

GRAPPLING WITH THE GAINTS

Reading: 1 Kings 19-18

3. THE GIANT OF DEPRESSION

Many years ago there was a young Mid-Western lawyer in the U.S.A. who experienced such chronic depression that for a while his friends kept all knives and razor blades away from him for fear that he might commit suicide. During this time he wrote these words, *“ I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better I cannot tell. I awfully forebode that I shall not.”* This same man afterward wrote, *“ I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better.”* Do you know who wrote those words ? President Abraham Lincoln. Winston Churchill the greatest Prime Minister in the history of our nation, the man who was renowned for saying, **“ Never give up, never, never, never, give up,”** called depression a **“ black dog,”** that followed him all of his life. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great nineteenth-century preacher, found that even spiritual leaders are susceptible.

Spurgeon was frequently plunged into depression during his ministry. This was in part due to gout but also for other reasons. In a biography of the *“ prince of preachers,”* Arnold Dallimore wrote, *“ What he*

suffered in those times of darkness we may not know, even his desperate calling on God brought no relief.” It was Spurgeon who said, **“ There are dungeons beneath the castles of despair.”** The fact of the matter is, some of the greatest people in the Bible struggled with the giant of depression. Moses for instance, was ready to give up, and asked God to kill him, even though he was leading thousands through the wilderness. He cried, *“ Kill me I pray thee out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight and let me not see thy wretchedness.”* (Num 11:15) Jonah was also ready to curl up and die after witnessing a mighty revival in the city of Nineveh. He said, *“ O Lord, take I beseech Thee my life from me for it is better for me to die than live.”* (Jonah 4:3) Can you recall an hour in your life when you have been overwhelmed with the temptation to despair ? The temptation to give up ? There seemed to be no light but only darkness within ! Are you being hounded by the giant of depression ?

But what is depression ? One Christian psychologist says, *“ depression means feeling extreme discouragement, dejection, despair, hopelessness.”* Perhaps that last word summarises it best for us. A feeling of hopelessness, all is lost, there's the desire to quit, you just can't make it. Does it surprise you that at this point in Elijah's life the great prophet hits rock bottom ? This Mount Sinai of a man with a heart like a thunderstorm, also found himself at wit's end corner. He got to the end of his tether. He says, *“ It is enough now O Lord, take away my life for I am not better than my fathers.”* (19:4) My what a contrast to all that has gone before. At the close of (Ch 18) *“ the hand of*

the Lord was on Elijah,” as he ran before Ahab’s chariot, at the beginning of (Ch 19) he’s occupied with self and runs for his life. In the former we see the prophet at his best, in the later we see him at his worst. One moment he’s confronting the 450 prophets of Baal undaunted, the next moment he flees panic stricken from the threat of a woman. In (Ch 18) we see him on the mountain victorious, in (Ch 19) we see him in the valley defeated. He has come from *Victory to Defeat, from the Pinnacle to the Pits*. Grappling for his life with the giant Despair, Elijah entered depression’s darkness.

Have you ever been there ? Are you there now ? In the grip of despair ? Experiencing despondency, a feeling that no-one understands ? Standing, at wit’s end corner. Look at this passage of Scripture and notice here,

(1) A HISTORIC CASE OF DEPRESSION

Here we have a case in history of a man of God grappling with the giant of depression. Let me set the context for you. There had been a remarkable showdown on Mount Carmel. Ahab the representative of Baal had been defeated, Elijah the representative of Jehovah had been vindicated. Can you imagine Ahab coming home that night ? It had been a long, difficult day. He hoped that Jezebel his domineering wife had gone to sleep. Perhaps he stepped into the palace with his shoes in his hand. Suddenly he heard that all too familiar voice, “ *Ahab,* ” “ *Yes, dear I thought you'd gone to bed.* ” “ *No, I couldn't wait to hear what happened, you look weary.* ” “ *Yes, dear I am weary,* ” “ *would you like something to eat ?* ” “ *No thanks, I've*

lost my appetite. ” “ *Well, sit down and have a cup of coffee.* ” So she served him up some Jezebel jaffa. Then she began to ask some pressing questions and Ahab tried to evade the issue. “ *Ahab, you're evading the issue what happened ?* ” “ *So Ahab ,* ” (19:1-3) Can you believe it ? Beersheba was about a 100 miles south of Jezreel, but that was not far enough. So Elijah went even further into the wilderness, and there he sat, all alone, under a juniper tree and he prayed to die. (19:4)

I mean, of all people, did you ever think that Elijah would be a case for depression ? Despondency,

(a) IN SUCH A MAN:

What a staggering and startling thing this is. For here we are dealing with one of the spiritual giants of the Old Testament, the man who had just achieved one of the most remarkable victories for the cause of God on Mount Carmel. The man who for years had stood amidst and against almost insurmountable odds and circumstances. Yet now the temptation to despair is rising up in the soul of one of the giants of God. (a) How amazing. Yet I wonder whether depression is not much more common than we think. Listen to the Psalmist, “ *Oh, that I had wings like a dove for then I would fly away and be a rest.* ” (Ps 55:6) Is there a believer here and you just want to get away from it all ?

