

**1 Kings 19:3-8    “How Low Can You Go?”    August 11-13, 2018**  
**St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN**

**1 Kings 19:3-8**

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,<sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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.”<sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.”<sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.

**Introduction**

Have you ever had a bad day? .....Have you ever had a bad day and thought, “I can’t wait for tomorrow because things will be better tomorrow?” But then tomorrow comes and things that day are worse than yesterday? Did you find yourself hoping that things would be better tomorrow? But when tomorrow came it was worse than yesterday? Maybe you still thought things would get better tomorrow but they weren’t. After a while maybe among your many thoughts you found yourself wondering, .... **“How Bad Can It Be?”** In his word we consider today God first of all answers our thoughts with the answer ....

**1. “Very Bad as Evidenced by Elijah’s Misery.”**

**Elijah the Prophet**

Elijah was a man of Jewish background who lived in the area of Gilead to the east of the Jordan River and served as a prophet of God in the mid-800’s before Christ. Elijah saw many miracles of God. For example Elijah received water from a brook that otherwise should have been dried up and food delivered by ravens who normally would have eaten it. At Zarepath God provided for Elijah by miraculously seeing to it that the last bit of flour and oil belonging to a widow to whom God directed Elijah for aid, would not run out. When the widow’s only son died, God allowed Elijah to play a part in miraculously bringing the boy back to life. In a showdown with the prophets of false gods over whose god was real, Elijah saw God miraculously engulf with fire an altar and sacrifice soaked with water. Even when there was no evidence of rain, God told Elijah that it would rain and it miraculously did. When Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, rode down Mt. Carmel toward his summer capitol of Jezreel, God enabled Elijah to run ahead of a the chariot all the way to Jezreel – a feat that would probably qualified Elijah for the Olympics today. So Elijah was a man who saw miracles.

**Elijah – A Man of Misery**

But Elijah was a man who knew misery. He knew misery as a victim of the threats of the wicked wife of Ahab, queen Jezebel. Ahab reported to her what happened on Mt. Carmel and that Elijah and his followers killed the 850 prophets of her idol gods. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah telling him, **“May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”** When a queen threatens you, that’s serious stuff. So Elijah was the victim of the queen’s threats.

But Elijah was also a victim of his own sinful nature. Consider this: hadn’t Elijah been threatened before in the presence of King Ahab? I mentioned the showdown with the King Ahab and the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mt. Carmel. If God had not responded, what do you suppose the king and the idolatrous people of Israel would have done to Elijah? Elijah’s enemies would likely have been dead serious about see him seriously dead. Yet, in those circumstances Elijah is bold and confident. Now suddenly he is afraid. So he flees. Isn’t this ironic?

Speaking of irony, isn't it also ironic that Elijah feels that he is a failure? That's evidenced in his words, "**I am no better than my ancestors...**" probably referring to the faithful who contended with idolatry among their fellow countrymen. And this comes after the great showdown at Mt. Carmel and seeing many miracles. Isn't this ironic and isn't this sin discounting the blessings of God? Elijah is in misery because of his sinful nature that he wants to die.

In his fear he traveled with his servant approximately 60 –70 miles from Jezreel to Beersheba. From there Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, sat down under a tree and prayed, "**I have had enough, Lord....Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.**" There's nothing wrong with wanting to die and go to heaven. The Apostle Paul wanted to die as evidenced by his *Letter to the Philippians*. There are many elderly Christians who pray every night that God take them. There is nothing wrong with that. But problem with Elijah is that he puts himself in the place of God with the attitude and statement, "**I've had enough, Lord.**" Elijah wants to play God with God and tell God how to rule in Elijah's life. In answer to the question we consider today, "*How bad can it be?*".... Elijah seems to think that God is letting things go too far. Elijah sins against God and deserves God's punishment.

