

Session 5

August 22, 2021

SERVE EVEN WHEN DISCOURAGED

1 Kings 19:1-5a,11-18

Between the mountaintops, there are always valleys.

That's true whether we are talking about physical geography or spiritual and emotional consistency. Unfortunately, even God's most committed people are susceptible to the doldrums and valleys of depression that so often follow great spiritual victories. 1 Kings 19 dramatically describes such an event in the life of Elijah, one of God's choicest prophets. On the brighter side, the principles Elijah learned still apply to God's people today.

Once again, the drama plays out in three scenes.

The queen reacts (vv. 1-2). In these verses we see the interaction between King Ahab and Queen Jezebel that no doubt characterized their entire relationship. Ahab was a spineless, sniveling man. He couldn't handle the pressures of being king. It's often said that behind every great man is a great woman, but in this case, it was a weak king Ahab who stood behind a brash and wicked queen Jezebel. Ahab had just lost a contest of the gods. But the loss of the contest on Carmel stung the queen much more deeply. While Ahab was whining to his wife (v. 1), Jezebel was raging at Elijah. Verse 2 shows the venom in her voice. Essentially, she let Elijah know that she intended to make him just as he had made her false prophets and pagan priests following the contest: dead! For reflection: *Can you think of real-life as well as Bible examples where a strong woman controls and manipulates a weak man? How does this usually turn out? How does this discussion reflect on our current gender-fluid society?*

The prophet retreats (vv. 3-5). One would hope that such a threat would fall on deaf ears. How I wish Elijah would have called Jezebel out on this. He just slew 850 enemies of God! He should have sent word back to her to come on out and he would make it 851! Unfortunately, that's not what happened. Elijah came straight from the victory and off into the valley. Beer-sheba was a staggering 100 miles from the Jezebel's palace in Jezreel. And Elijah went yet another day's journey into the wilderness. Verse 4 tells us, "He sat down under a broom tree and prayed..." That's not a bad solution when you are in the valley of despair. The problem is the rest of the verse: "he prayed...*that he might die.*" At this point, Elijah saw no benefit in living. He felt like he was no better than the dead prophets who had come and gone before. For reflection: *Consider the characteristics Elijah exhibits. What happened? Commentators I consulted suggested five contributing factors: (1) he forgot he was God's man; (2) he was off by himself, isolated from any form of encouragement; (3) he had just come off a mountaintop experience; (4) he was mentally, physically, and spiritual exhausted; (5) he was wallowing in self-pity.*

The Lord restores (vv. 11-19). In the intervening verses, the angel of the Lord provided nourishment and rest for God's prophet, then sent him on another journey. When he reached Mount Horeb forty days later, it was time for a meeting with God. In verse 11, the Lord *showed His power* through His mighty acts. But in verse 12, He *spoke to His prophet* in a still small voice. God allowed Elijah to state his case, but He responded with clear instructions. In the following verses, there was *progress to be made* (v. 15); *people to anoint* (vv. 15-16); *enemies to*

destroy (v. 17); the *faithful to rally* (v. 18); and a *companion to accompany him* (v. 19). The implication was clear: God was not yet finished with Elijah! For reflection: *Based on the lessons from this story, what advice would you give to those on the mountaintop? What kind of encouragement might you offer to those walking through the valley of despair?*