

1 Kings 19:3-8

Life is like a **journey** - a journey which leads to many different **places**, and to many different **experiences**. All of them are **good** - some of them are **better**. I can truthfully **say** that, because it is the LORD who guides and directs us on our path **through** this earthly journey - and the LORD only provides us with what is **best** for us - what we truly **need** for this life. Our gracious God provides us with **Strength For The Journey** - both **physical** strength, as well as **spiritual** strength.

Just prior to our text, the Prophet Elijah had defeated 450 prophets of Baal, and an additional 400 prophets of Asherah in a **showdown** on Mt. Carmel. It was a stupendous display of God's almighty power - a display which clearly showed that Baal is **powerless**, and that the **LORD** controls the powers of nature - a display which also clearly showed that Elijah was a **spokesman** for the LORD. We would have expected Elijah to be on top of the world - **rejoicing** in the return of God's people. After all, they had seen **fire** come from the LORD to completely devour the sacrifice which Elijah offered to the LORD (including the wood, the stones, the soil, and even the water in the trench around the altar). They had also seen **rain** come from heaven - ending a drought which had lasted for 3 ½ years. They had boldly proclaimed, "*The **LORD**, He is **God!** The **LORD** - He is **God!***" We would have thought that there would be an all-out cry from the people to make Elijah the chief advisor for King Ahab and Queen Jezebel - a ground swell to make the worship of the **LORD** the state religion in the Northern Kingdom, and to finally get rid of the **idol** worship which had been so prevalent among them.

But it didn't happen that way. Apparently, the enthusiastic exuberance of the people for following the LORD had **died out** rather quickly. It reminds me of the crowds of people on Palm Sunday. That day thousands of people loudly welcomed Jesus into the city of Jerusalem as a conquering **king** with cries of, "*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*" But less than a week later, on Good Friday, the crowds of supporters were all **gone**. Only a few brave women, and one brave disciple, remained with Jesus at the foot of the cross. What had **happened** to the crowds? Where had they **gone**? Had they changed their minds so **quickly** about Jesus? The same thing happened with the prophet **Elijah**. The crowds of supporters had **deserted** him. So, when the queen threatened to take his life, Elijah felt that he was on his **own**, and he was forced to **flee**. We're told, "*Elijah was **afraid** and ran for his **life**.*"

Jezebel's threat to take Elijah's life wasn't just an **empty** boast. She had

proven her viciousness in the past, and she seems to be able to **act** on her desires, with or without the consent of the king. Elijah wasn't the **first** of God's messengers to be threatened with **death** by the government, and he wouldn't be the **last** either. Jesus spoke about how His **disciples** would stand before **kings** and **governors**. **James** was put to death by King **Herod**. And **Martin Luther** was marked as a man to be killed with no questions asked, by the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor **Charles V**.

The threat was **real** and it was **immanent**, but Elijah's **fear** is still a **problem**. Where did it **come** from? I find it hard to imagine that Elijah had already forgotten those great events on Mt. Carmel - that he had forgotten the awesome **power** of the LORD - that he had forgotten who is really **in charge**. But **something** was wrong in Elijah's world - something wasn't **clicking** with him. Maybe it had something to do with the lack of **support** from the people. They had **said** that they would follow the LORD, but then when push came to shove, they didn't **follow through**. Maybe they felt that following the LORD just wasn't **worth** it when they were also confronted with **threats** from Queen Jezebel - like physical harm, or the confiscation of their property. Maybe they just couldn't stand the persecution and rejection of **family** members and **friends** who still wanted to follow Baal and Asherah, because that's what their **forefathers** had been doing for generations. At any rate, it just goes to show how easily the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh can **distort** or even totally **ignore** the truth.

Or maybe Elijah was just plain **exhausted**. After all, he had been battling against Ahab, Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal for a long time already. He had been under a lot of **stress**, and the **emotional letdown** after the events on Mt. Carmel probably just made matters **worse**. Then to top it all off, Elijah was forced to make this big trip to the **south**, in order to preserve his life. We're told, "*When he came to **Beersheba** in **Judah**, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might **die**. 'I have had **enough**, LORD,' he said. 'Take my **life**; I am no better than my ancestors.'* Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep." I think it's kind of interesting that Elijah didn't even stop running when he got out of the country of **Israel**, where Ahab and Jezebel were in control. Once he was in **Judah**, where the good and godly King Jehoshaphat was ruling, he certainly would have been **safe**, even from a human perspective. But he kept going all the way to the southern-most reaches of Judah - putting as many miles as he could between himself and Jezebel as quickly as possible. Then we're told that leaving his servant behind, Elijah even continued to run **another day's journey** into the

wilderness. So, if he wasn't exhausted **before** this, he was **certainly** exhausted **now**.

