

1 Kings 19:3-8

Ahab, king of Israel was an evil man. In fact the Bible tells us that Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of the kings before him. He caused his citizens to worship idols. Furthermore Ahab married an evil woman named Jezebel. She and Ahab established the worship of Baal, an idol that was worshiped with filthy rites. The wicked couple also supported prophets of Baal.

God sent the Prophet Elijah to Ahab. He told the king to summon the people of Israel as well as the prophets of Baal to Mt. Carmel. There they had a showdown. Elijah addressed the people, "How long will you waver between two opinions. If the Lord is God, follow Him but if Baal is God, follow him. The Lord had the prophet offer this challenge; both sides would build an altar to their God and lay a sacrifice upon it. The prophets of Baal would call upon the name of their idol and Elijah would call upon the name of the Lord and the one who sent down fire from heaven- He was God. Probably you know how the contest turned out. Baal who was nothing, did nothing while the Lord sent down fire and consumed the sacrifice and the altar as well. The people were impressed and shouted, "The Lord- He is God. The Lord- He is God. Then Elijah commanded the people to seize the prophets of Baal that caused Israel to sin and Elijah slaughtered them.

One would think that this would have caused a reformation in country but the people did not change. They continued in their evil ways. King Ahab did not change and Queen Jezebel didn't change either. She sent word to Elijah, "May the gods deal with me ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." She swore to kill Elijah and this brings us to the time of our text. ^{1Ki 19:3} Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,

^{1Ki 19:4} while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, 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."

^{1Ki 19:5} Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

^{1Ki 19:6} He looked around and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

^{1Ki 19:7} 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."

^{1Ki 19:8} 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.

This portion of God's Word teaches us that Jesus is the Refuge of the Weary. We see that God's people do suffer discouragement and depression but Jesus is with them to lift them up and restore them

When Elijah heard the threat of Jezebel he was frightened and ran for his life. No doubt he had been feeling good. He had just witnessed a great miracle. I suppose he had hopes of turning Israel back to the Lord but it didn't happen. No one stood up for him, he lost his confidence and he ran.

The prophet fell into deep depression. He fled south out of Israel into Judah. There at Beer Sheba he left his servant. He wanted to be alone. Often people who are depressed will withdraw. The prophet went into the desert sinking deeper and deeper into

gloom. Finally he sat down under the shadow of a broom tree. Some say that this was little more than a bush. Elijah had had it. He prayed to the Lord that He might die. The prophet felt himself a failure. A little later in the chapter we can find his lament. "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken 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."

His words are those of one who has hit the bottom. "I have had enough Lord. I quit." It isn't that the prophet had lost his faith but he was terribly discouraged. He said, "I am no better than my fathers. Beside his failures Elijah was ashamed of his sins. Life was just not worth living anymore. Anyone who has suffered depression can understand that all Elijah wanted to do was sleep.

I am so pleased that God's Word presents believers as they are. It shows them in their greatest moments and it presents them in their weaknesses. We must be careful to be sympathetic to those who are depressed. Some would have us think that the life of a Christian is one of eternal highs. A believer never gets down. That is just not so. In Psalm 42 it is written, "Why are you down cast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me." Great heroes of faith had times when they were terribly afflicted with depression. There is King David, Job, St. Paul and, yes, Martin Luther.

We ask why? Why does God allow us to go through these times of testing? Someone wisely observed "God lets us stumble so that we can fall into His arms." St. Paul wrote, "God is faithful he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

How can we be sure of this? Through out this account of Elijah's misery it is the LORD who deals with him. The word LORD that we find spelled with capital letters in our Bibles refers to the Savior God- the God of steadfast love and faithfulness. The reason there are sorrows, sicknesses and disappointments in the world is sin. Part of Elijah's problem was his own sin; part was the general condition of sin in the world.

The LORD was still with Elijah and his comfort and our comfort was found in the Savior God who became flesh and lived among us. He bore the world's sins and suffered their punishment on the cross. In so doing He reconciled the whole world to God. Because of Him all sins are forgiven. He invites all people to believe on Him and so receive the free gift of forgiveness, God's favor and everlasting life. Because of Jesus God will not desert his believers but will always help them in their depression and hopelessness. Look how He helped Elijah.

All at once an angel touched him. All at once, suddenly. Like a lightening bolt out of a clear sky, help was there. When a poor Christian feels there is no help suddenly help is there. The Lord knows what He is doing.

Suddenly an angel was at Elijah's side. Angels are called ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. The angel touched Elijah and told him to get up and eat. There beside the prophet was warm bread and a jug of water. The Lord had not forgotten Elijah. The prophet ate and drank and then lay down again. The Lord was patient with him. He needed healing sleep. The angel of His Savior God came back a second time and touched Elijah. "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you," the angel said. He had more healing for Elijah and had more work for Elijah to do. Notice that the Lord knows exactly what His people need in order to heal them and to strengthen them to be able to carry out the tasks He has for them.

So Elijah 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. Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. It is God's blessing that causes bread to nourish us. With God's blessing this bread gave Elijah the strength to travel for a very long time.

God led Elijah to Mt. Horeb. You perhaps know it as Mt. Sinai, the Mountain of God. That is where God spoke with Moses centuries before this. The place had meaning for Elijah. If we read further in this chapter we see that there at Mt. Horeb God comforted and assured Elijah and prepared him for the work that he had yet to do.

Let me repeat, where does God take Elijah? To the mountain of God, to the place where he will Hear God's saving, comforting Word. The Lord, the Lord Jesus is the help and refuge of the weary. He says, "Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

He invites you and me to come and dine on Him the Bread of Life and He will forgive, He will comfort. He will give strength. But how can we be sure of that? Listen to His Word. He has told you today of your forgiveness. In your baptism He has united you with Christ and washed away your sins. His body and blood were given and shed for your forgiveness. Trust His promises.

When you fall into a depression don't go away from your source of help. Go to the soul food, the bread that will sustain you. Go to your Bible. Go to a fellow Christian; go to your pastor and allow them to strengthen you with God's Gospel promises. Then, thinking of others, be ready to help a fellow Christian when he or she is suffering discouragement and depression. Jesus is the refuge of the weary. He will restore your spiritual strength. A while ago I quoted Psalm 42 where the psalmist asked, "Why are you downcast o my soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? The verse continues, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him my Savior and my God.

After the Lord has comforted and restored us, may we like Elijah, get up and do the work God has chosen for us. Amen.