Listen to Jeremiah, “ *Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men, that I might leave my people ,* ” (Jer 9:2) Is there a prophet here this who’s tired of the burden of the people ? That church,

that Sunday School class, that mission station, that ministry. My depression is much more common than we think. Martin Luther was experiencing a time in his life when he was suffering from deep despair and depression. He couldn't seem to come out of it.

Frustrated by it all, his wife came down to breakfast one morning wearing a black armband. “ *Who died ?* ” Luther asked. His wife answered, “ *Well, with the way you've been carrying on around here, I thought God did.* ” William Cowper, the English poet, and the man who wrote the hymn, “ *There is a fountain* , ” was subject to deep depression. One he hired a man to drive him to the River Ouse so that he could finish it off. A dense fog came down that night and the coachman got completely lost. Cowper groped his way to a door. It was his own door. No wonder he wrote. “ *God moves in a mysterious way* , ” My here is Elijah, a man whose obedience to God had been proven.

There was not one thing that God had required of him that he had not done. (17:5, 17:10, 18:2) A man, whose communion with God was real. (17:1) To Elijah God was a living reality. A man, whose courage for God was displayed. For this lone man had stood on Carmel's heights challenging the prophets of Baal. (18:19)

Yet it was in the soul of this man that darkness fell. Now some Christians will not credit this. They have placed the servants of God on such high pedestals that they think they never get depressed, despondent, ready to quit. They have forgotten that “ ***the best of men are only men at the best.*** ” My have you faced what Elijah faced ? Are you facing it now ? Is there a desire

to quit ? Are you ready to give up ? Despondency (a)

(b) AT SUCH A MOMENT:

When did this depression break in upon the soul of this spiritual giant ? Well, it was a time of unparalleled opportunity. There had been the most unmistakable evidence that God had been working through Elijah. His needs had been met (17:6, 9) his prayers had been answered (18:38) His God had been honoured, for when the fire fell, the people bowed down and cried out, “ *The Lord, He is the God* ” (18:39) My is your life such a life ? A life that God is working through ? A life that bears the evidence of God's presence and power ? Thousands of people had been touched by God through the faithfulness of this one man. “ *Hear me, O Lord hear me that this people may know that thou art the Lord Go, and that thou hast turned their back again.* ” (18:37) And God did hear, and the people did know. The fire fell, the rain came, the hour of victory had dawned, the door of opportunity for God was wider open than it had been for a generation yet here is a man thinking in terms as if it had been an hour of defeat. My beware when you have a victory. Despondency (a) (b)

(c) OVER SUCH A MATTER:

It was such a small matter compared with the tremendous obstacles Elijah had overcome. The man who faced hundreds of false prophets, the man who dared the hatred of the royal court, now trembles before the threat of one hellish, ungodly, evil woman. “

So let the gods do to me and more also if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

That's classic intimidation. Jezebel was saying to Elijah, "*By this time tomorrow I'm going to have you killed.*" Is it not remarkable that sometimes the darkness can fall over such a small matter ? And all of a sudden the light has gone right out of our sky. S.D. Gordon said on one occasion, "*You can shut out the light of the sun with a small coin, if you hold it close enough to your eye.*" My it does not take a lot to cloud the sun in the life of the soul. Indeed it was like this in such a man, at such a moment, over such a matter. (1)

(2) A SPECIFIC CAUSE OF DEPRESSION

Look if you will at (19:3-4) All psychologists agree that depression is caused by physical, emotional, or mental factors or either by a combination of them all. I heard about a fellow that went to see a psychiatrist. He said, "*Doc, I am depressed.*" The doctor asked, "*how depressed are you ?*" He answered, "*I'm terribly depressed. I am so depressed that I can't function. I am so depressed I don't want to get out of bed. Can you help me ? What do you recommend ?*" The doctor said, "*Well, I normally recommend that you take a holiday.*" The man said, "*I just got back from the Bahamas.*"

"*Well, I recommend that you go out and buy yourself new car,*" he says, "*I drive a Mercedes.*" "*Well then, I suggest you build yourself a new house.*" He says, "*I live in a £500,000 mansion.*" The doctor said, "*let me*

get this straight. You just got back from the Bahamas, you drive a Mercedes, and live in a half-million pound mansion. Why are you depressed ?" **The man said, " I only make a hundred pounds a week."**