### **Our Misery**

Sometimes God let's things get awfully bad, doesn't he? Pain may become **severe**. Problems may be **intense**. Danger may become **great**. Frustration may become **high**. Depression may become **deep**. Suffering may be **long**. We, like Elijah, may be **afraid**. We may fear even though God says, "*Don't be afraid (Is 41:10)...Don't be anxious about anything...(Phil 4:6)*" We may find ourselves thinking ourselves failures because we feel weak and insignificant forgetting that God reminds us about suffering, "**...Suffering produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.....(Rom 5:3,4)**." We may forget that God says his strength is made perfect in our weakness and that he can do so much more than we can ever ask for or imagine. Therefore, we may not realize all the things God is doing in our behalf and to his glory. And don't we at times find ourselves playing God with God, just like Elijah, trying to tell God when we've had enough as if God is so stupid that he doesn't know what's good for us? Or that he is so lackadaisical that he isn't paying attention and needs our help? Or that he has made a mistake and is taking things too far? Just like with Elijah, part of our misery comes from lack of trust in God, frustration with God, and playing God with God – all sins and the result of our born-with sin for which we deserve God's anger and punishment in hell.

The fact is God in love – to test, to strengthen, to teach new things and sometimes to correct as we see from the life of Elijah and know from our own lives - allows things to get really bad, but never too bad because of his mercy.

## ***2. But Never Too Bad Because God's Ministry***

### **Elijah Experiences This**

Elijah experienced this. He lay down under that tree that the NIV calls a "Broom Tree" and hoped that he would die. But he didn't. God's word tells us, "**All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."**<sup>6</sup> **He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.**<sup>7</sup> **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."**<sup>8</sup> **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.**

### **Angel**

Elijah needed help and an angel gave it. In vs. 5 there is reference to "an angel." Vs. 7 refers to "the angel of the Lord." Angels are those created spirit beings whom God made sometime during creation week to serve him and his people. But sometimes the Old Testament refers to "the Angel of the Lord" and it's the

Lord Himself. Whether this is a created angel or the Lord himself, it's a case of the Lord ministering to Elijah. And isn't this what God promises to his people? *"Do not be afraid, for I am with you.....I will strengthen and help you..."* And doesn't God promise that he will never give us more than we can bear and will deliver us? God ministered to Elijah.

### **Miracles**

He did so by miracles. Just the presence of the angel was a miracle. Imagine when Elijah felt the angel's touch and opened his eyes to see the freshly baked bread, he must have been amazed. He must have been encouraged by the angel. A number of times in the Scriptures when humans see angels and especially the Angel of the Lord they think they will die because they are sinful and God and his angels are not. Whether he realized it or not, Elijah experienced a miracle in that God didn't bring judgment on him for his sins of doubt, despair, and displacing God. God forgave him. Because of a sinless Baby born in Bethlehem whose adult body together with the soul would suffer on the cross of Calvary, God forgave Elijah. This too was a miracle. So was the fact that by verse 8 Elijah is "back on the road again" serving the Lord. God ministered to Elijah with other miracles. God changed Elijah. God gave him purpose and a new outlook on life.

God still does miracles today. You may say, "But I've never found an angel or the Lord himself sitting at the headboard of my bed waiting with hot bread and coffee or juice. Maybe not. But on the other hand you may have seen angels and not have known it. The angel may have come to you in the form of a nurse, a rescuer, as someone who assisted you. God is performing miracles in your life everyday directly caring for you and sending his angels to minister to you. Every day you enjoy the ministry of God in his grace whereby he does not look at your sins and destroy you, but looks at his Son and his Son's death, and forgives you. Every day you stand in grace dressed in the holiness of Jesus from your baptism. Every day you enjoy the forgiveness of sins bought with Jesus' death. Every day you experience the miracle of God's peace assured to you by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Every day you live with the miracle of God's promise to you that you will live eternally and that one day your body will be like that of Jesus. More than you realize you experience the miracles of God as he not only changes circumstances in your life but also changes you giving you a different outlook on life and purpose for living. God still works miracles today.

### **Common-Sense Methods**

God also uses common-sensed methods to minister to us. Elijah was tired. So God enabled him to sleep. Elijah was hungry. So God provided food. Elijah was probably dehydrated, so God provided water. God still provides things that we need for our health and welfare and wants us to use common sense in using them. When we find ourselves struggling, we still need to eat, drink, sleep, and exercise. When we find ourselves trying to sleep but can't, isn't it amazing how God eventually gives us that rest that we need even though it may not come when we would like it too? 24 hours of sleeplessness may give way to 48. In exhaustion and frustration you may pray, "God help me." The next thing you know you're waking up. God has kept things from getting too bad.

### **Conclusion**

How bad can it be when it comes to suffering? Very bad as the account of Elijah and life's experiences show us. But it can never get too bad because of God's ministry to us. Amen. (DRS)