

Broom Tree Tribulation

1 Kings 19:1-9

Opening Prayer

Too late I have loved you, O my Beautiful God, ancient yet ever new! Too late have I loved you! And behold, you were already inside me but I was out and about searching for you elsewhere. I was looking for you amid the lovely things you have made. You were with me the whole time but I was not with you.

From Augustine's Confessions (paraphrase)

Introduction

1 Kings 18:16-46 is one of the most dramatic stories in the Old Testament. Historically we could say it saved Yahweh-worship in Israel.

The nation of Israel had not rejected Yahweh as their God. Instead they had merged Baal worship with Yahweh worship. Syncretism is always considered broad-minded, but Yahweh of Israel never left room for other gods. So Elijah staged a contest between himself, the Prophet of Yahweh, and the 450 prophets of Baal to prove who the real God was. Yahweh delivered big time and in the end the people screamed, "Yahweh is God!" over and over again. The road to revival appeared with Elijah leading the way. The future looked bright...until...1 Kings 19. Ahab went home and told his wife Jezebel what happened and we quickly learn who wore the pants in that family. She put out a contract on Elijah's life and he fled fast and far.

Rarely, if ever, is the road to revival a smooth pathway. It is filled with road blocks, switch backs, speed bumps, and pot holes. And the temptations to discouragement, depression, and disillusionment for the servants of the Lord are inevitable. For Elijah, physical exhaustion, lack of sleep, isolation, fear of harm, over responsibility, preoccupation with short term goals, and an inability to see God's hand at work over the long term may have all have been contributing factors to his state of mind. Read this story of Elijah's hour of darkness to see what you can learn. How do you identify with him?

1 Kings 19:1-9

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.



Elijah and the Broom Tree by Daniele da Volterra, 1509-1566

⁷The 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.” ⁸So 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. ⁹There he went into a cave and spent the night.¹

Quotes

The internal powers that would seek to hinder us in our journey are doubt, questioning, lack of confidence, fear of failure, the reluctance to risk, the lack of self-discipline, the inertia of the status quo (a body at rest tends to remain at rest) and the voices from within and without that whisper, “You’ll never make it.” But even these “demons” have their shadow sides, which we may use creatively and constructively.

Miller in the Golden Shadow page 106

Although speech is often good and serves as a means of helping one another, it is not a sacrament. There is sometimes a problem with people in positions of power who think their every word is golden. Occasionally one gets the impression that some suppose that all issues can be resolved by talking. Non stop talking can be a means of insulating oneself from the shock of the real... I think many of us would be much better off if we did not speak as much as we do.

Michael Casey in Living in the Truth, page 172

To have a healthy spirituality, we must feed our soul in three ways: through prayer, both private and communal; through the practice of justice; and through having those things in our lives (good friendships, wine-drinking, creativity, and healthy leisure) that keep the soul mellow and grateful.

Ronald Rolheiser in The Holy Longing, page 67

I like to think about that story sometimes because it reminds me that, although we like to think of our heroes as perfect, the harsh truth is that they became heroes by making mistakes and learning from them. To me, that makes them even more heroic.

Coach Wooden and Me: Our 50-Year Friendship On and Off the Court by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Most people work so hard developing their correspondence with the visible world that their power of corresponding with the invisible is left in a rudimentary state. But when, for one reason or another we begin to wake up a little bit, to lift the nose from the ground and notice that spiritual light and that spiritual atmosphere as real constituents of our human world; then the whole situation is changed. Our horizon is widened, our experience is enormously enriched, and at the same time our responsibilities are enlarged. For now we get an entirely new idea of what human beings are for, and what they can achieve: as a result, first our notions about life, our scale of values, begins to change, and then we do.

Evelyn Underhill in The Spiritual Life, page 42

Benediction

Lord Jesus, we admire the devotion and courage of your servant Elijah. Even more so, we admire you for how you care for him when his life falls apart. You give us hope when our own lives seem to hit a dead end. When we are ready to give you, you don’t give up on us. Thank you.