Now depression often arises from a variety of things. It can come as a result of losing someone or something we deeply value, a husband, wife, a close friend, a prized possession. Sometimes it is a reaction to such things as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a severe personal setback. Did you notice that the reason for Elijah's depression was three fold ? I mean he failed at the point where would have considered him to be strongest. He was a man of courage yet his courage now failed him. Why ? Well, notice that,

(a) VICTORY MAKES US VULNERABLE:

There is something about victory that elates, that takes you off your guard, that leaves you open to the devastating arrows of Satan. My its a short distance from the *Mountain of Victory to the valley of Despair*. Here's a man who has just achieved one of the most remarkable victories for the cause of God on Carmel, under the juniper tree saying, "*O Lord fathers.*" What in the world happened ? Where is the Elijah of Mount Carmel ? Where is the Elijah who stood before Ahab the apostate king and pointed his finger toward him and said, "*Its not going to rain until I say so.*" My are we reading about the same man ? Those of you who are interested in sport know that you are most vulnerable to the opposition when you score. Is it not the same in the spiritual realm ? When have Satan's

attacks been the strongest ? After a time of blessing, after some great spiritual victory. Have you never found yourself after some spiritual victory in what John Bunyan calls “*the slough of despond* ?” My are up times vulnerable times for you ? (a)

(b) FEAR MAKES US FAITHLESS:

Elijah had no faith because he was filled with fear and he was filled with fear because he had taken his eyes off the Lord. When Jezebel's threat reached him we are told significantly, “*And when he saw that he arose, and went for his life,*” (19:3) He's leaving town and running from one woman. Oh, that he had replied as Chrysostom did when he received a threatening message from the Empress Eudoxis, “*Go tell her Majesty that I fear nothing but sin.*” Now up until now Elijah had always waited on God's Word. (17:2, 8, 18:1) Up until now God's Word had been directing him but now he has no Divine word to rest upon. Till now the only person that filled his vision was Jehovah, now he was looking through the wrong end of the telescope and his perspective was greatly distorted. My Elijah looked at the circumstances and not at the Lord. Do you recall Peter ? “*But when he saw the wind boisterous he was afraid and beginning to sink he cried, saying, Lord save me.*” (Matt 14:30)

You see, the moment we take our eyes off the source of our courage we lose it. We'll slip on a spiritual banana peel. We'll sprawl in our faith. Our feet will begin to sink, our hope will vanish, our comfort will disappear. Why ? Because we have taken our eyes off the Lord !

My are you in the slough of despondency ? Is it because your vision has been misdirected ? Is it because you've taken your eyes off the Lord ? (a) (b)

(c) WORK MAKES US WEARY:

Look if you will at (19:10) What a C.V. Elijah had, but this achievement had taken its toll. He was exhausted.

George Whitefield was once asked if he did not get tired of his work. He said “*I sometimes get tired on the way, but I never get tired off the way.*” How did Elijah come to this place of frustration, fear, futility, fatigue and failure ? Well,

1. He was Over-Taxed Physically:

He had just been through three years of famine, faced and slain 450 prophets of Baal, missed several meals and lots of sleep, been in intense prayer, been up and down Carmel twice, made a 20 mile run down to Jezreel and then another 90 miles to Beersheba and then another day's journey into the wilderness. My can you imagine how physically exhausted Elijah must have been ? He was in a weakened state, his strength was gone, leaving him totally exhausted. Then the devil came in for how cleverly he times his attacks. Physically worn out ! Is that you ? Like Elijah are you “*weary in well doing* ?” 1.

2. He was Over-Strained Mentally:

I mean its not easy when you are contending with false cults. When your picture is on a “*Wanted Poster*,” for Jezebel wanted him “*Dead or Alive.*”

3. He was Over-Come Emotionally:

He was filled with fear. Moreover, his feelings of self pity reflect that his focus was on himself. “ *I’m all alone. There’s no-one else. I’m the only one standing true to the cause.* ” (19:10) Have you ever said that ?

4. He was Over-Drained Spiritually:

Virtue had gone out of him. Those of you who think that preaching is an easy touch should try it. Nobody knows what goes out of a man who faithfully preaches the Word but only another preacher. You see, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually this man was spent. My those are the times when your enemy, the devil circles your name on his agenda. Have you reached your end ? You’re not going back to teach that S.S. class, you’re not continuing in that ministry to which God has called you. You are resigning, you’re changing, you’re giving in, you’re just tired out. (1) (2)

(3) A DRAMATIC CURE FOR DEPRESSION

Have you ever thanked God for unanswered prayer ? You had better. Wouldn’t we be in a mess if God answered “ **yes,** ” to our foolish prayers like, “ *O Lord, take away my life,* ” (19:4) But God didn’t you know. The Lord gave it back to him. In the life of Robert Murray M’Cheyne we read these lovely words, “ *At the very time I was beginning to give up in despair God gave me tokens of His presence.* ” Fancy, Murray McCheyne giving up in despair, you see the giants are in it all of them. You must not think you’re

the only one experiencing the “ *dark hours of the soul.* ” “ *At the very time God gave me tokens of His presence.* ”

