**Surviving Quarantine Series**

**Discovering 40 Day Episodes in the Bible**

**“Fighting Faith Fatigue”**

**I Kings 19.1-18**

**Introduction**

Our current series is “Surviving Quarantine – Discovering 40-Day Episodes in the Bible.” The word “quarantine” comes from two Italian words *quaranta giorni,* which means “40 days.” The Bible has several instances where God used the period of 40 days. So we are entering the fifth week in our own 40-day journey through the Scripture looking at 7 episodes where God used 40-days to help us survive quarantine.

Today we come to a least familiar story in the Bible. So far we have looked at the 40-day experiences of Noah, Moses, the twelve spies, and David and Goliath. This morning we will look at Elijah’s 40-day experience of wandering in the desert on his way to Mt. Horeb but more about that later. Our text comes from I Kings chapter nineteen where we find the Prophet Elijah in an extreme state of depression and God’s prescription for relief. Of course, we don’t have time to read the entire chapter this morning but allow me to share a brief summary to get us to the main points for today. But I do want to encourage you to read chapter nineteen for yourself.

The Prophet Elijah is referenced twenty-nine times in the New Testament, which makes him the most celebrated Old Testament prophet. God used Elijah during an important time in Israel’s history to oppose a wicked king, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel had introduced and encouraged the pagan worship of Baal in Israel. Baal was a fertility god who was believed to enable the earth to produce crops and people to produce children. Baal proved to be a highly adaptable god so different regions worshiped Baal in different ways. Elijah’s ministry marked the beginning of the end of Baal worship in Israel, which we will learn more about today.

What we will discover is that the Prophet Elijah experienced both the great manifestations of God’s power and tremendous depths of personal depression. Let’s face it – we like heroes of the faith *who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,**quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* (Heb.11.33-34) It’s difficult for us to imagine one of theses great heroes of the faith battling discouragement or “faith fatigue.” Somewhere along the way we begin believe the lie that to be a “real” Christian a person must always be experiencing mountain top experiences – running faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. We seem to forget that even Superman had Kryptonite. The point is that we all have times of great spiritual success and sometimes we suffer bouts of faith fatigue.

**Elijah and the Prophets of Baal**

To get to the heart of today’s sermon I must give the back-story. As I mentioned,

God used Elijah during an important time in Israel’s history to oppose a wicked king, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel, who had introduced and encouraged the pagan worship of Baal in Israel. A showdown occurred in I Kings chapter eighteen when Elijah confronted the wicked king, Ahab, and 450 prophets of Baal.

*Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it.**Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.”* (IKgs.18.21-24)

Let’s face it – everybody likes a good show! So the prophets of Baal prepared their altar and *called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But there was no voice and no one answered.* (IKgs.18.25-26) So the prophets of Baal began dancing around the altar as they continue to call out to Baal. Nothing happened so they began cutting themselves with swords making deep lacerations with blood gushing out. They did this until evening *but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.* (IKgs.18.27-29)

After the prophets of Baal had done everything possible to get Baal’s attention, Elijah called the people together. Elijah prepared his altar and dug a large trench around the altar. Then he called for the people to pour buckets of water on the altar to the point that water flowed around the altar, filling up the trench. (IKgs.18.30-36) Then Elijah prayed, *Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.”**Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.” Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.* (IKgs.18.37-40)

Elijah did not harm the wicked king, Ahab, but showed him acts of kindness by giving him food and drink and advising him to return to his evil wife, Jezebel. Perhaps Elijah performed these acts of kindness to the wicked king in hopes that this event, this demonstration of God’s power, would turn Ahab and Jezebel’s hearts away from these pagan practices and serve the living God. So, how did his plan work?

*Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.* (IKgs.19.1-3)

**Faith Fatigue**

Elijah was experiencing faith fatigue. The same guy who God just used to call fire down from heaven is now running for his life with his prophetic tail between his legs because of threats from Jezebel. We have to ask the question, how could this have happened to such a man of God? And the answer is Elijah allowed his expectations that Ahab and Jezebel would repent to control his emotions instead resting in God. Elijah goes from a mountain top experience to the deepest valley of despair over night. This only proves how fragile we really are and how much we need the stabilizing force of God in our lives.