Elijah's journey had already amounted to about 100 miles. He was **tired** and **dejected**, and that was clearly **evident** through his **words**. "*Take my **life**; I am no better than my ancestors.*" Elijah had had **enough** - he was ready to **die** at the hands of the LORD. Maybe Elijah thought that his earthly journey, his work for the LORD, was **over** - that he had fought **hard** enough and **long** enough. Maybe he thought he had done everything he **could** - everything that was humanly **possible** in order to try to bring the people of the Northern Kingdom back to the LORD. Maybe he thought it was time for someone **else** to give it a try - that maybe **they** could come up with something he had **missed**. At any rate, it seems that **Elijah** was **tired** of **trying**. He was throwing in the towel. I find it a little bit **ironic** that at the very same time Elijah was running **away** from death, he also asks God to **bring about** his death. I suppose the **difference** is that it would be coming from a **gracious** God, rather than from a **godless** idolater.

But, even though **Elijah** was ready to die, the LORD wasn't **finished** with him yet. There were still a couple more legs left in Elijah's earthly journey. Since he was already **tired**, and the LORD still had a long way for him to **go**, obviously, Elijah was going to need some strength - **Strength For The Journey**. So, God saw to it that Elijah **received** the strength he needed. Again we read, "*All at once an **angel** touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of **bread** baked over hot coals, and a jar of **water**. He ate and drank and then lay down again.*" God took pretty good care of Elijah, providing him with food, water, and rest. And, just think about all the **other** times God had **sustained** him on his journey through life. God had provided him with food from **ravens**, water from a **brook**, and miraculous bread from a **widow** whose flour and oil never ran out. Now, once again, God provided Elijah with food and water - this time through an **angel**.

But this was no **ordinary** angel. Verse 7 goes on to say, "*The **angel of the LORD** came back a **second** time and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.'*" When this angel **returns**, He is called the angel of the **LORD**. That's another way of saying **Jesus**, before He was conceived and born as a human. So, it was God Himself who provided **Strength For The Journey** for Elijah. And He did it, because God still had a lot of things He wanted Elijah to **do** for Him.

As our text concludes, Elijah receives a miraculous meal, which gives him strength to travel in the wilderness for the next **40 days!** That's pretty impressive. But, what was even **more** impressive was the **spiritual** strength that Elijah was **about** to receive. At Mt. Sinai (a good 200 miles **farther** than Elijah had already traveled), the LORD would appear to Elijah - not in a great and powerful **wind** - not in an **earthquake** - and not in a **fire**. But rather, the LORD would appear to Elijah in the gentle **whisper** of His **Word**. The LORD would reassure Elijah that He would continue to be **with** him in journey through life - that He still had **work** for Elijah to do - and that Elijah was not **alone** in his worship of the one true God. There were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Life is like a **journey**, and the LORD **knows** exactly what **our** journey in life **looks** like. Jesus **knows** that we are **sinful**. He **knows** that we can't **remove** sin from our own lives. He **knows** that we are often **weak**, and **weary**, and ready to throw in the towel. Just like Elijah, **you and I** continue to need spiritual **strength** from the LORD. And the LORD still graciously continues to **bring** us that spiritual strength through the **Gospel**. That Gospel isn't a message that strikes **fear** into our hearts. It isn't a message that has great outward **appeal**, and which **impresses** large numbers of people. But rather, it is a **simple** message - something that often goes completely **unnoticed** - a gentle **whisper**. It's the message that Jesus **loves** you - that He loves you **so much** that He lived a perfect **life** for you - that He loves you so much that He also **sacrificed** that life for you through His death on the **cross**, as payment **in full** for the sins of the world.

Those actions, which could **only** come from our Savior, mean **everything** to us. Through the Gospel Jesus takes away our **fears**, He provides for all our **needs**, and He assures us that we are not **alone**. What Jesus has done for us **motivates** us in life, and gives us **Strength For The Journey** as we battle against the forces of evil on the **inside** as well as on the **outside**. That battle for us is a **never-ending** battle. But through Jesus, we can rest assured that not only the **battle**, but also the entire **war**, has already been **won**. Amen.