubles resulting in withdrawal from their faith.

In His Word we read, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him” (Ecclesiastes 7:14*). The most ancient experiences may give us instruction concerning the manner of how we should respond when facing stressful events.

Let’s learn about this ancient instruction through the story of the prophet Elijah.

1. Who was Elijah?

The book of Kings does not clarify Elijah’s origin; however, the study of the Holy Scriptures sufficiently proves that Elijah:

- was the most well-known amongst the Israelite prophets—he whose Ministry has been the most prominent.
- He worked during the period from 874 to 850 before the birth of Christ.
- he forecast the beginning and the end of three years of drought.
- he was used by God to hand a dead child over to its mother.
- he stood in for God in a confrontation with Baal and Ashtoreth’s servants.

- he stood with Moses at the moment of Jesus' transfiguration (see Mark 9:4).
- according to the meaning of his name (Jehovah is my God), Elijah made God his Everlasting God.

2. The misfortune of the prophet Elijah

It's surprising to learn that a well-known prophet such as Elijah suffered stressful days in his life. The Bible declares that after Elijah's smashing victory over the Almighty's enemies on Mount Carmel, Jezebel sent him a message declaring the following: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" (1Kings 19:2).

Jezebel was furious after hearing about the death of Baal's prophets. They always told her what she wanted to hear while forecasting power and glory. Their task consisted of defying the king and queen's authority. Jezebel was angry at the disappearance of her faithful participants in Elijah's test, in addition to the loss of their services. She felt a deep humiliation and fear to see her authority weakened.

Elijah was a continual irritation to Jezebel because he never brought good news, only bad. Incapable of controlling her actions, she swore to kill him. Elijah knew Jezebel's reputation of being pitiless and felt panic. He lost sleep wondering what to do. Finally, along with his servant, Elijah "...arose and ran for his life..." (1 Kings 19:3). Elijah fled to Beersheba where he decided to release his servant and go into hiding by himself in a lonely grotto.

3. Elijah's discouragement

As he was fleeing Elijah was discouraged. He had no hope for his future; everything seemed dark in front of him. In his distress, he addressed a prayer to God: "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'" (1Kings 19:4).

So, what was the problem here? The problem was fear. Overwhelmed with fear, the prophet expressed doubt about God and contemplated managing things himself. Ellen G. White portrays the context of Elijah's situation as "a fugitive, far from the dwelling places of men, his spirits crushed by bitter disappointment, he desired never again to look upon the face of man. At last, utterly exhausted, he fell asleep (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 163).

"Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to

plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”¹

Ecclesiastes suggests that it is very important to think deeply during the difficult times; otherwise, we risk making rash decisions that may isolate us from our God. But He has a way to save us.

4. God's intervention for Elijah during his languid period

Notice that God takes care of His children. Even in the moments of woe, God reveals His love to us. In Elijah's life, even if he had wanted to stay isolated and hidden in a grotto because of his depression, God saw and manifested Himself because He is a God of perfect timing, controlling all of history.

Moreover, we can read what is written concerning God's intervention in favor of Elijah through an angel's intermediary:

“Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, ‘Arise and eat.’ Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, ‘Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.’ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God” (1Kings 19:5-8).

Six elements are to be taken into account in the above passage to illustrate God's intervention, for the people who feel lonely and hopeless:

1. God comes across Elijah by touching him—He is also very close to you. (Psalms 46:1-3)
2. God communicated with Elijah using a living voice (“Arise ...”). It is the posture of the resurrection: up—God will elevate you too.
3. God gave Elijah strength through food, water, and rest—God will also reanimate you.
4. God gave Elijah a mission—God also gives you a mission to accomplish.
5. God was considerate of Elijah's hardships (“for your remaining way is too long”)—It is only God who can take your difficulty into account and release you.
6. God works in His own time—God will do for you as well, according to His own expectations.

5. Elijah recovers hope

God wants us to clearly confess our problems to Him so that we have hope and will orient our focus and comprehension on God and His ways. That is why God's speech was addressed to Elijah as follows: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9). In other words, “What is your business here, Elijah?” Elijah did not delay in confessing his problem to God. Have you ever introduced your disquietude to God? Let us see what God

recommends in His word to us: “Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). God calls us to throw all our anxiety upon him, because he cares for us. We are to take that opportunity to let Him solve our problems.

Look at the way in which Elijah introduces his problem to God: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life” (1Kings 19:10).

Answering his preoccupation, God invited Elijah to approach and said to him, ““Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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 a still small voice” (1Kings 19:11, 12).

When nothing seems clear, look toward God in lieu of trying to solve it yourself. Come close to the mountain near to God, since very close to God is the only place where you can better see things. His proximity changes everything. When Elijah approached God, the Lord manifested Himself and gave Elijah a new mission (Verses 11-18) using a still, small voice.

Conclusion

As humans we experience a life of hardship no matter our race, our language, our nation, our state, or our social status. However, we should understand that only God takes care of us; He reanimates us and gives us victory from the misfortunes that overburden us. God leads and controls history. He asks us to look to Him only, for it is only with Him that we have hope and a future.

¹Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 163.

*Unless otherwise noted, all verses are from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible.