

I Kings 19:1-15  
June 20, '10

"TRAPPED IN A CAVE"

(Before scripture)

OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING FALLS ON THE HEELS OF ONE OF THE GREAT EVENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT – ELIJAH'S VICTORY OVER THE PROPHETS OF BAAL IN THE 18th CHAPTER OF I KINGS.

THIS IS OUR OLD TESTAMENT LECTIONARY READING & IT COINCIDENTALLY FALLS ON THE SAME SUNDAY THAT PAM DOERTER LEADS US IN A STUDY OF JEZEBEL IN OUR ADULT SUMMER SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS.

IT WAS JEZEBEL & KING AHAB WHO WERE ELIJAH'S FOES IN THIS GREAT ENCOUNTER WHERE THE POWER OF GOD WAS DISPLAYED IN DEFEATING THE FORCES OF EVIL.

THE ACTUAL LECTIONARY READING JUMPS IN AND OUT OF THE FIRST PART OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF I KINGS, BUT THAT SEEMED TO MAKE IT TOO CHOPPED UP & DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW, SO I'VE CHOSEN TO READ ALL OF THE VERSES IN THE PASSAGE – I KINGS 19:1-15.

(After scripture)

NEARLY 30 YEARS AGO, I ATTENDED A SEMINAR THAT WAS LED BY THE GREAT PREACHER, ERNEST CAMPBELL, PASTOR OF NEW YORK'S FAMED RIVERSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

I BECAME INTRIGUED BY CAMPBELL'S PREACHING STYLE & LATER PURCHASED A BOOK OF HIS SERMONS. ONE SERMON – THE TITLE SERMON OF THE BOOK – PRESENTED AN IMAGE AS MEMORABLE AS ANY I'VE EVER READ IN A SERMON.

CAMPBELL REFERRED TO AN INCIDENT IN A NOVEL THAT INVOLVED TWO BROTHERS.

THE YOUNGER BROTHER HAD A TERRIBLE FEAR OF OPEN DOORS.

ON ONE OCCASION, HIS BROTHER TAUNTED HIM BY SAYING, "*ONE DAY I'M GOING TO LOCK YOU UP IN A ROOM WITH ALL THE DOORS OPEN!*"

ISN'T THAT A FASCINATING IMAGE – TO BE LOCKED IN A ROOM WITH OPEN DOORS.

THE POINT CAMPBELL WAS MAKING WITH THIS ILLUSTRATION IS THAT ALL OF US – ON OCCASION – FIND OURSELVES TRAPPED.

WE GET TRAPPED IN A PRISON OF OUR OWN MAKING & IT FEELS LIKE A PRISON FROM WHICH WE'LL NEVER ESCAPE.

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH IN THIS PASSAGE.

IT SEEMS SO ODD THAT HE WOULD FIND HIMSELF IN SUCH A PREDICAMENT.

HE HAD JUST EMERGED VICTORIOUS IN ONE OF THE GREATEST CONFLICTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

HE SEEMED INVINCIBLE.

NOW YOU CAN MAKE OF THIS ALL OF YOU WANT BUT THE FACT IS THAT ELIJAH WAS FEARLESS WHEN FACING HUNDREDS OF PROPHETS OR SOLDIERS, BUT WHEN HIS LIFE WAS THREATENED BY ONE WOMAN, HE FELL APART!

HE RAN FOR HIS LIFE!

WHAT WE'RE DEALING WITH HERE JUST MAY BE A BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF CLINICAL DEPRESSION.

I RECENTLY READ AN AD FOR AN ANTI-DEPRESSANT.

IT BEGAN WITH THESE WORDS:

*"DEPRESSED MOOD...*

*LOSS OF INTEREST...*

*SLEEP PROBLEMS...*

*DIFFICULTYCONCENTRATING...*

*AGITATION...*

*RESTLESSNESS."*

THEN THE AD SAID, *"LIFE IS TOO PRECIOUS TO LET ANOTHER DAY GO BY FEELING NOT QUITE 'YOURSELF.'*

*IF YOU'VE EXPERIENCED SOME OF THESE SYMPTOMS EVERY DAY FOR AT LEAST TWO WEEKS, A CHEMICAL  
IMBALANCE COULD BE TO BLAME. AND LIFE CAN FEEL DIFFICULT ALL DAY."*

NOW, BEFORE I GO ANY FURTHER – DON'T MISUNDERSTAND.

I'M NOT ABOUT TO SAY THAT PEOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM DEPRESSION SIMPLY NEED TO TURN THEIR  
LIFE OVER TO GOD & THEY'LL GET BETTER.