What were these tokens ? What was the cure for Elijah’s depression ? What did the Lord do for Elijah ? Well did you notice there was,

(a) A PRACTICAL MINISTRY:

No sermon. No lightening bolt from heaven saying, “ *Look at you, get up, you worthless servant ! Get on your feet ! Quickly, back on the job.* ” Instead God said, “ *Take it easy my son. Relax. You haven’t had a good meal in a long time.* ” My what a practical God we have. Do you see how God dealt with him ? (19:5-7) In the hour of his need and failure, God still loved him. And the Lord provided for him. Elijah asked for death. The Lord gave him dough baked into bread. That’s what I call “ **angel delight.** ” This was the first step in the Lord’s therapeutic treatment of Elijah’s despondency. To this mentally exhausted, physically tired servant God gave sleep. (Ps 127:2) To this hungry, thirsty man God gave sustenance. Is that the kind of blessing you are looking for ? It may be just the kind of blessing you are needing. Do you know why Moses was depressed ? Because, he was physically exhausted. How did the Lord handle him ?

He said “ *Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee.* ” (Num 11:16-17) Do you believe its Biblical or practical for a pastor to do everything ? I don’t, though most do, despite all that’s said about the

priesthood of all believers. Oh, you say, “ *Its better to burn out than rust out.* ” My that’s not the option. It’s not a question of burning out or rusting out, its a question of living out. Christ said, “ *Come ye yourselves apart and rest a while.* ” (Mk 6:31) Old Vance Havner said “ *If we don't come apart, then we will do come apart.* ” (a)

(b) A PERSONAL MESSAGE:

Look if you will at (19:9) A rebuke albeit a gentle one.

In some dark cave having a pity party, feeling sorry for himself whining and crying “ *the Word of the Lord came to him.* ” If ever a man needed the Word of the Lord it was at a time like this. “ *Elijah, what are you doing here ? Of all people, what are you doing in this place ? You, who had enough courage to face Ahab and Jezebels apostate prophets. What’s gotten into you ? Why have you left your post of duty ? Why have you left the scattered flock who need you ?* ” You see, Elijah was in the wrong place. He was the cave of despair having a pity party. Have you ever sat where Elijah sat ? Are you sitting there now ? Are you in some cave of depression feeling sorry for yourself ? Do you need to pause and consider the blessings of God on your life ? Think of the times the Lord has provided, prospered and protected you. Has the Lord ever treated you any way but right ?

“ *What doest thou here ?* ” Is that God’s Word to you **Vocationally** ? Once you were active for the Lord, but the devil’s pills of self pity and self occupation have robbed of your zeal and the Lord is saying to you

“ *What doest thou here ?* ” Is that God’s Word to you **Socially** ? Are you stuck in some disco, or dance, or night club, and the Lord is saying, “ *What doest thou here ?* ” Is that God’s Word to you **Ecclesiastically** ? Are you stuck in some church where fellowship with Rome is on the increase and God says “ *What doest thou here ?* ” Or are you stuck in some other church at other times and your membership is here and the Lord is saying “ *What doest thou here ?* ” (a) (b)

(c) A PUBLIC MISSION:

For this man who was running away from God heard a voice saying, “ *Go return,* ” (19:15) In effect the Lord was saying, “ *You are not through yet Elijah. Go back to the nation. Go back to Israel because you have a man to anoint in your place. You have a successor to your work.* ” One of the greatest problems with depressed people is that they have lost their willingness to serve the Lord. They are sitting around doing nothing, feeling sorry for themselves. You see, God’s cure for Elijah’s depression was to get his eyes on the Lord (19:3) to recognise that he was not indispensable (19:18) to stop feeling sorry for himself (19:10) to get busy again (19:15)

“ *Go return,* ” Is this God’s Word to you this ? “ *Go return,* ” back to that Sunday School class, back to that outreach work, back to that mission station. Like Elijah have you suffered some kind of breakdown ? Has the devil whispered in your ear, “ *You’ve had it, you can never be the same again, your days of usefulness are over.* ” My he’s a liar, ***for failure is not final !***

Indeed such is the mysterious working of our God that He can even take our failures and breakdowns and use them for His glory. The Word of the Lord came to Elijah, “ *Go return*,” (19:15) Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Word of the Lord came to you this and you realised that you are not cast off, not done yet, that God still has a work for you to do. Elijah grappled with the giant of depression, but the Lord refreshed him, rebuked him, and re-commissioned him. Will you allow Him to do the same for you ? “ ***Go return,***”