

Call to Obedience #488
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
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The Juniper Tree

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But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom [juniper] tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4); ...And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place (1 Kings 19:16).

In this story of Elijah sitting down under the juniper tree, we learn that there is a price to be paid for discouragement. We all must constantly guard ourselves against discouragement. But let us first look at the tremendous success of this great servant of God, Elijah. The first appearance of Elijah is in a royal palace to announce a famine—the LORD sent him there. His second appearance is at the brook Cherith—the LORD sent him there. His third appearance is at the house of a poor widow—the LORD sent him there. His fourth appearance is back in the presence of Ahab after three and a half years of famine—the LORD sent him there. Then we see him at Mount Carmel, first praying for fire and then for rain; we know that the LORD sent him there. But when he came to the juniper tree, it is obvious for the first time that the LORD *did not* send him there.

1. God Never Sends Anyone to a Juniper Tree

Juniper trees are places of men's choosing and not of God's choosing, and just because one great man of God sulked under a juniper tree, his action does not give us the right to do likewise. For Elijah, the juniper tree (*broom tree*) was a place of self-pity, bitterness, discouragement, futility, hopelessness, loneliness, darkness and disorientation. What makes you think that God has a juniper tree for anyone? What makes you think that God would ever desire any one of His servants to rest in a place like that?

Juniper tree experiences have weakened and shortened the ministry of many servants. If you want to run the full race God has destined for you, forget about stopping under juniper trees. God did not let Joshua tarry under a juniper tree (Joshua 7:10), nor did He want Elijah to be there—neither does He want you to be in such a place. The first rule is: "Don't go there!" and if you

have already broken that rule, the second rule is: “Get up and move on!” But you ask, “Is it not natural for any one of us to get discouraged once in a while?” Of course, it is natural, but the point is, none of us should allow the natural man within us to control our actions. We are called into the supernatural life of abiding in Christ, and that makes us steer clear of all juniper trees.

It is this perception that we are entitled to do the natural that has become the reason why many churchgoers have hundreds of excuses. Yes, it is natural for us to want to strike someone back when they strike us on our cheek. It is only natural for us to despise our enemies; to be resentful when we are hurt; to skip our prayer times when we are tired; to stay home from church when we are depressed; to remain silent when we do not feel like witnessing. By us giving in to the natural, the carnal nature is at work within us and that takes us to a juniper tree. Because Elijah was greatly discouraged and because Elijah was done with Elijah, he said: *“It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”* Let us now consider how Elijah began his ministry and how he got himself into trouble.

2. Elijah Had Pinned His Hope on Unrealistic Expectations

First consider the character of this prophet. Elijah was *...very zealous for the LORD God of hosts...* (1 Kings 19:10, 14). Working zealously for God should be imitated. May I zealously work for the LORD of hosts like Elijah did! It is when God’s chosen ones have this zealous spirit within themselves that worldly dreams and worldly ambitions are driven out of their lives.

Elijah told King Ahab of Israel: *...As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word* (1 Kings 17:1). God will do great things through those who are zealous for the Lord. During the following three years, every river and brook dried up. The famine was to soften the people’s hard hearts. After three and a half years, God saw that the people could now be persuaded to leave idolatry. He then ordered Elijah back to Ahab, and revival ensued. All false prophets were slain, the rain returned, and life and prosperity returned with it.

Then suddenly, a forgotten element made itself known against Elijah! He was reminded that Jezebel was still around and about to destroy him, “the only prophet left” to perpetuate the revival. But it seems to me that the real source of Elijah’s sudden discouragement was deeper. It was Elijah’s own unrealistic view of life!”

Somehow, during those years of famine, Elijah’s relationship to his God was overshadowed by his obsession for revival which led to a “revival or perish”

mentality. Now, the fact that he was able to help a lonely widow through a famine, and that he, perhaps, could help others sometime in the future, had lost its meaning. He was after the big things, and if it was not total revival, death was preferable. That is a “revival or perish” attitude. It is an attitude where small things, and small numbers, and small people, and small successes no longer count. Life is bigger than that.

And with that, we must realize that Jezebel will always be around us, and that wheat and tares will continue to grow together until the end of time. But let us remember that: *...He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world* (1 John 4:4). Our greatest enemy is not the devil himself, but rather, it is the unrealistic expectations that the devil tries to plant into our hearts which, once he can cause us to focus on them, will lead us to discouragement. It is exactly this that led Elijah to a depressive, suicidal attitude.

Hardly any man of God ever gets all he wants. Jesus Himself seldom got what He wanted. But He kept walking with His Father with a divine calmness and dignity in this troubled world. With this, let us be refreshed by these beautiful words: “My times are in Thy hand: My God, I wish them there; My life, my friends, my soul, I leave entirely to Thy care.” So, my friend, let your attitude be more than noble, let it be right. You may come short of revival, but, for the sake of another needy widow along your road of life, you must continue to move on. Never let your relationship with God get thin at the expense of a project you are pursuing. Doing so will get you out of first love into all kinds of troubles.

3. Elijah’s Greatest Mistake Was that He Left His Servant at Beersheba

And when he saw that [Jezebel was after him], he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba...and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom [juniper] tree... (1 Kings 19:3-4). How long did it take for Elijah to reach utter despair *without* his servant? One day! Have you ever wondered why Hebrews says: *...exhort one another daily...* (Heb. 3:13)? It also says we ought to pray daily (Matt. 6:11). Miss one day of that, and you are about to lose your victory.

The one who was called and equipped to exhort Elijah was left behind. His servant who could talk to him and bring him back to his senses could have said, “Listen, God has heard your prayers and what God has begun, He is able to finish.” But now that Elijah was separated from his servant, he ended up in the city of self-degradation, discouragement and uselessness. He thought he

was no better than his fathers; yet, he was! He thought that he was the only one left; yet, he was not! God had reserved for Himself 7,000 more men of righteousness. Elijah thought he had failed, yet he had succeeded. He had done all God told him to do.

God did not talk to Elijah under the tree. He sent a messenger. Only after He had Elijah walk 40 days' worth of obedience would He talk to him again. People who are discouraged want to hear from God right away, but often, God will speak to them only through a fellow-Christian; and then, it may require 40 days and 40,000 steps of obedience before God will talk to them again!

Then God met Elijah at Mount Horeb. In the beginning, He asked Elijah what he was doing there and Elijah gave his sad story. God wanted none of it, but rather, He put on display some of His power and majesty unlike He had ever done for anybody else to get His disorientated prophet back on track letting him know that He was bigger than any problem. But He did not succeed. Unlike Isaiah, who fell on his face to worship when he met God in such fashion, Elijah kept wallowing in self-pity. God demoted him and told him to anoint his replacement. He gave him a few more assignments which Elijah faithfully executed before being carried away in a chariot of fire to later attend a meeting with Jesus, Moses, Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Oh, what a God we have.

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