

I Kings 19:4-18; Luke 4:1-8; The LORD Meets His Prophet on the Mountain I. Elijah's Weakness II. Elijah's Complaint III. The LORD's Response

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever felt like running away from your problems? When it feels like the trials and troubles of life are overwhelming, there can be a desire to just get away from them. Mankind even goes so far as to try and drown their sorrows by drinking- or forget their troubles by escaping to entertainment- or to get rid of their troubles by doing drugs. And for those depressed, sometimes it seems like death would be better than their current burdens. These responses to trials forget one, crucial point. The troubles you try to run away from always catch up. What you try to forget will be brought up in memory. Well, today we find our prophet Elijah at one of the lowest points of his ministry. He is in deep despair and anguish of the soul. For those who have experienced depression- we can see why the Psalmist concluded Psalm 88 by saying- darkness is my closest friend! My soul is full of trouble, and my life draws down into the pit. That is where we find Elijah today. He is in the wilderness- having escaped from the grasp of the wicked queen. Remember the context- why is Elijah here in the wilderness? Well, he has run for his life. Although the Hand of the LORD brought him Jezreel- although the Spirit of God had anointed, equipped and appointed him to work in the capital city, Elijah leaves his post in fear. It was the fear of man that moved him to run 100 miles south. Elijah is surprised by the unbelief and rebellion in Israel- he is scared by the hatred and threats of Jezebel- so he flees for his life. So today we find that the LORD meets His prophet on the mountain. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ rebukes his servant by displaying God's power and revealing a message of encouragement.

### **I. Elijah's Weakness**

Our text begins in v. 4 where Elijah separates himself from his companion- and continues his journey alone. After traveling 100 miles south, he leaves his servant and continues into the wilderness and desert. A trip that would take about 1 week concludes, and Elijah is all alone in the wasteland of the Negev. Here Elijah sits under a tree and asks to die. Elijah, the man of faith and prayer- having prayed

that it not rain, praying for fire to fall, praying for rain to fall- now prays that his life be taken. Now we note again how Elijah and Jonah have a similar position. Both Elijah and Jonah sit under a plant- and both talk about death. Where Jonah says in Jonah 4:9- I am angry enough to die- because his plant died. Here Elijah says- I have had enough- I am ready to die. So Elijah lays down- exhausted from his journey and emotionally empty from the spiritual battle he is engaged in. Here we see Elijah's weakness. Now we can understand why he would be physically weak- traveling some 100 miles and now in the dry desert after a week of running for his life. But more than that, he sees himself as a failure. Where Jonah wanted to die because of his success- Elijah wants to die because he thinks he has failed. When we base our success on what we see- when we judge our faithfulness on external signs- we often get it wrong don't we?! For example, a church that is small in number may be great in God's sight- they may be doing their work faithfully and in accordance with God's word- although their numbers never increase. While a huge, mega church may have many people while at the same time being unfaithful and disobedient in their ministry. It is always dangerous to base our standards of ministry success on external numbers! To gage the faithfulness of the Word proclaimed on what our external eyes behold. So Elijah's weakness is a human weakness- judging a situation by external, human standards. Was Elijah's ministry a failure? So he says in v. 4- take my life, I have failed. No one has listened to me- I have had enough- there is no one to help me. I am no better than my fathers. Now this reference to the fathers is a reference to his ancestors. It is true, that the same heart in Elijah's chest is the same sinful heart that beat in the chest of the Israelites of old. It is a sinful, fallen heart- he shares the same nature with those rebellious Israelites who grumbled in the wilderness. He is no better than they! But what about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? What about the patriarchs of faith? Well, Elijah is no better than they as well! But that should not be a disappointment- that is actually comforting! Salvation is not reserved for those who are really good- strong and powerful! The race is not to the swift of foot! No, Elijah, you are right! You are no better than your fathers- you are just as sinful and fallen! But there is good news- your salvation is

not limited to your ability! Your work is not what saves you! Yes, you are weak but He is strong! He makes His power known when He saves the weak! So Elijah has come to a point when he has come off the mountain of Carmel- come to see his own inability! You cannot save Israel- Elijah! You are no better than your fathers- but your forefathers lived by faith- were saved by grace- just as you must learn to trust in Christ alone for your salvation! Your life is not hopeless- your ministry will not be in vain- because God is able to do more through you and in you than you can imagine! Success is not a product of your hand- but it is secured by the hand of Jesus!

