

It is not about my life. It is about God's work. God delivers us by sending us back to work – the work that he wants, not the work we think God wants us to do nor the work we want to do. God sent Elijah back to Israel. Place is also important; the place where God wants us. Doubts cease and misgivings vanish when God puts us to work.

## CONCLUSION

*James Fraser was a minister but had sullen and peevish disposition. One day he called on one of his elders to have a conference with him. All the time Dr. Fraser was talking, the elder sat patting a pet dog to whom he paid more attention than to his minister. When his wife came into the room to give them tea and ventured a word or two in the conversation, her husband turned on her with an angry look and curt remark that sent her out of the room with reddened cheeks. Fraser rode slowly back home that night giving himself time to think. "After all my evangelical preaching," he said to himself, "to see an elder of mine such a brute at home!" But Fraser began to see that it was a case of like minister like elder, especially in his behavior at home. The minister was later than usual in arriving home, but from that time, his whole household began to see a change in him. His sermon the following Sunday also blessed the bad-tempered elder. Both minister and elder had entered into newness of life.*

<sup>1</sup>

## AM I THE ONLY ONE?

**1 Kings 19:1-18**

### INTRODUCTION

*A man has not been feeling well and goes to the doctor for a check up. After the physical examination and a battery of blood tests and x-rays, he asks the doctor about his situation. The doctor replies, "You are very sick. You might not live longer than perhaps three or four months." The man, in despair, yet, with a glimpse of hope says, "If you don't mind, doctor, I would like to have a second opinion." "Okay," the doctor answers, "you are ugly, too!"*

Peter had thought it was all over for him. Jesus would never want him again. Elijah thought he had dealt the death blow to Baal and apostasy in Israel, but now he in the depths of despair.

### DESPAIR

Elijah is terrified! Ahab had told Jezebel about the outcome of the contest on Carmel and the slaughter of all the prophets of Baal. Ahab, as an Israelite, would have been convinced by the outcome of the contest. The Lord and the Lord alone is God. Not so Jezebel. She is totally unrepentant, continues in her Baalism and blames Elijah for all that has happened. She is determined that he should pay with his life. Elijah gets right out of Israel. He journeys south, not even stopping in Judah, but going on into the wilderness. At last, tired out he lies down under a tree and prays to die. For Elijah it is the end of his ministry. At Beersheba he dismissed his servant, his assistant in ministry. He will not need him any more. He has left the country – the Promised Land – the place of his labors. I'm done with it. It's all over. Lord, take my life. How often Elijah's *life* is mentioned in this story. Jezebel threatens to take it. Elijah flees for his life. He's ready to surrender the life he has been anxious to save. He says his enemies are seeking his life to take it away. This is what comes of cutting oneself off from God, the source of all our strength, the place where God wants us to serve him and the people to whom God sends us. Despair. In the depths of despair God seems far, far away. When we feel like that, we need to ask, 'Who moved?'

*Civilization stands at the crossroads. Down one road is despondency and despair, and down the other is total annihilation. Let us pray that we choose the right road. (Woody Allen)*

*Every year thousands of people climb a mountain in the Italian Alps, passing the "stations of the cross" to stand at an outdoor crucifix. One tourist noticed a little trail that led beyond the cross. He fought through the rough thicket and, to his surprise, came upon another shrine, a shrine that symbolized the empty tomb. It was neglected. The brush had grown up*

*around it. Almost everyone had gone as far as they cross, but there they stopped. Far too many have gotten to the cross and have known the despair and the heartbreak. Far too few have moved beyond the cross to find the empty tomb.*

## DISILLUSION

Why should Elijah be in such despair? After that terrific victory on Mt. Carmel he should have been on top of the world. Was there something of pride in his ministry up to this time? He had been so successful. He had said there would be no rain and none fell for over three years. He said the widow's food would not run out and it did not. He restored a dead boy to life. He convinced the widow that he was a man of God who preached the Word of God. He successfully challenged 450 prophets of Baal and proved that the Lord was the only God, the God of power who answers prayer. After the victory surely Jezebel would capitulate and that would be the end of Baal-worship in Israel. Had Elijah been taking his own importance too seriously? He had come to bask in the glow of the spectacular. There is no-one like me! Think where you would be if I wasn't there! But now he is a wanted man and he knows that Jezebel is more than capable of carrying out her threat. His pride was shattered and he became a broken man. He even complains to God.

*1 Kin 19:10*<sup>10</sup> "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

Almost hidden in the story is Obadiah. Although he was a minister of state and acted as Ahab's representative, he had not been corrupted by Baalism nor the wickedness of the king. **Obadiah revered the LORD greatly.** He had been responsible for hiding, and thus keeping safe, 100 prophets of the Lord. Yet the actions of this good man seem to go almost unnoticed by Elijah. The great prophet still had much to learn.

*God does not always move in the realm of the extraordinary.*

If we need high, exciting experiences all the time, probably our zeal is misdirected.

*Isa 30:15*<sup>15</sup> For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

Like Obadiah, for the majority of us, life's service is in quiet routine and humble obedience to God's will, even if that means staying in a hostile situation.

Elijah arrives at Horeb, the Mount of God, the place Moses received the Ten Commandments. He again complains that his faithfulness and zeal have not produced the desired results, even though he has called down fire from heaven. He still maintains that he is the only faithful Israelite left. Surely here on this mountain of all places God would vindicate him. Once again he is disillusioned. Hiding, probably in the very cave where Moses had stood when in thunder and lightning the Law was given, Elijah experiences a terrific wind-storm tearing up the rocks, then an earthquake and then a raging fire. What he had done on Mount Carmel was as nothing compared with the ferocity of what he was now seeing. In none of these did God speak to him. No wonder he felt it was all over, this is the end and I've lost. He was a totally disillusioned man.

## DELIVERANCE

The truth is, God has not forgotten him. Elijah's deliverance comes not in the crashing notes of the Hallelujah Chorus, but in the quiet solo, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." **And after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.** The sound of silence.

*Why should the wind, and the fire, and the earthquake be God's only instruments? Is He not equally in the gently dawning light, the soft-whispering breeze, the silent, secret forces of nature?*

Our work, our usefulness, may be obscure. Our influence may go unnoticed. What is noticed is the shouting and the activity which all too often neglects the ways of quiet love, simple piety and persuasive kindness.

*A young student-pastor was sent to visit an elderly church member whose wife had died. The young man did not know what to say, what words of comfort to bring. He sat saying nothing and the old man said nothing. Finally it was the old man who broke the silence. "You're right, lad, it's too deep for words." The young man went on to be a fine minister.*

Moreover, Elijah was not alone as he had thought. There were at least 7000 who had not gone along with the Baal nonsense. God sent him back to work. He was given a commission to appoint his successor. The work Elijah had been doing was not a failure and it must continue. Elisha would succeed Elijah. Ultimately that would mean not only a new prophet, but a new dynasty ruling in Israel. Fare reaching effects indeed. There are times when we feel failures. We believe what we are doing is right and yet it all seems to go wrong. We despair. We are disillusioned.

*1 Kin 19:10*<sup>10</sup> ... "I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."