Elijah believed that the whole dramatic experience with the prophets of Baal would change Ahab and Jezebel’s heart and when that didn’t Elijah felt like a failure. Maybe Elijah felt like God had let him down. Have you ever thought that God has let you down? Elijah had done everything right and his motives were pure. As the Prophet he wanted the whole country to serve God starting with the king and his wife. But when Elijah heard these threats from Jezebel, he allowed his expectations to control his emotions instead of God. Maybe Elijah thought, “If this whole thing didn’t change them – then nothing will change them. Maybe it would be better for me just to give up and get out of the ministry.” This perceived failure of his ministry brought Elijah to a state of despondency and he fled the land.

Brothers and sisters, Christian leaders are humans too. We have feelings and emotions. We put on the armor of God but situations can arise that put some real dents in our armor. Criticism, lack of support, and personal attacks are on the top of very list of why pastors leave a church and we see each of these things in this narrative with Elijah. (IKgs.18.17, 22; 19.2) It’s difficult for us to accept that even great men of God like Elijah can get discouraged and feel defeated but it happens.

Elijah’s faith fatigue drove him to make the poor decision to travel by himself a day’s journey into the wilderness. He left his servant behind and *went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree.* (IKgs19.4a) What thoughts do you think raced through Elijah’s mind as he traveled into the wilderness alone? Isolation and personal quarantine, often leads to poor decisions and after a long journey Elijah sat down under the juniper tree and *requested that he might die, and said, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”* (IKgs.19.4b)

Christians are not immune from being human. Yes, we have the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit resides in human vessels that are frail and fragile. (2Cor.4.7) Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit but sometimes the temple needs repair. (ICor.6.19) The Bible tells us that these episodes were written so that we might learn from their experiences so what can we learn from this episode with Elijah? (ICor.10.11)

At this point the story takes a turn and we begin to see God’s provisions for this fatigued Prophet.

**God’s Provisions**

*He lay down and slept under a juniper tree;* (IKgs.19.5a)

Out of exhaustion, Elijah fell asleep. It is a simple verse but it shows us exactly what Elijah needed – sleep. God has ordained sleep and rest for our survival and the ability to function, so the Lord allowed a time for Elijah to sleep before He brought the next provision.

After some sleep *behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, “Arise, eat.” Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.* (IKgs.19.5b-6)

*The angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you.” So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.* (IKgs.19.5b-8)

Elijah was allowed to sleep two times and afterwards he receives heavenly room service from the angel. Brothers and sisters, God knows we are frail. He knows our frame that we are be dust. (Ps.103.14) He is mindful that we possess bodies that must be cared for and often the physical must be cared for before the spiritual can function.

I often tell people when they are experiencing a crisis that they must take care of themselves. “Go for a walk – get something to eat! Don’t think that starving yourself of exercise and nutrition is going the help in this situation.” During the stay at home order it has been encouraging to see a lot of people going out for a walk, a run, or a bike ride. You can’t stay in the house forever! God knows we need sleep, food, drink, and exercise to fulfill His Will and Word.

So God was patient with Elijah to give him this time under the juniper tree and God will be patient with you. God gave Elijah what was necessary to bring him to a place where he would respond. God doesn’t beat us into submission. God doesn’t coerce our response to force us to honor him. He brings us to the place where we can willingly respond to His grace.

**In the Desert**

So after God’s gracious provisions Elijah took off for the mountain of God – Mt. Horeb also known as Mt. Sinai. And now we come to the heart of the story! Notice that the text says that Elijah *arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.* (IKgs19.8)

What is interesting is that from where Elijah was under the juniper tree to Mt. Horeb was no forty-day journey. A straight trip would have required about seven to eight days. But with the strength from the food provided by the angel Elijah wanders in the desert for forty days and forty nights before he arrives at the mountain of God. It seems that God wanted Elijah to take some time to purify his heart from fleshly zeal and regain a renewed sense of his calling. Sometimes God gives us time alone for us to search our hearts and humble ourselves before Him. Elijah wondering in isolation in the desert these 40-days gave him the opportunity to purify his heart of ungodly zeal and to renew His dependence on God Himself. We will see later that even after these 40-days in the desert Elijah still had remnants of prophetic pride but the Lord will be patient with Elijah and set him straight.

During the quarantine we have heard a lot about essential and non-essential business. This morning I want to let you what is absolutely essential for your life. It is essential that every one of us take time to walk in the desert and allow God to search our hearts. As the Psalmist wrote, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.* (Ps.139.23-24) Brothers and sisters, self and soul examination is vital for spiritual health.