YES, THERE *IS* – OR *MAY BE* – A SPIRITUAL COMPONENT TO SOME FORMS OF DEPRESSION,

BUT IT'S NOT MATTER OF CHOOSING BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT & TURNING TO GOD FOR  
HELP.

SOMETIMES THE ESSENTIAL PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT CAN INCLUDE THE SPIRITUAL AS WELL.

BUT JUST LOOK AT ELIJAH IN THIS PASSAGE.

ISN'T HE A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF SOMEONE WHO'S DEPRESSED?

*FEAR* – THE PASSAGE TELLS US HE WAS AFRAID.

*EXCESSIVE TIREDNESS* – IT SAYS *"HE LAY DOWN UNDER A BROOM TREE & FELL ASLEEP."*

*FEELINGS OF REJECTION* – NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE – IN THE LONGEST SENTENCE ELIJAH IS QUOTED AS  
UTTERING – HE WHINES TO GOD ABOUT HIS FEELINGS OF REJECTION.

AND – JUST AS THE AD SAYS – ELIJAH EXPERIENCED THESE FEELINGS FOR A LONG TIME.

IT IS SOMEWHAT HEARTENING, ISN'T IT, TO KNOW THAT IF YOU EVER EXPERIENCE SUCH A MOOD OR  
SUCH A MALADY, YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

YOU'RE IN PRETTY SELECT COMPANY BECAUSE ONE OF ISRAEL'S GREATEST PROPHETS WENT THROUGH  
A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE.

HE FOUND HIMSELF TRAPPED IN A CAVE – LOCKED IN A ROOM WITH OPEN DOORS.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH IN HIS STATE OF DEPRESSION IS INTERESTING.

THE PASSAGE SAYS THAT AN ANGEL OF THE LORD VISITED HIM & TOUCHED HIM & BROUGHT HIM FOOD.

WHAT'S INTERESTING IS THE WORD THAT IS USED FOR "ANGEL."

IT'S THE EXACT SAME WORD THAT WAS USED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PASSAGE WHEN IT SAYS,  
"JEZEBEL SENT A MESSENGER TO ELIJAH..."

THE WORD IS TRANSLATED "MESSENGER" IN ONE VERSE & THEN JUST 3 VERSES LATER, IT'S TRANSLATED  
"ANGEL."

SO WHICH IS IT?

IS IT A MESSENGER OR AN ANGEL?

PERHAPS IT'S BOTH.

JEZEBEL SENT A MESSENGER OF DEATH & GOD SENT A MESSENGER OF LIFE – OR, IF YOU PREFER,  
JEZEBEL SENT AN ANGEL OF DEATH & GOD SENT AN ANGEL OF LIFE.

MAYBE THAT "ANGEL" FROM GOD WAS REALLY A MESSENGER – A REAL, LIVING PERSON SENT BY GOD TO  
OFFER COMFORT & NOURISHMENT TO ELIJAH IN HIS TIME OF GREATEST NEED.

DON'T YOU FIND THAT THINGS WORK THAT WAY SOMETIMES IN YOUR OWN LIFE?

DON'T YOU FEEL AT TIMES AS THOUGH GOD HAS SENT YOU A MESSENGER OF HOPE – AN ANGEL IN  
HUMAN FORM WHO OFFERS YOU COMFORT & NOURISHMENT IN YOUR TIME OF GREATEST NEED?

WHEN ELIJAH FOUND HIMSELF TRAPPED IN A CAVE, HE WAS SENT TO A PLACE WHERE GOD CAN ALWAYS  
BE FOUND.

HE WAS SENT TO MT. HOREB OR MT. SINAI.

THIS WAS A PLACE WITH GREAT OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS – THE PLACE WHERE GOD HAD MET MOSES &  
GAVE HIM THE 10 COMMANDMENTS.

THIS WAS A PLACE – MORE THAN ANY OTHER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT - THAT SYMBOLIZED GOD'S  
PRESENCE.

IT WAS AT MT. SINAI THAT BOTH MOSES & ELIJAH MET & ENCOUNTERED GOD.

IN MUCH THE SAME WAY, IT IS HERE IN THE CHURCH – MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE - THAT WE  
ENCOUNTER GOD TODAY.

I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS AS I CONSIDERED THE FACT THAT TODAY IS FATHER'S DAY.

WE DON'T USUALLY SPEND A LOT OF TIME FOCUSING ON FATHER'S DAY IN WORSHIP – PERHAPS NOT AS  
MUCH AS WE SHOULD.

I'VE BEEN THINKING RECENTLY, THOUGH, ABOUT MY OWN EXPERIENCE AS A FATHER.

