

GOD'S SUPER HEROES - ELIJAH

Fighting God's battles- part 4-Elijah

We have been looking for the past few weeks at god's superheroes. First of all we saw god do a miracle through a very unlikely man named Gideon in overthrowing the power of the Mideonites. Then we saw Moses, a man who was so great that he refuses to be forgotten even today thousands of years later. Last week we looked at the prophet Elijah. Today, other than looking at another character, we're going to have a second look at Elijah. A number of years ago, a man named Herbert Lockyer wrote a series of "all the" books. For example he wrote all the professions in the bible, all the promises in the bible, all the women in the bible. He also wrote all the men of the bible. When he came to Elijah, and he said, "No career in the old testament is more vividly portrayed, or has as much fascination as that of the unique character of Elijah."

Elijah-the mighty prophet of God

There are certain stories in the Bible that have become so well-known that when we mention the person's name, we automatically think of a particular event. When we say Noah, we think of the flood. When say Joshua, we think of Jericho. When we say David, we think of Goliath. When we say Daniel, we think of the lions' den. When we say Elijah, we think of the crisis on Mt. Carmel.

Mount Carmel was very important in the Old Testament. Whoever held Mt. Carmel controlled the northern half of the nation. And whoever controlled the worship that took place on Carmel controlled the nation spiritually. The priests and the prophets of Baal knew that. That is why years earlier they had built an altar to Baal on top of Mount Carmel. Under the reign of wicked king Ahab, Baal worship had virtually swept the northern kingdom, and the worship of the one true God had been almost completely extinguished.

That's when Elijah was sent by god to confront the king. Elijah told Ahab that it would not rain until the true god caused it to rain, and then he hid himself by a brook where god provided for him. When the brook dried up, god sent Elijah to Zarahabath where a widow was to take care of him.

1 Kings 18:1-2, "I After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab."

1 Kings 18:17-19, "When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. Before Ahab could say anything more, Elijah said, "It's time for the truth to come out. It's time for the people to decide." He said to the king, "Tell all the people of Israel to meet me at Carmel." Elijah said, "Send 450 prophets of Baal, and send 400 priests of Asherah,"

who was thought to be the female companion of Baal. That's 850 false prophets versus one man of God. That was agreeable to the king, and upon the appointed day they met on top of Mt. Carmel.

1 Kings 18:20-21, "So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him.'" The most important part comes in the next sentence. "But the people said nothing."

Of all the things that plague modern Christianity this may be the greatest. Spiritual indecision—the inability of the people of God to make up their minds, to decide which team we're really on.

Note the little word "if." The word "if" means you have to make up your mind. He said if the Lord is God, get on his team and follow him. And if Baal is god, fine, then get on his team and follow him. But stop sitting on the fence. He proposed a simple experiment so the people would know which God was the true God.

1 Kings 18:22-24, "Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 23 Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

They said, "You've got a deal." He told the prophets of Baal and Asherah to do whatever they thought they needed to do in order to entice Baal to send fire from heaven. The prophets of Baal had hair down to their shoulders. When they danced, they would scream and beat their drums, and lower their bodies almost to the ground. They shouted louder and louder and slashed to themselves with sword and spears until their blood flowed. When their god did not answer, Elijah mocked them. He said, shout louder. "Maybe he is asleep. After they had done that for hours, Elijah called the people together. It was game time for Elijah.

He cut a trench around the altar and poured 4 large jars of water on the wood and on the sacrifice so that it would be impossible to burn. He had this process done three times.

1 Kings 18:36-39, " At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD -he is God! The LORD -he is God!"

Elijah prays for three things that we all would do well to pray for.

- 1) Lord, answer me so they'll know you are the true God.
- 2) Answer me so they will know that I am your prophet and that I am doing your will.
- 3) Answer me so that the hearts of the people may be turned back to you.

Elijah's only concern was for God, his word, his work, his glory, and God's people. At this point in our story, Elijah truly looks like a superhero. We wonder if he wore a cape or if he could fly. What we're seeing in the life of Elijah is someone who is truly surrendered to god and who truly walks and the power of god. He almost seems superhuman.

Elijah-the human being

The bible tells us that when Queen Jezebel heard about what Elijah had done, she sent a message to Elijah promising to take his life the next day. And what did our mighty prophet do? He ran for his life.

1 Kings 19:4, "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."

Elijah was depressed. He was suffering from burnout. How can someone who would face 450 prophets of Baal be this terrified of one woman?

1. Elijah was overstrained mentally

Sometimes you just have too much going on in your life. I found some information on how to know when you own too many cats.

You and your spouse are sleeping on the floor because there's no more room in the bed.

All your windowsills are occupied.

Your neighbors forget your last name and start referring to you as "you know, the cat people".

You're running out of corners to put litter boxes in.
Flea collars smell good to you.
More than half your mail comes from Purina and Friskies.
For Mothers Day last year, the kids pooled their money and bought you
an electric cat brush. You thought it was the perfect gift.

Sometimes, you just have too much going on. To use a different illustration, life is like a rubber band. If you put enough pressure for enough time on the rubber band, it will pop. Elijah has gone from confronting the king in the palace to hiding out at the brook to being fed by a destitute widow to the showdown on Mt. Carmel, and he had reached his limit. Everyone has a limit. You've got your limit, and I've got mine, and when you pass that limit, you're in trouble.

2. Elijah was exhausted physically

Your physical condition greatly affects your emotional condition. People involved in military intelligence have known for years that if you can break someone down physically, you will also break them down emotionally. At one point in his ministry, Jesus told his disciples to "Come apart and rest for awhile" (Mark 6:31 KJV). If we do not come apart and rest awhile, we will simply come apart." Elijah was worn out, and God knew what he needed.

