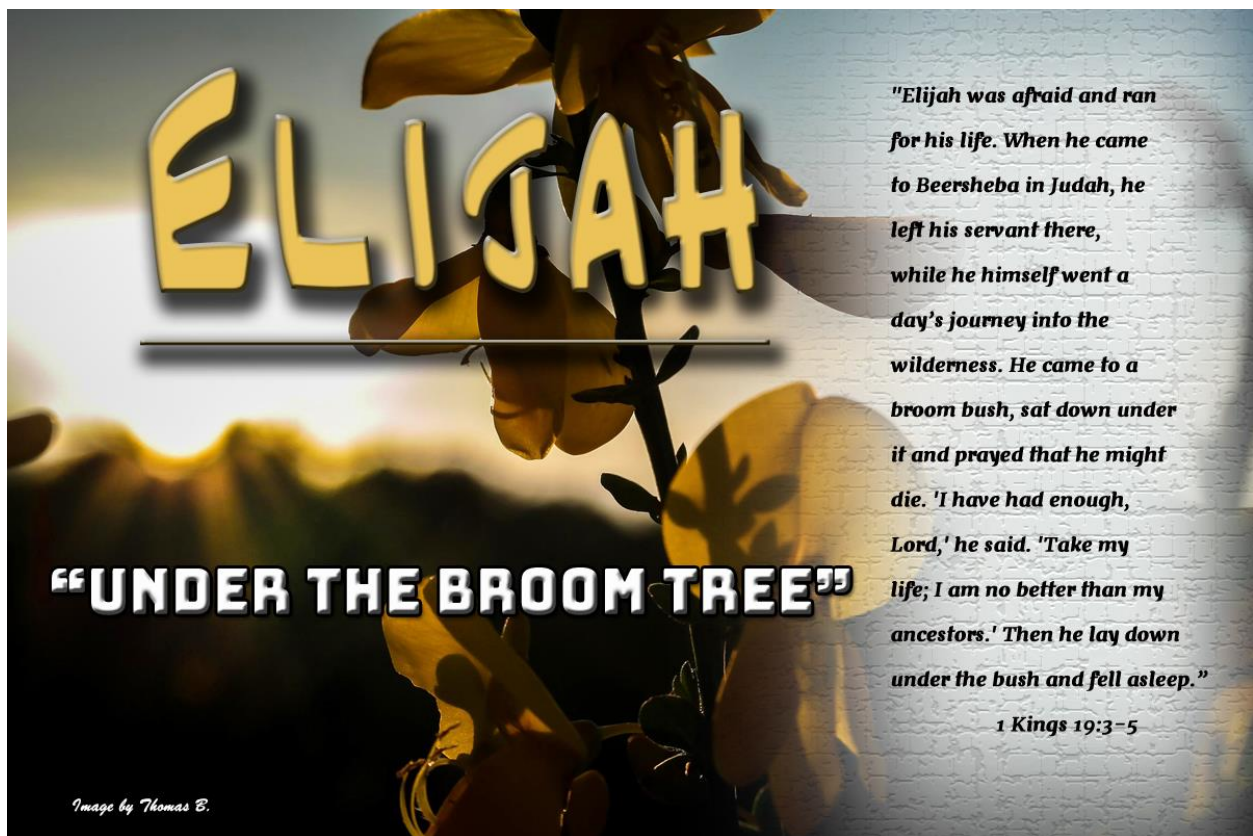


February 20, 2022

Under the Broom Tree

1 Kings 19:3-7



Special Music: "Need You Now"

Plumb

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ylnx0NA9X4>

1 Kings 19:3-5

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.

ELIJAH'S LAMENT

Beneath the broom tree
My back to its stalwart trunk,
Hot sand sears my flesh
As the noon-day sun
Passes between sparse leaves
And beats down upon my face,
Perspiration gathers on cracked
And caked leathery hide.
Purpose has fled
My weary mind.
I may as well be dead.
I find myself beyond useless
Gathering dust in the desert,
Sulking in misplaced disgrace.

God has deserted me.
The idol's prophets have been freed
From the wisps of their souls
And God's children return home.
The rain has come
To renew the earth.
I have served beyond the spring
Of my spirit,
Yet, I am alone,
Waiting to pass to realms unknown.
I want not.

I thirst not.
The blood of my soul
Poured out on the ground.
“I did what you asked, now let me die!”
Here, I lie
Beneath this tree of
Uncovered boughs
I await death’s angel
To plow my soul under the sand.
How cruel it would be
To let me live
Knowing that I am slain
A hundred times over
Should I be found and bound
Beneath the blistering sun.
“If you love me, let me die!
Let me leave this earth behind,
For I am weary
And find no comfort in the continuance
Of my existence.
Always your servant,
Grant me this one request
For God’s sake, let me die!”
I now take my leave of life
And sleep
Praying that the sorrows of tomorrow
Do not find me awake.

