

True Loneliness

Elijah may have been “a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17), but that doesn’t always mean it’s easy to identify with people in the Bible. After all, they killed lions with their bare hands (Judges 14:5-6), slew giants (1 Samuel 17:49), and walked on water (Matthew 14:29); when was the last time you heard of anyone doing that? Still, that doesn’t mean that we can’t relate to them in other ways.

Perhaps one of the most awe-inspiring feats to take place was that of Elijah in 1 Kings 18. Facing off against (at least) 850 prophets of both Baal and Asherah, Elijah called on the Almighty to defend His name by incinerating a water-saturated sacrifice, and God responded by delivering far beyond that simple request. God had won in spectacular fashion, proving that He alone stands supreme and that the idolatry of the world is utter nonsense.

One would think that Elijah would feel on top of the world after such a victory, and yet 1 Kings 19 finds him sunken into deep despair, bewailing his position as the “lone survivor” against a nation of faithlessness. Of all the lines that typify his sadness, one stands out the most: “I alone am left, and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10).

Elijah’s problem was not that he sat alone in a cave at Horeb, running for his life; his main affliction was that he had to watch those whom he counted on to defend God forsake Him, and the last ones that had stood watch were cut down. In short, Elijah stood alone, either due to apostasy or persecution, and there was little end in sight.

How many of us have ever felt like this? I don’t mean simply standing by yourself in a room full of people that decry the existence of God, or even standing up against temptation when it’s incredibly unpopular — those are difficult by themselves. I mean having to make a conscious decision to still serve Him in spirit and in truth, when it seems like those whom you have counted on for years forsake God in favor of “better” options? What do you feel in times like that? Betrayal? Despair? Loneliness?

You may be in a position where you have family that has departed from God, where either those who have taught you the truth or those who were raised in the same household as you where truth was taught have turned aside to things of the world. Or you may have a close friend who sat by you on the pews for years, and who has all of a sudden become “enlightened,” and wants you to follow a new form of the gospel than that which you (and him) know to be the truth. Despite your pleas, they depart, forcing you to re-evaluate what you knew to be truth.

It’s doubtful that Elijah ever questioned what was true and what wasn’t, but what plagued him the most was having to watch people that knew better depart for something that was fleeting. It pains us as well, because we know what the ending is.

Paul the Apostle dealt with this in 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, remarking that he was “jealous” for the church that had been “betrothed” to God, yet had been deceived regarding the “simplicity and purity” of the devotion to Christ. For Paul, fellowship was not just a group of friends that he hung out with on the weekends; these were people that he had earnestly attached himself to after leaving his Jewish family behind: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation” (Romans 10:1). To see them walk away from the faith was to see them walk away from him.

We are faced with the same decision. Watching those we love (whether family or friends) forsake God is like watching them forsake us. In this case, we may find ourselves sitting in a metaphorical cave at Horeb, crying out to God about our loneliness. But in times where we feel the most alone, God’s voice whispers in the wind to remind us of our purpose and our company. We are not alone, nor will we ever be, for there will always be “7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal.” We just have to find them.

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