

Good morning! Happy New Year to you all! On the first Sunday of the New Year, we are going to be looking at the passage of scripture found in 1 Kings 19 verses 1-16 Read

Before looking at this scripture a bit more deeply. I want to give you an overall look at Elijah's story. As this can give us more context in understanding Elijah and this part of scripture. I can do this but being a Children's pastor, I found this kid's video clip that I felt did a great job summarizing Elijah's life. Let's Watch it together...

As we enter 1 Kings 19 – Elijah has just come from an amazing encounter with God- Elijah led a face-off between the worshiper of Baal and the worshipers of God and God wins big time. However, this powerful and obvious display of God grabs some people's attention but instead of bringing King Ahab and Queen Jezebel to God it instead infuses more anger and at the start of Chapter 19 Queen Jezebel threatens to take Elijah's life. In Verses 3-4. Elijah flees in fear of this death threat and ends up in the desert where we read, he sits under a solitary broom tree and at that moment he asks that he may die. This reaction from Elijah may surprise us because previous to this he has been a powerful prophet used by God and He has faced adverse situations and challenges and God has always protected and helped him all along the way. But in this moment, we see the humanness of Elijah. After all he too is just a person just like us(imagine for a moment if all our stories were documented for the world to read and analyze kind of glad this is not the case) we are not sure what the specific cause Elijah to be discouraged at this time around but we can guess that maybe it is because Elijah is tired, tired of running, maybe he was hoping for a better outcome and more lives turned back to God whatever specifics discouraged him he is fearful, lonely and wants to die. As readers might be surprised by this response, or even maybe a little judgmental. I mean God was so obviously moving in his life and caring for Him how did he get to this point. You may be interested to

know that Elijah was not the only person in the bible who wanted to die at one-point others in the bible such Moses, Jonah and even the Apostle Paul to name a few all had significant times of discouragement that lead them to want to die. Can I remind you that when you are in a slump you are not alone- others are and have been there too and there is help.

In Verses 6 forward – We see the beautiful way that God responds to Elijah. He does not write him off but takes the time to help Elijah get back on his feet and he meets him. So, let's look at what God did.

The first thing God does is send an angel – the angel says nothing there is no rebuke, no advice he just ministers to Elijah's physical needs by giving him something to eat and drink. Let's take a moment and focus on the fact that this is a biblical example of the importance of taking care of our physical needs? Elijah needed rest, food and water and those needs were attended to before God met with him on a deeper level. The angel helps Elijah get strong enough to then be able to go and meet God at Mt. Horeb or better known as Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is often called the mountain of God. This is the same mountain where Abraham had an encounter with God when asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, and the mountain where God gives Moses the ten commandments. So, Elijah is physically strengthened, and he makes the journey to meet with God.

We then read that Elijah's gets to Mount Sinai he goes and finds refuge in a cave. Here the Lord talks to him again no rebuke, or disappointment in Elijah. He asks Elijah this simple question

“What are you doing here” God knows what Elijah will say but he gives time for Elijah to express his thoughts. Again, can we take this as another biblical example that God wants us to come to him with everything. He wants a relationship and communication with us. Elijah responds to God’s question in verse 10, and I get a little chuckle. Being someone who can be dramatic at times. I can appreciate Elijah’s dramatic response, Again, no re-buttal by God...disputing what he says. He gives this instruction to come out of the cave and stand on the mountain and the Lord will pass him by.

Then in verses 11 and 12 we read these mighty acts of nature show up.

