

June 19, 2022

Texts: 1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15; Galatians 3:23-29

Title: “The Lonely Prophet”

One of the great little phrases that’s often heard in addiction recovery programs is the acronym HALT—H. A. L. T. The word, of course, literally means “to stop.” It stands for “Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired”. If you are feeling that way, even one of these states, you’re especially vulnerable to a relapse.

Truthfully, we’re all more vulnerable to troubled behavior when we’re hungry, angry, lonely or tired. It’s a sign of emotional intelligence to be aware of when we are feeling that way. Today I want to focus on one of them, loneliness.

Would you be surprised if I told you that loneliness is an issue all over the world? In the UK and in Japan, have government departments to deal with the problem of loneliness and its negative effects which include suicide and attempted suicide, social loneliness and isolation. By the way, in Japan, you can pay people to essentially do nothing but to come and listen to you. I’m not talking about a psychologist but simply a trained listener.

When I read our passage from 1 Kings, I thought that Elijah could have used someone like that. He certainly had a lonely job. Elijah was a prophet whom God called to bring the people back to the worship of the one true God.

The people of Israel have been led by the evil queen, Jezebel, into the worship of the nature-god, Baal which was a form of idolatry. Elijah spoke out against this and Jezebel wanted to kill him so he runs into the wilderness and ends up on Mt. Horeb, the same mountain where Moses, met the one true God and received His

laws. And God asks Elijah, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah replied, “The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

Loneliness has turned into fear which, in turn, has turned into bitterness against God. Can you relate? Can we learn from Elijah’s story to protect us from discouragement and giving up?

**One thing we learn from this story is that God doesn’t have to respond to our “shoulds.”** Have you ever struggled with disillusionment and anger toward God because God “should” have done something different in your life? He “should” have fixed your broken marriage, or your child’s depression, or your ongoing problems with your boss. Whatever! I’ll bet you’ve got some. You’ve been a faithful steward of God’s calling. You’ve prayed with all your heart. You’ve studied your Bible, hoping to discern the secret to earning God’s blessings. So God “should” respond with blessings, shouldn’t He?

What does it mean when God doesn’t respond to our “shoulds?” Why doesn’t our faithfulness earn us protection, security or prosperity, especially when we’re obeying God’s calling? This is a struggle for every believer. What’s the point of following God if there isn’t some tangible material benefit?

I like how author Max Lucado describes this idea. He writes, “My first encounters with faith came about the time I was a Boy Scout, at about 14 or 15. I made the logical deduction that they operate the same way; I treated my faith like

earning a merit badge, and everything about Christianity was about earning merit badges.”

The Bible makes it clear that there’s no such thing as a merit badge believer.

**Following God sometimes leads to martyrdom, not merit badges.** That’s another insight we get from Elijah’s story. The literal definition of the Greek word “martus” is *witness*. God calls every single one of us to serve as witnesses to God’s work in the world. Like a witness in a court of law’s called only to tell the truth, we’re called to witness to God’s truth and goodness, to witness to God’s value system. And that witness includes our words, our actions, our lifestyle and our priorities. The life of faith requires sacrifice and never knowing if God will rescue us or remain silent. And that’s how we live as witnesses to the reality of the one true God.

**And that brings us to one more insight from Elijah’s story today: the cross of Jesus reminds us that faithfulness is in our power; the outcome is in God’s hands.** You’d expect that God would respond to Elijah’s fear and loneliness and desperation with some words of comfort, or some revelation of how God would avenge him against Queen Jezebel. Even a few days off from his job as prophet would have been nice. But God doesn’t do any of these things. Instead, God sends Elijah on a long journey back through the land where Jezebel is plotting his murder.

And that long journey through difficult territory is exactly the life God has laid out for those who love Him. God calls us to faithfulness in our journey, not

success in our endeavors. Our journey is be filled with joy and pain, hope and sorrow, strength and struggle. But just as God showed himself to Elijah before sending him back into the world, God has shown himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He has walked in our shoes and shared our suffering. His painful, humiliating and lonely death on the cross looked like a failure to the world. But it was through it, God brought eternal life and reconciliation and restoration to all of humanity. The cross is the answer to the question, “What’s the point of following God if it doesn’t earn you earthly rewards?”

We may want God to use us in spectacular ways. But our greatest usefulness to God is in our servanthood, in our desire to love and serve and witness as Jesus did.

Please don’t let loneliness or fear or frustration quench the Holy Spirit of Jesus that is working in you. Remain faithful to the calling to grow into the image of Jesus Christ, and trust the outcome to God’s good and powerful plan for you.

Amen.