1 Kings 19:5-9, "Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 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. 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." 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. There he went into a cave and spent the night."

God fed him fresh baked bread and cool water and then let him sleep. Then He fed him again. Give him three nights of good sleep and Jezebel won't bother him so much. There is a time when you need to get up and go to work, and there is a time when you need to lie down and take a nap. Go to the gym. Ride your bike. Watch a football game. Make some popcorn, sit on the couch and watch a video. There are times when God's work demands strenuous action. And there is a time when you need to sit in the recliner, and navigate with the remote.

3. Elijah was out of touch spiritually

Verse 3 says that "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life." The Hebrew text literally reads, "And when he saw." Elijah had just had one of the most wonderful experiences of his life. God had worked powerfully in response to Elijah's prayers! But when Jezebel promised to end his life, Elijah took his eyes off the power of God and focused instead on Jezebel and her soldiers, and despair was the consequence. When life's inevitable problems approach, we better not take our eyes off of God. When we focus on our

problems and difficulties we lose our spiritual power, and that means defeat. Isaiah 26:3 says, "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."

When your eyes get on your circumstances, you're easily defeated. James puts it this way, "Elijah was a man just like us." He was a great man, but he was still a man. And no one can break God's physical laws forever without breaking down sooner or later.

HOW DO YOU SMELL SMOKE-THE SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

How do you know if there is a problem in your life in this area?

1. WE EXPERIENCE A DECREASE IN ENERGY AND MOTIVATION

You no longer have the drive you used to have about life. Work is no longer a challenge. It is a dreaded chore. You are out of gas and out of energy.

2. WE WITHDRAW

Withdrawal is one of those kinds of experiences that people go through trying to protect what's left of their mental fabric. Sometimes we will watch TV and not really see what's on it. We're just trying to escape because we are at the breaking point.

Job said in Job 10, verses 20-22: "Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness."

Job was saying, "Leave me alone! I don't have any joy and I just want a moment of peace." But even in that moment of isolation, there is no joy, only a sense of failure, loneliness, being overwhelmed.

3. WE FEEL HELPLESS TO CHANGE THINGS

Having exhausted all of your resources, you feel there is nothing left to do to change things. You feel trapped.

4. WE EXAGGERATE OUR PROBLEMS AND IGNORE THE SUCCESSES

When we are burned out, we overemphasize what's wrong in our lives, and we ignore God's blessings. We see the cup as half empty not as half full. God had just done a great miracle in defeating the prophets of Baal and in turning the nation of Israel away from

idolatry, but now he was so drained emotionally, physically and spiritually that he couldn't see anything but the negative.

1 Kings 19:10, "He replied, "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."

When you are burned out, you don't think about all the good things that are happening. You only see the negative.

5. We abdicate our dreams.

You throw in the towel and quit. You surrender to defeat.

HOW DO YOU PUT OUT THE FIRE-OVERCOMING BURNOUT

1. RESIGN AS CEO OF THE UNIVERSE

The root of all burnout is playing God. When you start playing God, when you start acting as if you are in control, like you have to make it all work, you are setting yourself up for burnout. That's because we weren't wired to be God. If you are going to prevent or cure burnout, you have to serve God the best that you know how and let Him take care of the results.

Philippians 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

He is saying, "transfer your trust." Rather than trusting in our own power, wisdom, and strength, we need to place our trust in God for everything. If you carry the load yourself, you will become exhausted. If you let God carry the burden, you will find that He can handle it just fine.

2. ASK GOD TO RESTORE YOUR VISION

The blind author Helen Keller was once asked if there were, in her estimation, anything worse than being blind. She responded "yes' having no vision. The vision she are talking about is spiritual vision, a sight which goes beyond our physical capacity to see, and it is vitally important.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Vision is a mental picture of something better in the future, and it makes life an adventure as you reach out to make those mental pictures a reality. We are all familiar with the famous speech of Martin Luther King, as he stood before the crowd and declared, "I have a dream!" When you suffer from burnout, you there is very little dreaming left.

Paul told Timothy to stir up the fire.... That's what you need to do when you are suffering from burnout. You need a renewed vision. You've got to believe that God can make it work. You've got to understand that you and God make a winning team.

3. FORGET THE PAST AND BEGIN AGAIN

Stop dwelling on the failures of the past and look to what God can do through you in the present.

Philippians 3:13,14 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

God is the God of new beginnings. What looks like an end can become a new beginning if God is in it. Thousands of Christians sing Don Moen's praise song, God Will Make a Way. Most who sing his lyrics don't know their origin. Several years ago, Don was awakened in the middle of the night. His mother-in-law called to tell him of a tragic car accident involving his wife's sister, Susan. Susan and her husband, Craig, and their four little boys were on a trip when the tragedy occurred. Jeremy, age eight and the oldest of the four boys, was killed instantly. The others were seriously injured.

As Don and his wife grieved and poured out their hearts to the Lord, they felt helpless at communicating hope and grace to Susan and Craig. Don recalls how God helped him through the tragedy. It was as if the Lord gave me these words:

God will make a way when there seems to be no way.
He works in ways we cannot see. He will make a way for me.
He will be my guide; hold me closely to his side.
With love and strength for each new day, he will make a way.

If you're in a state of burnout, it probably looks like there is no way for that thing to work. You've tried and failed over and over, and it looks like you're at the end. Remember, God can make a way when there seems to be no way.