HAVING RECENTLY REACHED THE AGE OF 60 IN THE SAME WEEK THAT ONE OF OUR CHILDREN REACHED  
THE AGE OF 30, I CAN NOW SAY – FOR THE FIRST TIME – THAT HALF OF MY LIFE HAS BEEN LIVED AS A FATHER.

I THINK THAT – IN ITSELF – GIVES ME AT LEAST SOME SMALL DEGREE OF LEGITIMACY IN OFFERING A BIT  
OF ADVICE ON BEING A FATHER.

I DON'T WANT TO OFFER A LIST OF "HOW-TO'S OF FATHERHOOD" BUT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ONE SIMPLE  
SUGGESTION TO FATHERS – ESPECIALLY FATHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THIS ONE SUGGESTION CAN MAKE A BIGGER DIFFERENCE IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD THAN VIRTUALLY ANYTHING ELSE.

I AM CONVINCED THAT IF FATHERS WOULD DO THIS ONE THING, DOZENS OF OTHER THINGS WOULD THEN FALL INTO PLACE.

FROM THIS 60-YEAR-OLD FATHER OF THREE WHO HAS NOW SPENT MORE THAN HALF HIS LIFE AS A FATHER, MY ONE SINGLE LIFE-ALTERING PIECE OF ADVICE IS THIS - *COMMIT YOURSELF & YOUR CHILDREN TO SPEND EVERY SUNDAY MORNING AT CHURCH.*

THERE IS NOTHING THAT CAN HAVE A GREATER IMPACT ON YOU OR YOUR CHILDREN.

I KNOW I'M – AS THEY SAY – PREACHING TO THE CHOIR WITH THIS.

BUT NOT COMPLETELY.

BECAUSE I'M TALKING ABOUT *EVERY* SUNDAY.

I'M TALKING ABOUT BEING HERE (OR SOME OTHER CHURCH WHEN YOU'RE AWAY) EVERY SUNDAY WITHOUT FAIL.

I REMEMBER IN HIGH SCHOOL, OUR TRACK & CROSS COUNTRY COACH TOLD US THERE WAS ONE & ONLY ONE LEGITIMATE EXCUSE TO MISS PRACTICE & THAT WAS A FUNERAL...YOUR OWN!

I SUGGEST THAT SHOULD BE YOUR ATTITUDE ABOUT SUNDAY MORNING IN CHURCH.

YOU SEE, ALL THE OTHER THINGS YOU MIGHT THINK OF AS MORE IMPORTANT PIECES OF ADVICE FOR FATHERS, ARE INCORPORATED INTO THIS ONE.

THIS IS THE ONE THING THAT SAYS, *“THIS IS WHO WE ARE. THESE ARE OUR PRIORITIES. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE & OUR EXPRESSION OF THAT RELATIONSHIP BEGINS HERE.*

*EVERYTHING – EVERYTHING ELSE IS SECONDARY.”*

SO WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMETHING ELSE COMES UP ON A SUNDAY MORNING – A SPORTING EVENT OR SOME WORTHY ACTIVITY IN WHICH YOUR CHILD IS INVOLVED?

YOU SAY, *“THAT’S NOT WHO WE ARE. NOTHING – NOTHING TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER WORSHIP & SUNDAY SCHOOL.”*

JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO, WE HAD A FATHER & DAUGHTER WHO WERE VISITING FROM ANOTHER CITY. THEY WERE HERE FOR A SOCCER TOURNAMENT & THE DAUGHTER TOLD ME THAT BEFORE THEY DECIDED TO COME, THEY CHECKED CHURCHES IN THE AREA TO BE SURE THEY COULD FIND ONE THAT WOULD ENABLE THEM TO WORSHIP BEFORE SOCCER STARTED.

IF THEY HADN'T FOUND ONE, THEY WOULDN'T HAVE COME TO THE TOURNAMENT.

THAT FATHER WAS SENDING A MESSAGE TO HIS DAUGHTER THAT *HIS* RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD & *HER* RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE & NOTHING COMES BEFORE THAT.

AGAIN, I THINK THAT I'VE FINALLY – AFTER SPENDING MORE THAN HALF MY LIFE AS A PARENT – LEARNED SOMETHING ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECES OF ADVICE TO OFFER PARENTS & THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN THIS.

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HAS WARMED MY HEART AS MUCH AS ANYTHING AS I'VE SEEN OUR CHILDREN GROW & LEAVE HOME IS KNOWING THAT ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THEY DO WHEN THEY GO TO A NEW COMMUNITY IS LOOK FOR A CHURCH THAT THEY CAN CALL HOME.

