

The dangers of despair

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[0 : 00] The 19th chapter of 1 Kings, where we are going to consider this incident in the life of the great prophet called Elijah.

And while you're turning it up, may I remind you that James in his epistle chapter 5 and verse 17 reminds us that Elijah was a man subject to like passions as ourselves.

What James is saying is, Elijah is just a man like any other one of us.

But this man is found in this portion we are looking at this morning in great trouble. He's suffering from a great sense of discouragement and despair.

And while I was looking at this chapter, I realized that many Christians today suffer from this sense of despondency and discouragement.

[1 : 14] Not to mention despair and fear. And what is to be done about it? Have we got in this story from Elijah something to help us in our times of discouragement and despair?

Well, we'll look at the story. Usually, Elijah is taken as one of the great heroes of the faith. A man mighty in prayer.

And so he was. He was. He was the man who laid hold upon God in times of great apostasy in such a way that he gained control of the heavens.

And the sky poured down rain or withheld rain at the command of this man. Not only so, but this man was able to see the open heaven and the fire of the Lord descend once again in a time of great spiritual declension.

And so Elijah was a great man. He appears on the scene of scripture in a very dramatic way.

Perhaps the most dramatic appearance of any individual in the pages of Holy Scripture.

[2 : 47] It was a time, as we've said, of great declension. A time when the spiritual tide was running very low. And usually in times like these, idolatry and false cults rear their heads.

As a matter of fact, we are going through, I believe, a time like this just now in our own country.

When the spiritual tide is running rather low. And all kinds of cults and false religions are proliferating around the country.

It was at a time like this. One of these times when Elijah made his dramatic appearance on the scene.

And immediately things began to change. The appearance of this man brought in a new day. A day of quickening.

A day of renewal. A day of revival. And this man was one of the great men of all time.

[3 : 58] To see idolatry practically obliterated from the land. And the name of Jehovah exalted. No other prophet had the success that this man had.

See him on the top of Mount Carmel. This one solitary figure. Facing no fewer than 850 idolatrous priests.

In a trial of prayer. It was the greatest trial in his life. It became the greatest day in his life. And he was the prophet who made his request to God that he would declare himself.

And show that he was the God of all the earth. That he was Jehovah God. And the fire descended. And not only consumed the sacrifice.

But burnt up the offering. And the altar. Elijah was established that day.

[5 : 07] As the greatest giant of faith of his time. And maybe indeed of all time. Now this is the man.

That we see today in this portion of scripture. Elijah. In deep black despair. This is the man. Just like ourselves.

A man of like passions. To ourselves. Yesterday. Elijah was victorious as we've noticed. On the mountaintop.

He had the greatest mountaintop experience. The greatest day of his whole career. But this is the day after. And the day after.

A great spiritual experience. Can be very gloomy. And indeed it can be very dangerous. If you remember.

[6 : 06] When our Lord Jesus Christ. Was baptized in Jordan. And the heavens opened. And the dove descended. Or the spirit descended in form of a dove.

And the heavens opened. And declared. The Lord Jesus. To be the son of God. In whom the father had great delight. Immediately afterwards.

He was led by the spirit. Into the wilderness. To be tempted. Of the evil one. Yes. The day after. Is always a very difficult. And maybe dangerous day. The same thing happened. In the life of the apostle Paul. If you remember. He had that wonderful experience.

Of being caught up. As he says. Into the third heaven. There he saw things. About which he couldn't speak. Things that defied his.

[7 : 05] His language even. He couldn't declare them. He couldn't describe them. They were so wonderful. But then immediately afterwards.

He received. We read. A thorn. In the flesh. And what was this thorn. In the flesh. It was the minister. Of Satan.

To buffet him. And that word buffet. Is very interesting. It's the word that was used. Of a ship. In the midst of a great. A great tempest.

With the waves. Buffeting. The vessel. As it tried to make its way. Through the sea. A minister of Satan. Sent.

To buffet. The servant of God. And this is the day after. Yesterday. Elijah faced. 450. To 850.

[8 : 05] Idolatrous priests. Today. Today. We find him. Fleeing. From one. Painted. Idolatrous. Woman.

Yesterday. He experienced. The open heavens. And the fire. Of the Lord. Descending. Upon the sacrifice. Today. He's fleeing.

Into the wilderness. Cowed. And defeated. Seeking. Some. Scant shade. In the desert. Yesterday. He ran. A superhuman race. Today. We find him. Sleeping. Sleeping. Under. The juniper tree.

Like any. Ordinary. Mortal. Person. Yesterday. He was on top of the world. You might say. Today.

