

There are many great characters in the Bible and one of my favorites is the great prophet Elijah. One of the reasons that I like him is that even though he is considered one of the greatest Old Testament prophets, the Bible shows us his human side, his weaknesses as well. In some ways he is just like us and that gives me encouragement when I have one of those days when everything seems to go wrong and when I don't do my best for the Lord.

So, this morning let's look at the human side of this great man. Before we read the scripture text, let me give you the background on what's happening. Israel at this time was ruled by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. They were truly evil; as a matter of fact, if you were to look up the definition of evil, you might find their names or pictures there. They had led the people away from God and to the worship of a pagan god called Baal. To demonstrate the power of God over Baal, Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to a contest. Each side was to build an altar and place a sacrifice on it. Then they were to call upon their god and the one whose sacrifice was consumed by fire from heaven would be declared the winner, the true God.

Elijah being a good sport let the prophets of Baal go first. They danced around their altar chanting and calling on Baal but there was no response. They even started cutting themselves in an attempt to get his attention, but again no answer. Like in a football game, Elijah started trash talking and taunting them, asking where their god was, was he asleep. Finally, it was Elijah's turn. Showing off, Elijah doused his sacrifice with twelve large jars of water so that everything was thoroughly soaked. Then he called on the Lord, and the Lord answered with a fire so great that it consumed not only the sacrifice, but the stone altar as well. When the people saw this, they rallied behind Elijah and killed the 450 prophets of Baal.

Now this was definitely a high point in the life and ministry of Elijah. He had defeated the opposition and clearly demonstrated that his God was the Lord Almighty. It didn't get any better than this; he was on top of the world. But there's more to this story. Listen to the 19th chapter of 1 Kings, verses 1 through 14.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-14

Ahab runs and tells his wife Jezebel what Elijah had done. If you are familiar with Ahab, you know that while he's the king, he's really henpecked and Jezebel runs things. So, Jezebel sends word to Elijah that she will get even with him and by the next day he will be as dead as her prophets were. How does the old saying go – "Hell has no fury like a woman scorned." After his greatest triumph and the display of power that the Lord was with him, Elijah runs scared into the night. Then he throws what I consider to be one of the all-time, classic pity parties. "Lord, I have had enough, take my life." Then in verse 10 he says, "Lord, I have done all that I

can, but they have rejected You. I'm the only one left. And **now** they are trying to kill me too." You can almost hear the violin music in the background.

Ever felt that way? I'm the only one left; I'm all alone; I have given it my all and now everybody's out to get me. We all have had days like this. And that's why I love this story. Here is the greatest prophet in the Bible; the prophet who appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration to give Jesus a pep talk before He heads for the cross; and the prophet who is predicted in the Book of Revelation to come back with Moses at the end of time, and he's having a bad day just like ordinary folks like you and me. Even old Elijah got down, discouraged, depressed, and burned out. The point is that it is natural; it happens to the best of us. So don't feel alone when you are having one of those days.

Now Elijah is not the only Biblical character who had a bad day. Remember Peter's denial on the night of the Lord's Supper. Peter boasts that while the other disciples may desert Jesus he never will. He will be by Jesus' side no matter what. But as Jesus had predicted, before the rooster crowed the next morning, Peter denied knowing Jesus not once, but three times.

This event is recorded in all four Gospels, but Luke is the only one that records Jesus turning around and looking Peter straight in the eye. Can you imagine the look in Jesus' eyes? Was it a look of I told you so, disappointment, hurt, sorrow, compassion, or rejection? Put yourself in Peter's sandals and think what those eyes looked like, and more importantly, how it felt. How it must have torn at Peter's heart. He had failed the person he loved and followed. Then the scripture tells us that the great fisherman, the Rock, a man's man went out and wept like a baby. He like Judas who had also deserted Jesus in His greatest hour of need ran into the night crying.

Here are two of the great servants of the Lord, Elijah and Peter, experiencing letdowns, failures, and burnout. All of us who serve the Lord, have, are, or will at some time experience this as we go through life and try to do God's will. It's only natural since we are human. In Romans 3:23, the Apostle Paul writes: "We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

When Judy and I lived in Santa Fe, I taught an adult Sunday School class called the Wo Tani Class. One Sunday, a gentleman named Bruce Detter gave one of the best opening prayers that I have ever heard. Bruce prayed: "Lord, I'm a sinner, but please don't take it out on my friends and classmates." Simple, short and to the point. We are not perfect, so accept it; we are going to have bad days.

Okay, Elijah failed, Peter failed and we fail each and every day. But our God is an Awesome God. Let's look at how He restores and revives each of these great servants, starting with Elijah. Elijah was tired and exhausted from his battle with the prophets of Baal. His journey had been one of an emotional high and low; he had just experienced a great victory, and at the

same time a severe threat from Jezebel. He was emotionally drained when he reached the broom tree in the wilderness.

