

Canadian church historian Michael Haykin has suggested that in 1900, Ontario was predominantly Christian. Over 90 percent of Ontarians would head to church on a weekly basis, discussions about Christianity were commonplace, and Scriptural knowledge was widespread. Fast forward to 2020 and somewhere between 7-12 percent of Ontarians will be in a church this morning.

Throughout this pandemic, many people have become so discouraged and almost chafe at how things have gone on. People on social media have made campaigns stating “Church Is Essential” – protesting the government lockdowns. And the trajectory of society looks like the Church will continue to be marginalized in the broader culture.

In 1 Kings, we have this very quick descent from the glory days of David and Solomon into the most horrific days of the Northern Kingdom. Israel has split in two – northern and southern kingdom. By the time we reach our passage this morning, Ahab is king in the North and he does great evil like his father did. But his evil is intentional – he marries Jezebel, a thoroughly Canaanite woman, and he plans to revive Canaanite worship and reverse everything that has been done since the days of Joshua. His plan is to reunite north and south but through cultural and religious suicide for Israel. If the Canaanites were to be driven from the land, then the re-Canaanization of Israel will result in Israel being driven from the land. So along comes a prophet of God – Elijah – and he confronts the re-Canaanization of the land at Mt. Carmel with a showdown between the Canaanite gods and the One True God of Israel - Yahweh, showing that the worship of Ba'al is powerless and worthless. People are denying the faith all over, but Elijah has just shown that the Lord is the powerful God. And in the defeat of Ba'al, it looks like Ahab will change his ways – government policy could shift and revival of the covenant seems immanent. But when that doesn't happen, God's prophet never seems to recover. So many people have looked at this passage through the lense of psychotherapy, diagnosing Elijah with depression.

But this psychotherapeutic approach misses the entire purpose of the chapter. Depression isn't the main point – God's prophet and covenant that have been broken, and yet there is grace – God will preserve a people – a remnant for himself. In the midst of brokenness, we see a God who comforts a broken servant in a broken world. We also can find comfort from God in the brokenness of life by seeing his grace. So how does the Lord comfort us with his grace?

1. Accept Reality

Elijah has just had an enormous victory - The LORD has shown by fire that he is God; the people have just all publicly confessed orthodoxy - the Lord our God is One. The prophets of Baal have been killed. The Word is doing the work. Revival is about to break out, or so it looks.

But when that wicked woman Jezebel hears Ahab's report, things change. “Sweetheart, you'll never guess what I saw today! Elijah did this, Elijah did that...” And through her dark lipstick comes the response: “SO WHAT?” And so Jezebel signs the execution orders for Elijah.

And Elijah's response is seen in v. 3. The Hebrew says, "And he saw, and he fled for his life." What did he see? In spite of the overwhelming proof that The Lord is God, Elijah saw Jezebel was unchanged, and she was in charge. Elijah doesn't flee because he's afraid; he flees because he sees the situation and is broken over it; he flees and asks God to die (v. 4): It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

When he doesn't see God's word producing fruit, when he doesn't see God glorified, he is broken and wants to die. Elijah needs a dose of healthy realism, as do we all.

Someone asked me why people can sit under the preaching of the Word and remain unchanged. Just because people have the right information or are hearing the truth, it doesn't mean that people will respond to it. We think that education will change people. But John 3:19 says that Light has come into the world and men have loved darkness rather than light.

Unless God reveals himself, the evidence doesn't matter. People can have all the facts laid out before them and still resist. The LORD's fire may have consumed the sacrifice and everything around it, but it did not touch Jezebel's hard, cold heart. Change only comes by a work of God's Spirit. So we need to have a healthy dose of the reality of sin.

In our brokenness, we also need to see the grace that...

2. We Are Not Forgotten

When your heart is broken, it is easier to see the ruins rather than the grace. After seeing nothing will change, Elijah flees. His entire ministry has been fruitless thus far. He doesn't just flee from Jezebel. Instead, he heads to the Southern part of Judah. There, he encounters his providing Father. His heart is broken because Israel has not returned to the Lord. So he would rather die. We are not told why he wants to die. But the Lord meets him with three things:

- A. Physical reassurance. The angel comes to him and touches him. Often, in our response to broken people, we want to pull away from them, distance ourselves from them. But the Lord sends a messenger with a small, physical touch. There's nothing quite like a pat on the back, a squeeze on the shoulder, a compassionate handshake.
- B. Physical strength. God had provided for the widow and her son in 1 Kings 17 with hot cakes and a jug of oil. Now an angel comes and provides hot cakes and a jug of water for Elijah. And then Elijah goes back to sleep. One of my profs in seminary said that when you are discouraged, sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap. When you are hungry and worn out, what you need is a good walk, a good meal, and a good sleep.
- C. Spiritual Direction. The reason for the touch and the food is because when the angel of the Lord comes a second time, he gives him some spiritual direction. Elijah has been given spiritual direction. He has to go to Mount Horeb - another 200 miles south-east of Beersheba. And he knows what he has to do there.