**On The Mountain of God**

After Elijah’s 40-day journey in the desert he finally arrives ay Horeb, the mountain of God. This was the same mountain that we looked at in the second week of our journey where Moses had spent forty-days with the Lord without bread and water as he met with God. (Ex.34.28) When Elijah arrived *he came to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”* (IKgs.19.9) The Lord inquires about Elijah’s motives for coming to the mountain of God.

*He said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”* (IKgs.19.10) The Lord allows Elijah to vent his frustration. Remember you can always express your true feelings to the Lord. He already knows your heart so you might as well be honest. *So He said, “Go forth and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord was passing by!* (IKgs19.11a) And Elijah does exactly what the Lord commanded.

*And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind.* (IKgs19.11b) *And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.* (IKgs19.11c) *After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire;* (IKgs19.12a) *and after the fire a sound of a gentle whisper.**When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.* (IKgs.19.12b-13a)

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is not always in the loud and showy events of history. I know we like to be entertained. I know we have been told “the bigger the better.” But that is not necessarily true. Yes, there have been times that the Lord was in the rushing mighty wind like on the Day of Pentecost but not this time. There have been times when the Lord was in the earthquake like when Paul and Silas were in prison stocks in Philippi but not this time. There have been times that the Lord was in the fire like the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but not this time. Yes, God can speak through the mighty wind, earthquake, and fire but not always. Not even usually. The normal way the Lord speaks is through the gentle whisper of His Word upon our hearts.

**Be Still and Listen**

Most of us will never experience a miracle, a healing, or a spectacular display of God’s power but everyone can listen to the gentle whisper of God. But to hear the gentle whisper of God you must be still and listen. Notice that *when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.* When Elijah heard that gentle whisper he knew it was the Lord. So he wrapped his face in his mantle like the angels in the presence of God cover their face with their wings and he went out to listen to the gentle whisper of God.

This is what my Grandmother called, “The still small voice of God.” “Brian, listen to the still small voice of God and you will always make the right decision.” I was raised in the Pentecostal Church. There’s nothing I haven’t seen. I’ve seen the dramatic! I’ve seen the spiritual spectacular! But the still small voice of God has been my constant counselor. The gentle whisper of God is my constant companion.

The point of God speaking in the still small voice was to show Elijah that the work of God doesn’t need to be accompanied by dramatic revelation or manifestations. God’s work is “*not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit*.” (Zech.4.6) Displays of power do not necessary equate as a work of God. God usually works by gently speaking to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Elijah finally realized that he didn’t need the spectacular. God’s soft reassuring voice will do just fine. Elijah realized he wasn’t a failure. He had just forgotten how remove himself from all the drama, the clamor, and all the threats. He had forgotten how to be still and listen to the gentle voice of God. Like Mary will do centuries later, Elijah finally chose the good portion and decided to be still and listen to the gentle voice of God. And we should learn from his example.

**Closing Thoughts**

There is so much noise in this world. If I hear the word “unprecedented” or “extraordinary” one more time I think I’m going to throw my shoe at the television. We must learn how to remove ourselves from the clamor and be still and listen to the gentle voice of God through His Word, through prayer, and through the peaceful sounds of His creation. This is the way we survive the quarantine. In the mornings I like sit and listen to the birds waking up to the new day with the songs of praise. But to hear them I must be still and listen.

Several years ago as a result of becoming deathly ill the doctors had to amputate portions of both of my feet. To aid my recovery from these dramatic surgeries the decision was made for me to start treatment in the hyperbaric chamber to speed up the healing of my feet. The hyperbaric chamber is about the size of a coffin and the patient must lie on his back inside the locked chamber for 90 minutes. You cannot get out until the 90 minutes are over. There is no way out! And I have about 60 sessions.

I have to admit at first I didn’t like the chamber. I was scared and freaked out but as time went on I started to enjoy the whole experience. Why? The hyperbaric chamber became my personal sanctuary away from all the noise of the hospital, the monitors, and the constant interruptions. The hyperbaric chamber gave me the time to be still and listen to God’s voice. I didn’t know how things were going to work out for me but as I separated myself from the clamor I was able to be refreshed by God’s presence and listen to His gentle whisper. “Be still My child I will care for you.”

As I conclude this morning I want to encourage you to find your personal sanctuary. I want to encourage you to be still and slow down in this crazy world. God knows you are fragile and can suffer faith fatigue. He will provide the provisions you need to regain your strength and He will speak to you as His child in a gentle whisper. This is hoe we survive the quarantine. As Jesus told us, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.* (Mt.11.28)

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,* *to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jude1.24-25)