[9 : 02] The world's on top of him. Him. Yesterday. Yesterday. He slew. The enemies. Of the Lord. Hip and thigh. With a great slaughter. Today. He is seeking.

The repose of death. For himself. Yesterday. He was on top of the circumstances. Today. The circumstances. Are on top of Elijah.

Yesterday. He was an elated prophet. Prophet. Today. He is a prophet. In the throes. Of black. Despair. The problem. Of discouragement. And despair. Now what are we going to say about this story?

Well I want to say three things specially about the story. First of all I think we ought to try and discover. If we can. The causes. Of this despair.

[10 : 01] In the life of Elijah. Then we want to see. The course. Of despair. Where despair leads us in the end.

And thirdly. If we can possibly find a cure. For this kind of discouragement. Now first of all. Let's look up the causes.

And far be it from me. To criticize. In any shape or form. A man like Elijah. Nevertheless. Since he was a man.

According to James. Just like ourselves. It might be helpful for us. To discover. If we possibly can. Some of the reasons.

For his despair. And. I find that the. Commentators. Have much to say about this. Some of them very kindly.

[10 : 58] And others not so kindly. One of the kindly comments is. That this man was under great. Pressure. Of work. Pressure.

He had been under great strain. This prophet of the Lord. His energy was sapped. His nerves were frayed. His will. And resolve.

Were broken. And what he needed. Was to get away from it all. He needed. A rest. He needed a place away.

From the maddening throng. For a time. He needed. Some good food. And some good rest. He needed. A holiday. A holiday.

That's what Elijah needed. On this occasion. And I believe the story suggests that. Sometimes. A rest. Is all we need.

[11:54] Sometimes. I knew of a minister. Who was going away on a month's vacation. And one of his. Congregations said. But you know minister.

The devil never. Rests. No. Said the minister. I know. But I'm not following him. You know. The one I'm following. Says. Come ye apart.

And rest a while. We are following. The one who understands. The problems. Of pressure. And strain. And Elijah.

Perhaps. Needed. A holiday. But I believe. That perhaps. There are. Greater implications. I believe. For instance.

That there might have been here. In Elijah's case. An incomplete. Obedience. I want you to read. Two verses with me. From the previous chapter.

[12:50] Chapter 18. First of all. Verse 19. Now therefore. Says the Lord. Send and gather to me. All Israel. Unto Mount Carmel. And the prophets.

Of Baal. 450. And the prophets. Of the groves. 400. Those that eat. At Jezebel's. Table. Verse 40. Of that chapter. And Elijah. Said unto them. Take the prophets. Of Baal. Let not one of them. Escape. There's no mention.

There. Of the prophets. Of the groves. Jezebel's. Favorites. Those that ate. At her table. No mention there.

I wonder. Was there. An incomplete. Obedience. At this time. On the part. Of God's. Servant. He had been. Told to slay.

[13:46] 850. He had been. Satisfied. With. 400. He had left. Those 400. Favorites. Of Jezebel.

Who ate. At her table. Was there. In complete. In complete. Obedience. I throw out. The suggestion. To you. You read. The story. Find it out. For yourself.

Was this man. In this great. Distressful condition. Because of. In complete. Obedience. Then. Others say. That it was. Fear.

That caused this. The fear of man. Says the. Book of Proverbs. Bringeth a snare. Fear. Well. In this case. It wasn't a man.

It was a woman. Painted. Beautiful. Intelligent. But. For all that. Very bad. And. Very dangerous.

[14:42] And. Sometimes. The best thing. To do. With these kind of people. Is to flee. From them. Get away. As fast as you can. The Bible. Says. Flee. Useful rust.

And Joseph. When he was brought. To temptation. By such a woman. Fled from her presence. But my dear friends. This was not a case. Of. Seduction.

This was a case. Of defiance. This was one. Who had set herself up. To defy. The God of Israel. And this call. For confrontation.

This call. For a demand. On the part. Of God's servant. That she bring. Forth of 400. Favorite. Idolatrous. Prophets.

That they might. Meet the same end. As. The prophets of Baal. Yes. I believe. This was a time. To be. Counted.

[15:37] A time to stand up. To be counted. This was a time. To confront. The dark. Sinister. Idolatrous. Power. In this woman.

I think. We have a little. Sidelight. On that. In the book. Of Revelation. In the church.

Of Thyatira. We always have. This kind. Of problem. And in. The church. Of Thyatira. Revelation. Two and twenty. This is one.

