

QUESTIONS GOD ASKED: 5 – “What are you doing here?”

READING:

1 Kings chapter 19 verses 1 - 15

These weeks have been enough to challenge anyone's faith. With church worshipping together getting further down the list of acceptable practices – way behind swimming pools, gyms, and pubs. It makes you wonder, when will we ever get back, especially since they are looking towards the threat of another spike in cases, let alone what the winter months will bring. The scenes of devastation from Beirut, the plight of refugees (regardless of your views) making their way across the channel, the closure of businesses all makes for some depressing news. So now that I have really put you in the mood, isn't it no wonder that peoples' faith in God is wavering. We all face times which threaten to overwhelm us with a loss of hope and vision that we will barely make it through the night, let alone, live in victory in the days and years that lie ahead. It is clear from any honest reading of God's Word, that we as are going to have trials and tribulations just like the next person, and sometimes, it feels, more than the next person.

As you read through **1 Kings chapters 17 and 18** you would have thought that the prophet Elijah would be on some sort of "religious high". God had miraculously used ravens to provide food for him whilst he was by the Kerith brook after just having told King Ahab that God was sending a massive drought on the land because of his willingness to allow worship of foreign gods in the land to keep his queen, Jezebel, happy. Elijah had witness God perform a miracle using flour and oil and also the raising from dead a young boy. Elijah witnessed the awesome power of God on Mount Carmel in the great showdown with the followers of the false god Baal and the worshippers of Asherah. Next, Elijah prophesies rain was going to fall on the land, and the long, hot dry drought and famine was going to be dealt with by the rains from God's heaven and the rains came. Elijah may have been thinking to himself that there was absolutely nothing that was impossible for God to do! If there ever was anyone who was on a "spiritual high" it had to be Elijah at this moment in his life, and he had been part of it. But Elijah goes in a totally different direction. Ahab had told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and Jezebel puts a price on Elijah's head. That "religious high" had come crashing down and he ran for his life, lay down under a juniper tree and cries for God to end his life. He has had enough.

Elijah experienced great discouragement just after his two great spiritual victories: the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the answered prayer for rain. Isn't it true that often discouragement sets in after great spiritual experiences. Elijah went on a 200 mile journey, found a cave and spent the night, and the Word of the Lord came to him saying: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah then went on to explain why he stopped in the cave (verse 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." We go on to read of the story of the Wind, the Earthquake, and the Fire, but then the still small whisper of God. Elijah knew that the small whisper was the voice of God, and he covered his face and walked out into the open, and God once again asked him the same question, and Elijah gave the same answer. But God told Elijah, that He still had a work for him to do. There was some anointing that needed to take place, and Elijah was going to be the prophet would take care of it. Basically, God was telling Elijah, "It's time to come out of your cave", and get back to work!

We too, can go through times of great victory, but then for some reason stoop to the lowest of lows, find our juniper tree wanting to give in and give up, then finally end up in our caves believing that God has no further use for us. At these times we need to hear God's voice asking us "what are you doing here?" It's time to "get out of our caves", because there is a work to be done.

Possibly one of Elijah's greatest struggles was that he was offended in God for not answering in the way he thought he should have. This is the bait that the enemy will continually dangle in front of us, and sometimes succeed with our help to throw us into the cave of offense. We've all been

there, offended that God didn't act the way we thought he should have. Elijah had seen the powerful miracles of an almighty God, only to be run off in fear by Queen Jezebel. If he had any problem at this point, it was more likely in the area of pride as he realized he had made a quick decision in a panic-induced state of mind, and that the decision turned out to be a bad one. Instead of turning around and going back and facing the music, he drove himself deeper into the wilderness, until he finally ended up in this cave. God had been very patient with Elijah - in the wilderness, under the juniper tree, and now here at the cave. We may run far and long, but rest assured, God will be with us, loving us, drawing us, searching for us, there with open arms when we are ready to walk out of our cave into the sunlight of His love! Elijah may have thought to himself..."After all I did for God..." here I am on the run. One thing about being in the cave of offense is that our mind often becomes filled with lies from the enemy, and we begin to believe those lies! The imagination runs wild, and within this cave's dark and dreary confines we feel like we can see the formation of new enemies we never knew we had before.

Many Christians have left their faith in the back of the cave of offense. God would say today, "It's time to come out of your cave, there's work to be done!"

While he was under the juniper tree, and also in the cave, he didn't ask the Lord for guidance, that flicker of hope had dimmed through the circumstances that had recently been swirling around his life. In the hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" there are the words, "strength for today, bright hope for tomorrow..." Where would we be today if we did not have "The Blessed Hope", or the knowledge that Jesus truly is going to come back one day for His church? Where would we be if we could not look through tear-filled eyes at the grave of a loved one knowing that one day we are going to see them again if they died in the Lord, and we live and die the same way? In **Romans 5:3-5**, we read: **Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.** Hope is the promise for the future! It is the assurance of the blessed promises and provision of God! It is the realization that God will take care of us! Hope in God, and He will not disappoint us!

There is that cave of despondency that produces a sense of aloneness that is intense and unbearable at times. Elijah was convinced that he was alone in serving God, and wanted to pack it in. Another trick of the enemy is to convince us of our loneliness, and that no one really even cares about us, especially God! Despondency will cause us to lose our focus on all that is important, and often causes us to over-appreciate self, and sometimes under-appreciate others! One trick of the enemy is to isolate the believer from the family of God! He knows that if he can get us alone, he can also take away our support system, and before long despondency sets in causing spiritual havoc.

It's strange, but after being on the run for so long, even the rock pillows become comfortable after a while! Quite possibly the comfort of the cave was more deceiving than the offense or the despondency he was feeling. For us, we might feel that at least we're not doing anything wrong, let's take it easy for a while. It almost seems that Elijah was going to be content to be "retired", but God confronted him with the need to return to his mission—to speak God's words in Israel. Elijah's battles were not over; there was still work for him to do. When you feel let down after a great spiritual experience, remember that God's purpose for your life is not yet over. Elijah had time to think about the events of the past few days, and didn't seem to come out until God caught his attention with the Wind, Earthquake, and Fire, and then the still small voice. Elijah may have thought of all the miracles of God, but also his involvement. As Elijah was on the run, and in this cave, he was also on the run from responsibility. But this was not the time to relax, there was still a great work to be done, and Elijah was the one that God had called to do the work. It seems that Elijah was willing to lay down the work of God for the comforts of the cave. It also seems that he was looking for early retirement. We must believe that the same God who called us, is the same God who will keep us!

CONCLUSION

We may experience and witness the mighty power of God at work and when we do, you can guarantee that the enemy will try to rob us of this. We may feel offended by how God has, or has not acted – how He seeks to achieve His purposes in our lives. We may find ourselves in the cave of despondency, where we may feel like packing in and giving up. We may feel like we have made it and it is time to put up our feet. God always has a work for us to do. Have we crawled into a cave, and is God saying to our hearts “What are you doing here?” Time to come out of our cave and hear what God has to say.

1 KINGS 19 verses 1 – 18

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, ‘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.’

³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ 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.’ ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ ⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.’ ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’

¹⁰ He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.’

¹¹ The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’

¹⁴ He replied, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.’

¹⁵ The LORD said to him, ‘Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.’

PSALM 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.