## II. Elijah's Complaint

After Elijah has seen and confessed his weakness, the LORD supplies His need. His daily bread is provided in v. 5 and 7- and Elijah is strengthened for the task at hand. But before we get to the heart of Elijah's complaint, we see that Elijah is walking the path of Moses. Elijah is becoming the 2<sup>nd</sup> Moses of sorts. Moses complained back in Numbers 11:15- this burden is too heavy for me- if you will treat me like this, kill me at once. So Moses had asked for God to take his life. Moses had also traveled up the same mountain that Elijah now traveled. Elijah follows in the footsteps of Moses- up Mt. Sinai also called Horeb in v. 8- the Mountain of God. As Moses remained on Sinai for 40 days- now Elijah goes forth for 40 days. As Moses met with God and received His Word- so now Elijah meets with God and hears His voice. Let's read Ex. 33:19-23; 34:28. Notice the similarities? In this, Elijah is reminded of His position and calling. As a prophet of the LORD, it was Elijah's job to bring God's Word to His people. Elijah could not change hearts- Moses could not change the hearts of the people. But a prophet is to be faithful- and a faithful prophet brings the Word in season and out of season no matter how the people respond. A prophet is also to intercede- to pray for and on behalf of the people. To seek peace for the people for the sake of God's name and glory. Elijah had forgotten this- and the LORD would now remind him. So our 2<sup>nd</sup> Moses comes up the mountain and is asked- with a hint of rebuke- what are you doing here, Elijah? In v. 10 and in v. 14 Elijah responds with an indictment against God's people. The first

point he makes is this- I am innocent. I have done my duty- I have been very jealous for the LORD. Basically, the fault is not mine. I have done what you have asked- I have spoken the words you gave me. Secondly, these people have been very wicked. They have broken your covenant, they do not deserve your mercy, they are all rebellious and stubborn. Even after all that I have done- after all that you have shone them- they still rebel! You have done enough for them- and they are still rebellious. It is enough! And thirdly, they have killed all the prophets and I alone and left. There is no one else beside me. And added to that- they are seeking my life as well! Now we note that this complaint is true only in part- but Elijah does not know the whole story- he does not see the whole picture! How often doesn't that happen in our lives- we become discouraged or depressed when we focus on one small part of our lives- when we focus on all that is going wrong and we forget all the good graces that we still receive! We worry about tomorrow- or about what might be- instead of taking each day at a time! Elijah was not seeing the whole picture- yes, Jezebel was seeking his life- but not all had rebelled and rejected the LORD. Had he forgotten the 1000 prophets kept safe in the cave, or of righteous Obadiah? In this complaint of Elijah, we can see that Elijah did not fulfill his office as prophet to the utmost. Although we can understand- we can sympathize with him- it is also true that he forgot some major items- as the LORD will make clear when He responds. We need a prophet who is faithful- even when- especially when times are difficult. Of this perfect prophet we read earlier in Luke 4. Like Elijah, we find Jesus in the desert wilderness. Elijah was here because he ran away- but Jesus was in the wilderness because the Spirit led Him here. Jesus, like Elijah, fasted for 40 days. And at the end of this trial, Jesus was tempted. Would He be faithful to His calling? Would Jesus remain the perfect prophet, priest and King? Or would Jesus forsake His office and give up when the times became tough? As you know, Jesus perfectly kept the covenant, fulfilling all righteousness, worshipping God rightly and worshipping Him alone! And although Elijah was pursued by wicked men to take his life- Jesus was actually put to death

at the hands of wicked men- and yet Jesus did not neglect or forsake His office as prayed for us as He laid down His life for His sheep!