Of the things. The spirit. Says. I have against you. As a church. Nevertheless. I have somewhat. Against you. Because. You tolerate. That woman.

Jezebel. Which calleth herself. A prophetess. To teach. And seduce. My servants. To commit. Fornication. And to eat. Things. Sacrificed.

[16:32] To idols. Yes. There was. Perhaps. The despair. In the heart. Of the prophet. Because. Of a great.

Fear. That had gripped him. The fear. Of man. What. A terrible. Terrible. Imprisonment. When we get.

Into bondage. To the fear. Of man. There's something else. That perhaps. Caused his despair. And that is.

Egoism. Pride. You say. Was Elijah. Such a man. Well. As I read. The story.

I think. Perhaps. He was rather. Full of himself. On this occasion. You see. On top of the mountain. He had. Had this.

[17:27] Wonderful. Experience. Of. Discomforting. Eight hundred. And fifty. Prophets. Idolatrous. Priests. Who had gone.

To all. Extremes. To call. Down. Fire. From heaven. Without success. And he alone. In the power. Of God's spirit.

And in mighty prayer. Saw the fire. Come down. And perhaps. He thought. For a moment. You know. I'm the greatest. No prophet. Has ever seen this. Before. I am the man.

I am the greatest. I am the greatest. I am the greatest. I am the greatest. And how do I. Come to this conclusion. Well. Because you find him.

Saying under the juniper tree. I am not better. Than any. Of my. Fathers. I think perhaps.

[18:21] He had been thinking. He was better. And it was only there. Under reflection. And in the coils of remorse. Under the juniper tree. That he could say.

I am not better. After all. I've been thinking. I was. And I'm not. After all. Notice also.

Under the juniper tree. He says. I have been. Very jealous. For the Lord. Have been. He should have been able.

To say as a prophet. Of the Lord. I am jealous. For the things. Of the Lord. I have been. Was Elijah. Has been. In this matter.

Of being jealous. In the things. Of the Lord. Was it something. That pertained. To the past. And he even.

[19:18] Goes on to say. I. Even. I. Only. Am left. What a position. For any servant. Of the Lord.

To get in. To think. That he was. The last ditch man. Between. The whole world. And God. If anything. Happened to him. The world of God. Was going to fall to pieces.

I. Even I. Only. Am left. Yes. I believe. As we read. This part. Of Elijah's story.

There was. An awful lot. Of Elijah. In it. And I believe. That that was. One of the causes. Of his despair. Job.

In a great. Verse. Of satire. Turned round. To the people. Who were trying. To befriend him. In evil times. He said. Right enough. You are the people.

[20:16] And wisdom. Will die with you. What a greater danger. To think. That we are the people. And if anything. Happens to us. Then the work of God.

Is finished. Once and for all. Yes. Elijah was a man. Just like ourselves. Elijah. Could suffer.

I think. From a little bit. Of big headedness. Ah. He could suffer. From too much. Elijah.

And I am suggesting. To you. That the causes. Of this man's despair. Are there. Plain to see. The scriptures. Either it was.

Pressure of work. Either it was that. Or it was. Fear of man. If it wasn't. Fear of man. It was. In complete obedience.

[21:10] To the word. Of the Lord. And if it wasn't that. It was perhaps. A little bit. Of egoism. Maybe. It was a little bit.

Of all. For. The causes. Of despair. And discouragement. Are very many. Indeed. Now let us.

Look at the course. Of despair. Where does despair. Take us. In the end. Well I would. Point out to you. That despair.

First of all. Takes a man. Out of the battle. It takes a man. Out of the fight. It immobilizes.

The man. And here we find. Elijah. Ors de combat. Sitting. And then sleeping. Under the juniper tree. He is no longer.

[22:09] Serving the Lord. He has been rendered. A casualty. Of the battle. He is now. Out there. Having a sleep. Away in the desert.

Under. The scant shade. Of a juniper tree. He is not the only one. To do this kind of thing.

Remember. He is a man. Like ourselves. Jonah.

Was another. He fled. From the presence. Of the Lord. Maybe for different reasons. But Jonah.

Also became. Heavy eyed. And sleepy. Have you ever heard.

Of a man. In a little bark. In the midst. Of a tempest. At sea. Sleeping. Soundly. Like a baby. In the bottom. Of the ship. How sleepy.

You can get. When you are. Out of the way. And out of the will. Of God. And in the gall of bitterness. And a deep despair. Yes.

[23 : 05] You can. Sleep the sleep of death. And. This is the condition. We find. The prophet. Elijah.