And God wept for his servant.
The Master's divine tears
Gained angel's wings
And comforted the tormented emissary
Throughout the night.

And with the dawn
Came water and bread
More rest as the angel fed
The messenger's troubled soul.
He took the prophet's head
Into his hands of healing
And brought him back
From the precipice
Of despair
To resume the work of God
Among His children.

And the weary prophet was renewed
He stood
And resumed his mandate
His purpose restored.

The Bible is full of laments from the mouths of God's messengers and people. Every generation of humankind has struggled with moments of despair. Because of our mortality, we tend to fall into anguish when the world we once thought we had under control, spins horribly out of our control.

Think of the anguish that Adam and Eve must have felt when God ordered them from the Garden of Eden. Everything had been going fine. They lived and worked in a beautiful garden, walked and talked with God every day, never wanted for anything. And then one day, they messed up and it all came crashing down around them. With one very bad decision, they lost and destroyed the very foundation of trust they had with God and were forced from their home and into a life that was much more difficult.

Picture Noah as he watched the rain come down and wash away his home and all the people he knew, other than the family he had on the ark with him. Can you imagine the despondency that must have overtaken him as he watched the last of the treetops and mountains disappear beneath the waves? I have this image in my head of him falling to his knees on the deck of the ark, weeping uncontrollably, as the last vestige of land is swallowed up. Even with his faith and trust in the Divine, there is this human sense of tragedy that is so very difficult to overcome in the midst of extreme hopelessness.

Then we see Job sitting in the garbage dump, heaping ashes over his head in total confusion, his spirit devastated. He has lost everything he had worked for, everything that he had been blessed with. His home was gone. His wife and children have died. His lands and livestock destroyed. In just a short period of

time, the only thing he had left were the rags on his back. Even his friends didn't try to help him. Instead, they continued to suggest to him that he had offended God in some way.

Then there is David, the apple in God's eye, who threw away his relationship with God because he took someone else's wife and then murdered her husband. Here was a man chosen by God to be king of Israel. A man loved by both God and the people he served. Here was a man who was so blessed that no one doubted his divine connection with God. Here was a man who had everything any man could ever want, who, in a moment of lust, decided that he deserved more and turned his back on God. After he compounded deceit with lies and treachery, he realized the true cost of his actions and fell into deep remorse. What a horrible revelation set upon him as he realized that his only salvation was in the hope of God's grace.

As we head into the Lenten season, we think about Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating dark drops of blood in prayer as He engages with his mission and accepts his purpose, stepping into His role as sacrificial lamb, even as His friends betray and disavow Him; as the very people that had just laid a carpet of palm leaves before Him as He entered Jerusalem, turned on Him and cried out for His crucifixion; the very same people that he had healed, taught, fed, and engaged with in His three-year ministry.

There are so many stories of despair in the Bible, but each of them finds a renewed hope, a new beginning, a restored relationship with the Almighty. Elijah is no exception. But the picture that is painted of this weary prophet, running

from his enemies, exhausted from his service, is painted with broad, intentional brush strokes as God exposes the raw nature of a spirit in total agony and defeat even after overcoming every momentous obstacle and remaining faithful to his purpose.

We will pick up the story of Elijah where we left off. Remember, he built the altar in the desert and God consumed the sacrifice, the wet wood, the altar, and even the surrounding soil. Then he has Elijah order the deaths of all the prophets of Baal and Ashera. As the people turn back to the God of their ancestors, Elijah calls for rain to end the draught that has been destroying the land and crops. God delivers on his promise of rain. Ahab boarded his chariot and took off for Jezreel and had to be surprised when Elijah, powered by the spirit of God, runs past him and stays ahead of him all the way to Jezreel. That is where our story picks up.

1 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."

Just like a faithful husband, Ahab tells Jezebel what Elijah has done, and she is none too happy about it. She sends a messenger to Elijah telling him that because he killed all of her prophets, she is going to have him killed as well. And she has an army to get the job done. Elijah had to be riding an emotional high after all the events that had occurred, and the arrival of this messenger must have

been a wake up call. It dawns on him what has occurred, has just made him the sole target for the wrath of Jezebel. And even though he has experienced a virtual plethora of God's miracles in the past few days, the thought of Jezebel sending an army to chase him down seems to give him a case of amnesia about the awesome power and nature of Yahweh.

**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.**

Have you ever been in one of those situations where you know that something really bad is about to happen, and you don't want your family and friends to get caught up in it? Knowing that there is the possibility that you won't survive, you send your family and friends elsewhere, far from you, so they don't become collateral damage. Elijah has accepted his fate. He believes that he knows what is coming next. The hurricane is about to arrive. The tornado is headed straight for him. The riverbanks are overflowing and there is a flood coming. There's a wildfire that is burning down everything in its path. There simply seems to be no way to avoid what is about to happen. In the case of Elijah, he has already accepted his fate. Anyone around him is in danger. But he can save the life of his servant by keeping his distance from him. He makes sure that his friend and servant is safe before he heads into the desert.