- A great wind, an earthquake, and a fire.... just one of those things would have my attention and here God sent all three. But scripture says something very interesting. It says God was not in any of these big moments and acts of nature. He then showed up in a sound of sheer silence- and Elijah knows it is God and then comes out of the cave and the Lord ministers to him. The Lord for a second time asks “Elijah, what are you doing here.” Verse 14 – Elijah answers a second time. We see Elijah has made little progress in his struggle. Then again, the Lord does not address the question/ no rebuke/ no rebuttal but he does provide Elijah with some direction. Verses 15 and 16

As we read further in 1 Kings, we read that Elijah follows the instruction of God and we conclude that God meeting Elijah on Mt. Sinai allows Elijah to go on...and we don’t hear about Elijah struggling in this type of discouragement again. We also see that a gift of a successor is given to Elijah by a man named Elisha. Not only is he going to be Elijah’s successor, but Elisha provides a valuable friendship in the end years of Elijah’s life and he is not alone, which was a complaint of Elijah’s Can I take a second to

insert a side note that friendship and community are important parts to God's way of living. God has given us each other and he did not intend for people to do life alone. Sometimes we feel being alone especially in our struggle is easier...but again God has created our lives full of people with the intent on not doing life alone. So today lean into community, friendship, isolation is not God's way.

Elijah's story is marked by all the things a typical life holds mountain top moments, valley experiences and lots of in-between. The story in first King 19 reminds of two important things about God and how he meets us in the story of our lives

- 1) God allows us to have struggles. God could have prevented Elijah from hitting this low, but he did not. The word of God does remind us that in this World we will have trouble. No one is exempt for the trouble, but He promises that in all things God will never leave us or forsake us. God is always there...and we can rest in this truth and look for Him because He is there
- 2) God cares about the specifics needs in our lives and he meets these specifics in different ways. In 1 Kings 18– God showed up with fire and magnificent acts of power and in chapter 19 he shows up in silence. Matthew 6: 26 reminds us “Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? If I was to ask you to take a few seconds to think of the different ways that God has met, you in your life. My guess is you would have many different examples of ways he has met you. It may be a scripture, a song and answered prayer, it may be a specific amount of money, a peace that superseded your

circumstance (how many times have we heard someone say I don't know how I got through, but I did, a provision, I even have a story of a jug of milk answering a specific need. My human mind can't fully understand the how's and why's of God working. And sometimes I feel it should have been a different way. 1 Corinthians 13 verse 12 "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

So how can we apply this going forward in 2021. A New Year often gives us a chance to reflect on our past year. It also gives us a chance to look forward and anticipate new things, maybe make some plans or goals. I don't know what position you are in today you may be closer to the mountain top or maybe you are in a deep valley or maybe somewhere in between. I also know collectively this global pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. Now don't get me wrong a lot of good has emerged during the pandemic and there have been lessons learned and gifts given along the way that we did not expect. However, as a person and a pastor during this time I would be naïve to not acknowledge what a challenging time this has been. The repercussions of grief, loneliness, sickness, financial stress, death, anxiety and division that COVID has caused has been so very challenging. So ...wherever you are at today... in a good or a challenging place I hope this story of Elijah can remind you that regardless of the circumstances God desires is to meet with you and help you. Sometimes in our circumstances we are like Elijah and our circumstances cause us to look down because we are discouraged and all we see is the problems before us, or maybe we look sideways because we compare ourselves to others, we also look inward because the struggles and emotions are too big to handle. Can I encourage you today to take the posture of looking up, looking up to God. Looking up to God allows him to lead, meet, guide and provide in His will and it will change your perspective. Looking to God releases us

of being in control and we experience a freedom when we put the reigns of our lives in His hands. If you are listening today can this story of Elijah maybe motivate you to take some time today or in the next few days to quiet yourself before God and have an intimate talk with him about this new year ahead. God might ask you as He asked Elijah why you are here, and your answer will be only heard between you and God. You may be tired, need direction, are you carrying a burden and need help, maybe your walk with God has not been a priority, maybe God might want to nudge you in a new way, are you are in a transition, or maybe He wants to you to stay exactly in the place you are, but he wants to give you renewed strength and vision, does he want to re-ignite your faith in him or your commitment to him. The scenarios and lists of where any of us are at can be endless ...However, don't keep this conversation with God out of your start of 2021 because you don't have to figure this out on your own. God will listen, answer, and He loves you enough to meet you specifically and wants to give you what you need to step into the New Year with His presence guiding the way and give what you need to get through.