### III. The LORD's Response

Well now that we have seen Elijah's weakness and His complaint against Israel, in our final point we find the LORD'S response. The LORD answers Elijah's prayer with a firm NO. Your work is not done- rather He responds to Elijah's weakness by feeding him- and He responds to Elijah's complaint by rebuking and encouraging Him. He strengthens Elijah for a meeting- provides food, water and sleep to sustain the weary soul- to go out and behold God's glory and hear God's voice. The first thing that our LORD does is ask the question- what are you doing here. But the LORD goes beyond this- by showing His power and glory to Elijah to humble and encourage him. Elijah came to Horeb to give up- to tell God it was hopeless. But God's ways are not our ways- and He is able to do immeasurably more than we think or imagine! So in v. 11 the LORD passes by Elijah as he did Moses. What Elijah sees and hears is awe inspiring! A great and strong wind tore the mountain to pieces. A violent earthquake the tore the mountain apart and shook the earth to its core. And blazing fire that burned and consumed all the it touched. But God was not in these catastrophic events. God does reveal His power- He puts His wonders on display as He did with Moses. But God was not in these violent manifestations. Next came the breath- the small sound- the quiet voice of a low whisper. God is not only the God of thunder, lightning and fire! He is also the God of the still, small voice! And in this still voice God speaks again! The power of God is in the presence of His word- in the sound of His voice! Thinking back to our contest on Carmel- God revealed Himself as the God who present because He answered by fire. But the fire was only a temporary display- God had sent Elijah to be the voice of God- to be the Word bringer to His people! And the enduring power of change and life comes through the Word- the Word of God in spoken form is the power by which hearts are changed! The Word of God is living and active- it will not return void- it piercers to the heart! But when Elijah fled, the word of God was silenced in Israel! So

once again the LORD reminds Elijah- I come to my people in the word- the breath of God- the Spirit of Life speaks through you! So Elijah is confronted again- what are you doing here? Next, Elijah is comforted- or encouraged to retake His mantle of prophet. Although he fled like Peter, Elijah is recommissioned for office. Elijah is given a command and a promise. Go and anoint future leaders- and they will finish your work! In v. 15- Elijah is told to anoint kings. Anoint Hazael over Syria and Jehu over Israel. Added to that- anoint your successor- anoint Elisha to be prophet in your place. In doing so, the LORD is revealing that Elijah is now preparing the way for the future. Elijah is a forerunner- making ready the way for the coming judgement of God. The Kingdom of God is at hand! To encourage Elijah, the LORD makes it clear that His swift sword of judgement will come! He will deal with that wicked Ahab and his wife Jezebel. None will escape the sword of the LORD'S justice- the judge of the earth will do what is right! As Psalm 110 says, He will shatter kings on His day of wrath, He will execute judgment among the nations. And Elijah- you are not alone! In fact, you will anoint your own successor, Elisha! The Word of God will not be silent in the Land- and the wicked who try to snuff out the Word will themselves be destroyed! So the enemies of God will be dealt with- and the righteous remnant will be preserved and protected. There is a remnant, Elijah- some 7000 in Israel that have not bowed down to Baal! Now this truth should encourage us as well. Jesus Christ is King and Lord of the church- Lord over all! As Elijah learns- Jesus will defeat His enemies! Every enemy will be crushed- they will be punished with the sword that comes out of His mouth as Rev. 1 says. The gates of hell will not prevail! But the church will also be protected- the remnant will be saved out of all nations. In fact, Paul uses this passage in Rom. 11 to prove the doctrine of election and preservation! Just as in the days of Elijah, God will have His people. God has not rejected those whom He foreknew. I have kept for myself 7000 men who have now bowed the knee to Baal. So too, there is at the present time a remnant chosen by grace! So God will have His people- Jesus will have His bride and the church will be present on this earth! This fact encourages us when it seems like the wicked are winning the day- when it appears that we alone

are left! The church is always bigger than we think- there will be an innumerable number of saints standing before the throne on that last day!

To conclude, it is easy to be discouraged when we see the wickedness and sin of the world around us. We can think that we alone are the only ones left- all have forsaken you- and the Devil is winning over the world. But as we saw today, Jesus Christ rebukes his servant by displaying God's power and revealing a message of encouragement. There is a remnant- and the wicked will not succeed. The perfect prophet has come- and the battle belongs to the LORD. There was a point in Jesus' ministry when He was seen with Elijah- on the top of the Mountain of Transfiguration- both Moses and Elijah met with Jesus in Mt. 17. These men stood in the presence of God- basking in His glory and listening to His Word. It is this Jesus who would speak of both justice and mercy! Peter said- it is good for us to be here! One day- we will bask in the glory of our God again- and His Word will be in our midst! Until then, let our hearts be encouraged as we remember that Jesus has secured the victory over all His foes and He will gather His church! We, like Elijah have a calling- work to do! To declare the victory of the Lord Jesus over all- and to comfort His struggling saints! Not one of His chosen ones will be lost- for His Word is powerful and effective!