In. In black despair. Now. I believe. That despair. Brings us. To two. Considerations. It leads us. To two things. Number one. You'll notice. It leads us. To demand. Demission. Resignation.

And secondly. A desire. To see. The end. Of everything. Another kind. Of resignation. A desire. For death. Itself.

First of all. We find. Elijah. Here. Demanding. Demission. I'm going to put in. My resignation. Says. Elijah.

[24 : 03] It. Is. Enough. I've had enough. That is what he says. I've had enough. I'm not going to continue.

Any longer. It's been too much. For me. I'm battered. And I'm bruised. And I can't take anymore. I'm putting in. My resignation. I'm finished.

I knew a missionary. Not very far from here. Who was sent to a place. Of. Terrible persecution. And deep discouragement. And that missionary.

Packed his bags. Four times. To leave that place. By the grace of God. He was able to continue. Because he knew. That. Is the place. This was the place.

To which God. Had sent him. Oh. How easy it is. When we get down. Into this. This bondage. Of despair. To put in.

[25 : 02] Our resignation. I've had enough. And then. There's this desire. To be taken out. Of it all together.

Says. Elijah. Take away. My life. It's not worth living anymore. Take away. My life. This man. This man. Who was destined. Not to die. This man. Who was one of two people. Only two people. In the whole of the Old Testament. Who did not pass through.

The article of death. What was caught up. Into the presence of God. This man. Of all people. Is saying. Take away.

My life. It's not worth living anymore. Yes. Despair. Can take us there. I mentioned Jonah.

[25 : 56] It took Jonah there. Remember. When they wakened him up. Out of his sleep. He said. You know. I'm the cause of all this trouble. Throw me overboard. Get rid of me.

End it all for me. And. Elijah. And Jonah. Weren't the only people.

Who suffered. This kind of thing. John Bunyan. Knew about this. He must have known about this. In his pilgrim's progress. We have a beautiful piece.

About this. Pilgrim. And good hope. Got out of the way. What happened to them. When they got out of the way. They were captured. By a giant.

Called. Despair. And a giant. Despair. Took them. And he put them into his prison. In Doubting Castle. And he left them.

[26 : 51] Languishing there. For a time. And then the giant. Came. And this is what he said to them. Seeing. You are never. You are going to get out of here. You are best to put an end to it all.

There is the blade. There is the rope. There is poison. Really. You can't put up with all this bitterness. End it all. Yes.

It's a very common thing. Apparently. For Christians. Even servants of the Lord. To get to the point of despair. And say.

I am going to cast. Everything away. I am resigning. I have had enough. I have reached the end of the road. Lord. Take away my life.

It's not worth living anymore. Discouragement. Despair. Disheartened. Defeated. And one of the old commentators adds this.

[27 : 55] He says. Sometimes. Sometimes. There aren't enough juniper trees to go around. Sometimes. All right.

We've seen some of the causes of this. We've seen the course this takes us along. I wonder. Is there a cure. For this kind of depression.

This kind of despair. Well. Let's turn to the story again. Because I believe the story. Suggests three things to us along this line.

And the first one is this. Elijah needed to get a new appraisal. Of himself. Of himself. He needed to know who he was.

He needed to get a look into his own heart. He needed to know his own weakness. His own inability. To carry through the program that God had given him to do.

[28 : 58] A new appraisal of himself. And so God. God gives him a long and a good sleep. And God provides him with the good food he requires.

How many of us have had a meal. Prepared by the angels themselves. Yes. Twice over. This man was fed from the hands of the angels.

Such a. Such a meal. That he was able to go for days. And days. And days. On the strength of it. Ah yes. But with the meal. There came the word of the Lord.

What a rebuke it was. Elijah. The journey is too long. For thee. It's too difficult for thee.

You can't do it Elijah. On your own strength. By your own abilities. Trusting in the arm of the flesh. Elijah. You cannot do this thing.

[30 : 02] All by yourself. The journey. Is too great for you. Elijah. You need to depend on God.

You need to. To receive heavenly sustenance. You need the means of grace. You need the companionship of God himself. You need his Holy Spirit.

You need all the grace. That God can give you Elijah. If you're going to do this. Work that I've given you to do. You have to have the sentence of death in yourself.

Elijah. Not to trust in yourself. But in the God who raises the dead. You've got to know what Paul knew. When he said. I am crucified.

With Christ. Nevertheless I live. But not I. But the grace of God that worketh in me. Christ in me.

[31 : 03] Christ lives in me. For in the words of the psalmist. All my well springs. Are in thee. He needed a new appraisal.