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."

I want to talk about broom trees for just a minute. A broom tree or bush in the Middle East is akin to a mesquite tree here in Texas. There just isn't a much good you can say about it. It doesn't really present any shade to speak of. It grows in very dry climates. It is usually pretty ugly and seldom has any vegetation growing around it. But when one is in the desolation of a desert, one can't be real choosy. And given the choice between a broom tree or a pile of sand, I can see why Elijah would choose to sit down under the broom tree. Besides, broom trees are considered pretty worthless, which is how Elijah is feeling at this moment. He's tired. He's feeling useless. He's feeling worthless. He feels there is nothing of value left in him, like he's just breathing in someone else's air and taking up someone else's place at the table. He feels like he's been dumped on a pile of garbage. He's got that same feeling that we find in Adam and Eve, Noah, Job, David, and to some extent, Jesus.

I need to point out that he has not lost faith in God. He probably has no doubt that God can rescue him. But he's tired. He's tired of running. He's tired of the chase. He's tired of being the Go To guy. He's tired of his leadership role. He's just plain tired... and he's giving up. His batteries are dead. If you flip the switch, the lights don't come on and wheels don't turn. Even though God may want him to continue on, he just wants it all to come to an end. If an exit out of the situation presented itself, he probably would not take it. He's done, finished, kaput. And in this wasteland of despair, he cries out to God,

“I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

How many times did the Israelites fall away from God? How many times did they give up hope even as God made a way through their challenges? How many times did they just throw up their hands and say, “We were better off in Egypt,” “We are tired of Manna,” “We want a different God,” “We are too tired to go on?” Elijah is telling God that he isn’t any different, that he has been pushed beyond his human limits, that he has lost his focus and his purpose. His body is wore out and his mind is pegged out on the weariness scale. “Take my life because I can no longer live up to your expectations and I just don’t want to try anymore. Kill me now and get it over with.”

In our Christian walk, there are going to be times like this. Times when we are too tired, too afraid, too despondent to carry on. Even if we love our Creator and seek only to do His will, the times will come. Times when we have gladly scaled the mountains before us and watched as God has made a path, but as we round the corner, there in front of us is a mountain ten times higher and just the thought of trying to scale it, drains our energy and makes us want to give up. But the very nature of our relationship with God means that we choose to accept the fact that we don’t get to pick the mountains or the path. We are called to do what is asked of us, even if it seems impossible, even if we are so tired we can’t even take care of our own needs, much less anyone else’s needs.

5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

And, without waiting for a reply from God, Elijah lays down and falls asleep, hoping that he never wakes up.

But here's the deal about our relationship with God. If we have surrendered our lives to our Creator, asked Him to let us be His hands and feet in this world, and we truly want to maintain that relationship that we have with God, we don't get to choose when we give up. We don't get to decide when we have had enough. That becomes God's decision. As hard as you try to turn in your keys and check out, God may have other plans. And because you are His loved and blessed child, He will nudge you back into the relationship and create a path for you to overcome the next mountain. Even when our doubt raises its hoary head, when we simply no longer search for the path, God delivers us into His service.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

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.

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."

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.

I'm not going to dwell here other than to ask you to remember a time when you were at the end of your rope, and someone tossed you a lifeline. An unexpected check arrives in the mail. Someone has a car for you to use when yours is broken down. Someone who volunteered to come stay with your children so that you could go to the hospital and visit your spouse. A doctor who

had given up on you, calls you out of the blue with a new treatment. Whether you choose to believe it or not, those are God moments. Moments when God stepped into your misery to bring back your strength so that you could meet the needs of those around you. You don't have to be an Elijah to experience those moments. And sometimes those moments are not even visible to us, we only see the results. Our child recovers from a deadly illness. A bill that we cannot pay somehow gets paid or written off. A job becomes available we have given up hope of finding a job. Food is left on our doorstep. That is Jesus' hands and feet working in our lives. That is why it is so important for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus working in the lives around us. We can do the work of angels if we allow God to work through us.

That's what I want us all to think about this week. This is such a hard lesson to learn because, by nature, we have built in self-perpetuated instincts that sometimes have to be overridden by God instincts. Let us listen to the voice of Jesus as He lets us see the world through His eyes. He has given us everything we need to get up from under the broom bush, and travel to the mountain of God. It isn't by accident that he brings us nourishment and purpose. He is not going to ignore us when we are too weary to stand up or to answer. We are His messengers in this weary world where too many people have given up. But just standing up and showing we are attempting to climb the mountain before us, we become an inspiration for those around us.

Let me be the hands of Jesus

In a weary world today

Let me feed His hungry children

And help to light their way

Let me heal the broken-hearted

Shine Light into their dark

Let me be the hands of Jesus

Let me be the spark

Let me be the spark

God bless you all.

AMEN

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