Look what God did for him. First, God gave him rest, let him sleep. Then the Lord gave Elijah some food and water. Not once, but twice through an angel. We all know that things look brighter and that we think better when we have had a good night sleep and a good meal. These are essential ingredients to a balanced life. Elijah had gotten too caught up in his personal crisis and emotions to recognize his own immediate needs. Of course, that doesn't happen to us, does it? But God knew what Elijah needed, as He knows the needs of each one of us, even when we don't recognize them ourselves.

Next God appears to Elijah, hears his complaints, and gives him new instructions and an assistant to carry on his ministry. God assures Elijah that he is not alone; there are still 7,000 servants faithful to the Lord. Elijah, strengthened, went on to do God's will and work.

Well, what about Peter? The last time we saw him, he was running into the night weeping. Following the resurrection, did Jesus hold a grudge against Peter because he deserted Him? No way, in the resurrection story recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the angel tells the women that Jesus has risen and that they should go and tell the disciples and Peter. Peter is singled out, not because Jesus was upset with him, but because Jesus needed to restore Peter for the work that Jesus had planned for him; Jesus saw great potential in Peter.

Let's see how Jesus restored Peter in the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 15-17.

Read John 21:15-17

Jesus takes Peter aside and restores him in private with love and compassion. Notice that Jesus only asked him one question: "Do you love me?" This is same question that He asks of each of us. And the Peter who denied knowing Jesus at an evening's fire in the high priests courtyard goes on to proclaim Him with the fire of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and throughout the world. Remember what 1 Corinthians 13 tells us – love keeps no record of wrong and love is patient. God is truly love.

The point is that God loves each and every one of us here this morning just as He loved Elijah and Peter. He knows that we will become discouraged, tired, make mistakes, and at times feel like the whole world is against us and we can't go on. If you are feeling that way this morning or when you have one of those days like the old song, "Mama Said There Would Be Days like This," then give it to the Lord.

Don't try to conquer it all by yourself; go to God. Find a quiet place and open your heart up to the Lord in prayer. Tell Him what's got you down, what you are struggling with, what you need,

and how you feel. Don't be afraid to open up to God. Be honest and don't sugar-coat your feelings. Because in reality, He always knows what you are thinking, so there's no sense in trying to hide your true feelings. Prayer is a time when we talk things out with God; a time when we talk and a time when we listen for His guidance and encouragement. Nothing is too big or too small for Him. Don't stay up all night worrying about your problems, give them to the Lord; He's going to be up all night anyway!

Then let His Holy Spirit guide you. Let the Master Physician heal you, take you in His arms, embrace you, give you rest and restore you like He did Elijah and Peter. Then walk in faith and accept God's amazing grace. It's free; the price has already been paid in full on a hill called Calvary.

But don't make the mistake that I, and maybe you have occasionally made, and that is to think that God will solve my problem or fulfill my need in just the way I want or expect. That's normally not the case. God usually has a better plan. Remember Elijah's prayer to die. Well, he didn't. He fulfilled his ministry here on earth, turned it over to his assistant Elisha, and then rode a chariot of fire into heaven, never experiencing death. God always answers our prayer, maybe not the way we want, but always in the way that is best for us in the long run.

Max Lucado tells a story in his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, about a trip on a chartered plane. Here's the scene. You and a half-dozen other folks are flying across the country on a chartered plane. All of a sudden, the engine bursts into flames, and the pilot rushes out of the cockpit yelling: "We're going to crash; we've got to bail out."

Good thing he knows where the parachutes are because we don't. He passes them out, gives us a few quick pointers, and we stand in a line as he throws open the door. The first passenger steps up to the door and shouts over the wind: "Can I make a request?" "Sure," says the pilot, "what is it?" "Any way that I can get a pink parachute?" The pilot shakes his head in disbelief. "Isn't it enough that I gave you a parachute at all?" and the first passenger jumps out of the plane.

The second passenger steps to the door and asks: "I'm wondering if there is any way you could ensure that I won't get nauseated during the fall?" "No, but I can ensure that you have a parachute for the fall."

Each one of us comes with a request and receives a parachute. "Please captain," says one, "I am afraid of heights. Can you remove my fear." "No," he replies, "but I'll give you a parachute." Another pleads for a different strategy: "Can't you change the plans? Let's crash with the plane. We might survive." The pilot smiles and says: "You don't know what you are asking," and gently shoves the guy out the door. One passenger wants some goggles, another wants boots, another wants to wait until the plane is closer to the ground. "You people don't

understand,” the pilot shouts as he helps us, one by one. “I have given you each a parachute; that’s enough.” PAUSE - A parachute called Grace.

There are three points that I hope that I have been able to convey to you this morning. First, we all have bad days and problems. Second, don’t try to handle it all by yourself, let God restore you as He did Elijah and Peter. And finally, His grace was sufficient for Elijah, the great prophet. His grace was sufficient for Peter, the great apostle. And His grace is more than sufficient for you and me. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus gives this wonderful promise to all who believe that we discussed two weeks ago: “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And at the end of Matthew, Jesus promises: “Lo, I am with you always even until the end of time.” And that my friends is the wonderful and amazing assurance of the cross and the resurrection that we not only celebrate on Easter, but should celebrate each and every day of our lives; because God is good, all the time. Amen