Our tender Father is gracious and he provides what broken servants need. A good meal, a good sleep, a long walk, a physical touch, and some spiritual direction. In our brokenness, we need to we also see that...

3. Our God Hears (vv. 9, 13)

Elijah now moves on to Horeb - otherwise known as Mount Sinai, and as a Second Moses, he goes. For Moses, when he was on this Mountain, had heard the news of Israel's apostasy, worshipping a golden calf. And Elijah had just seen Israel's apostasy in Baal worship.

For 40 days and nights, Moses had been on the mountain, and for 40 days and nights Elijah had travelled there. Moses had been desperate and asked God to see his glory; the Lord passed by Moses in all of his goodness when he was hidden in the cleft of the rock. And here, the Lord comes to Elijah and passes by while he is in the cave or hollow – maybe even the same hollow of rock where Moses had been - but God comes not in signs or wonders, but by his gentle word.

Elijah has come to do covenant business with God. And God's question in vv. 9 and 13 are not rebukes. They are not questions from a God who's looking at Elijah going, "Wow, you're in rough shape. What are you doing here?"

Instead, God knows that we need a listening ear. The LORD is inviting Elijah to unburden his heart and pour out his broken soul. The LORD is a tender listener, asking what was the problem.

What are you doing here, Elijah? Tell me about it. The double invitation is the request for Elijah to unburden his soul by stating the case against Israel. The tenderness of the question is the LORD's pastoral and covenantal care. READ PS. 142.

This is the kind of God that we have. He invites us to come in our messiness, our brokenness, and pour out our disappointments before him. You may be a broken servant, but you have a listening God. Before you are ready to tell him your troubles, he is eagerly asking, inviting you to pour out you heart. In our brokenness,

4. Wrestle with Discouragement (vv. 10, 14)

What is Elijah doing? If we take Elijah's complaint seriously, no one else is standing up publicly against the apostasy. No one else is standing up for The Lord's glory. That is his main concern. His complaint is Israel isn't being faithful and he is upset. He is depressed and angry and despondent because he is very serious about his message and very passionate about God's glory.

I have to ask, "What makes me depressed?" What usually makes me depressed is anything that disturbs my level of comfort. Anything that challenges my value and sense of worth. Any circumstance that turns my life in a way that I don't like.

But how often am I despondent over the state of the church? God's people? How often do you get upset over the lethargy of the worship of God's people? How often do you get upset over doctrinal indifference, over inconsistent lives? How often do I get despondent for God's sake? When was the last time we wept over the state of Christ's church?

5. See God's Persistence (vv. 9-14)

God agrees with Elijah in vv. 15-17; he wants Elijah to go back and anoint the individuals who will bring God's judgment. But because God is a relentless, persistent God, there is grace - v. 18 - the final word is not of judgment. God will preserve a remnant. When it seems like Jezebel has won and Israel will be judged, the LORD will keep a people faithful to himself no matter what. Our God is persistent and will keep a faithful people. Do you know God's persistence? Do you have know that God will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail?

See the Glory of Christ

Maybe Elijah wants to die because of his missionary zeal. I think this may be the case. There is a word of grace in dark days (READ ROM 11:1ff). Paul says that Elijah is bringing covenant accusations against God's people (11:2); Paul, who saw his ministry as a repetition of Elijah's, said in Rom 9:3 that he would rather die and be accursed than Israel be separated from God.

The Lord is saying that he will have, even under the most wicked of rulers, a faithful people preserved by him. There is nothing Jezebel or communism or atheism can do to change that! Because this is our God, we ought always to persevere and not lose heart.

And just because things don't turn out the way that you want, God's persistence for his glory does not mean that he does not work for your good. Your brokenness may be for a lifetime, but he is working for your eternal joy. Do you think that God doesn't care about the hearts of his servants? In Luke 9, we meet up with Moses and Elijah again. Elijah, this second Moses figure, would not go out before the Lord and look upon his glory. But one day, a call came from God: "Elijah, go down to that mountain, because I want to show you something." And in Luke 9:28-31, we read these words (READ).

And Elijah looked into the light of the knowledge of the glory in the face of Jesus Christ. He saw glory. He wouldn't look at the glory of the Lord in the cave, but now he looks upon the Saviour of the world and sees his glory. What did the Lord want Elijah to see? Not merely the return of Israel back to the Lord, but the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

That's how God deals with his broken servants. In his great wisdom and fatherly love, he gives us nothing but himself, learning that his grace is sufficient for you. For faithful ministry does not always see results. But it will see God, for God is working for your joy and your good, even when you cease to see anything.



THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

God will not use you as his servant and leave you writhing in your disappointments. He has a plan for your everlasting joy, in your faithful service to the Lord. The Lord doesn't treat his servant's life as cheap. Do not lose heart. When Felix Mendelssohn composed his musical work "Elijah", he ended it with these words: "He who endures to the end shall be saved."

You have a great God. You may not see today what God has in store for you tomorrow, let alone eternity. Dear church, never, never, never give up.