THEY'VE LEARNED THAT IT IS IN CHURCH THAT THEY WILL ENCOUNTER THE LIVING GOD.

THEY'VE LEARNED THAT THIS IS WHERE GOD WILL MOST POWERFULLY SPEAK TO THEM & TOUCH THEIR HEARTS.

THEY'VE LEARNED THAT THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE THEY WILL ALWAYS BE GIVEN THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD WILL BE WITH THEM THROUGH ALL THE TRIALS OF LIFE.

THEY'VE LEARNED THAT WHEN THEY FIND THEMSELVES IN A CAVE – WHEN THEY FIND THEMSELVES LOCKED IN A ROOM WITH OPEN DOORS – GOD WILL TOUCH THEM & COMFORT THEM & NOURISH THEM.

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH.

WHEN HE ALLOWED HIMSELF TO STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, HE WAS DELIVERED FROM THE CAVE IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN TRAPPED.

HE KNEW THAT EVEN IN THE MIDST OF HIS FEAR, EVEN IN THE THROES OF HIS DEPRESSION, EVEN THROUGH HIS DARKEST NIGHT, GOD WOULD BE THERE TO TAKE CARE OF HIM & SEE HIM THROUGH.

ONE OF THE GREATEST BUSINESSMEN OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WAS JAMES CASH PENNEY – J.C. PENNEY.

IN THE 1920'S J.C. PENNEY WAS – IN TODAY'S DOLLARS – A BILLIONAIRE.

BUT HE LOST VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING IN THE STOCK MARKET CRASH OF 1929.

AT A SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT ONE EVENING, HE BECAME DEATHLY ILL.

HE WAS ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL, AND THOUGH HIS ILLNESS SEEMED MINOR, HIS CONDITION WORSENEDED.

DAY AFTER DAY, J.C. PENNEY MOVED CLOSER & CLOSER TO DEATH.

LATER, HE RECALLED THAT TIME & HE SAID, *"I GOT WEAKER DAY BY DAY. I WAS BROKEN – NERVOUSLY & PHYSICALLY – FILLED WITH DESPAIR, UNABLE TO SEE EVEN A RAY OF HOPE. I HAD NOTHING TO LIVE FOR. I FELT I HADN'T A FRIEND LEFT IN THE WORLD – THAT EVEN MY FAMILY HAD TURNED AGAINST ME."*

ONE NIGHT, HE GOT UP FROM HIS BED & WROTE LETTERS TO HIS WIFE & FAMILY, CERTAIN THAT HE WOULD BE DEAD BY MORNING.

BUT MORNING CAME & HE WAS STILL ALIVE.

HE SAID, *"TO AWAKE AGAIN WAS A STRANGE KIND OF SURPRISE. IN SOME VAGUE WAY, I KNEW THERE MUST BE A REASON."*

PENNEY LEFT HIS ROOM & WANDERED DOWNSTAIRS WHERE HE HEARD SINGING.

THERE IN THE CHAPEL, HE HEARD THE WORDS OF A HYMN – “*BE NOT DISMAYED WHATE’ER BETIDE, GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.*”

MANY YEARS LATER, THE INCIDENT WAS AS FRESH IN HIS MEMORY AS THE MORNING IT HAPPENED.

HE SAID, “*SUDDENLY – SOMETHING HAPPENED. I CAN’T EXPLAIN IT. I CAN ONLY CALL IT A MIRACLE. I FELT AS IF I HAD BEEN INSTANTLY LIFTED OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF A DUNGEON INTO WARM, BRILLIANT SUNLIGHT. I FELT AS IF I HAD BEEN TRANSPORTED FROM HELL TO PARADISE.*

*I FELT THE POWER OF GOD AS I HAD NEVER FELT IT BEFORE.*

*THE MOST DRAMATIC & GLORIOUS TWENTY MINUTES OF MY LIFE WERE THOSE I SPENT IN THE CHAPEL THAT MORNING YEARS AGO ASSURING ME THAT ‘GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU.’”*

WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF LIKE J.C. PENNEY - DEEP IN THE DARKNESS OF A DUNGEON, OR LIKE ELIJAH - CAUGHT IN THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR - WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF TRAPPED IN A CAVE & LOCKED IN A ROOM WITH OPEN DOORS, KNOW THAT GOD WILL BE WITH YOU & WILL YOU LEAD YOU INTO HIS PRESENCE WHERE ANGELS WILL TOUCH YOU & COMFORT YOU & NOURISH YOU. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Evansville, Indiana*