Of himself. Not to trust in his self-sufficiency. In his abilities. The ego. Must disappear. Elijah must decrease.

God must increase. This was the way. An appraisal of self. The journey. Is too great. For thee. And the second thing is this.

He needed a new appraisal of God. And God gave him that too. He took Elijah. To the historic mountain of God.

He took him to Horeb. And he hid him in a cave. I wonder. Was it the same cave. From which Moses.

[32 : 07] First saw. The burning bush. It was in this mountain of God. Horeb. That Moses. Saw the bush.

And had the revelation. Of the God who is all sufficient. It was here that Moses said. And if I go back to this people.

They'll say to me. What is the name of your God? What will I say to them? And God says.

You shall tell them. That I am. Sent you. The all sufficient one. The one who is abundantly. Able to do all.

That he has promised to do. The God. Who is able. The great I am. And Elijah needed.

[33 : 01] A fresh appraisal. Of the God he served. And as he stood there. In the cave. He had a revelation. Of the mighty God.

Whom he served. He was shown. That the God he served. Was the God of all the earth. The God who upholds all things. By the word of his power. The God of creation.

The God of sustenance. The great God over all. Blessed forever. For there. As he. Sat in the cave. There came revelation.

That God was the mighty God. The wind blew. And the rocks. Were broken to pieces. The earthquake. Shook the mountain. Under his feet. And the fire of God.

Fell down on the mountain. A revelation. Of the mighty God. That. Had sent him. To do his service.

[34 : 00] He got a revelation. Of this. Is the God. Who communicates. With his people. Who has revealed himself. To us. And who speaks with us. And talks with us.

And as he sat there. There came a still. Small voice. And what did the voice say? The voice said. What are you doing here?

Elijah. You have no right. To be here. What are you doing? Elijah. Running away. In the time of battle.

In the time of great need. What are you doing here? There's so much work. To be done. And here you are. You're on the run.

You're running away. Oh Elijah. What are you doing here? You shouldn't be here. And there came also to him.

[35 : 02] A new appraisal. Of the service. That God had given him to do. God says. Elijah. What are you doing here?

Go return. Get back to the work. There's a lot of work. To be done. There are kings to anoint. Hazael. And Jehu. And little did Elijah know.

That this same Jehu. Was going to be a king. Who would. Once and for all. Deliver the land. From idolatry. Under his reign. Idolatry. Was to be totally.

Eradicated. From the land. And furthermore. Elijah. Don't you think. You're the only one. I've got. There are 7,000 people.

I have in Israel. Who have not bowed the knee. To Baal. Nor kissed his mouth. I've always got my remnant. Elijah. Never get into your head. That you are the last one.

[35 : 58] The last ditch man. The only one left. I've got 7,000. I can turn to. To do my work. And Elijah.

There's a young man. Waiting in the wings. You're going to anoint him. As your successor. He's going to get. A double portion. Of your spirit.

He's perhaps. Going to do many. More mighty things. Than you have ever done. The work of God. Is not depending. On you. Elijah. You alone.

You're only. One of the great. Band. Elijah. One of the great. Elept. Of God. And I believe.

Elijah. Was cured. Of his depression. And his despair. The cause of it. May be overwork.

[36 : 58] May be incomplete. Obedience. May be fear of man. May be too much self. The course. Of despair.

Resignation. Resignation. Resignation in two ways. Resignation from the cause. Resignation to die. But oh. There's the cure. Get a new appraisal. Of oneself. One's insufficiency. One's inability. A new appraisal. Of the God.

Who is all sufficient. And abundantly able. A new appraisal. Of the service. That God has given us. To do. And Elijah.

We read. Rose up. And departed. He went back. To the work. Never to fall into despair.

[37 : 56] Again. Until that day. He was caught up. In the angelic. Chariots. Into the very presence. Of God himself.

Let us pray. Our gracious God. We give thee thanks.

For thy word. And for thy Holy Spirit's direction. We pray. That we may find. In thy word. Something. For every. Consideration. Every eventuality. In our lives. For all the emotions. That beset us. When discouraged.

Or in despair. In disillusion. When defeated. When seeking. To get out of the work. All together. Oh dear Lord.

[38 : 54] Bring us back. To see ourselves. As thou deseest. Bring us back. To see our God. The mighty. And the terrible. The great God. Who is over all.

And may we lose. Our. Self-sufficiency. In the great. All sufficiency. Of the great. I am. And may we do.

Thy work. In the strength. That God. Alone supplies. Hear us. And cleanse us. And bless us. For the redeemer's sake.

Amen.