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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Sure Is Hopeless Around Here!"
I Kings 19:1-18; Titus 3:5-7

Some people say, "I just can't help myself. That's the way I have always been, and that's the way I'll always be. You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

Or someone may respond, "I can't do any better than that. What do you expect?"

What these responses mean is that an individual is saying, "I am what I am. I can't change, I am hopeless."

Then, we may find ourselves in a very challenging situation, and we begin thinking that the situation is hopeless. We may even think that we are failures, for we can see no light at the end of the tunnel.

What does God say to us in His grace to us when we feel like we can't make changes in our personal lives, and we find ourselves in situations that seem hopeless?

Consider with me the prophet, Elijah, in the Old Testament in our text for today, I Kings 19:1-18.

Elijah was ministering for the Lord in the northern kingdom of Israel around 870 B.C. During his ministry the kingdom of Israel was involved deeply in Baal worship, which idolatry was threatening to extinguish the worship of the true and living God, Yahweh, the LORD, the self-existent ONE.

God raised up Elijah to expose the idolatry of Israel by telling king Ahab that there would be no rain, and it didn't rain for 3 ½ years (I Kings 18:1; James 3:17). At about the end of that time, Elijah gathered the prophets of Baal to an amazing face-off on the top of Mt. Carmel for the ultimate challenge -- that the God who would be the true God would bring fire down from heaven and devour the sacrifice.

The results were that the 450 prophets of Baal could not call down fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice on the altar. Elijah poked fun at them, but the harder the prophets of Baal tried, the result was still the same. No fire from heaven.

When it became crystal clear that the god, Baal, of the prophets of Baal could not send fire down from heaven, Elijah asked that water be poured on the sacrifice, the wood, and the water ran around the trench surrounding the sacrificial altar. Elijah prayed to the biblical God, and fire came down from heaven and devoured the sacrifice, the stones, and licked up the water in the trench, demonstrating the purifying holiness of God in the midst of stark idolatry.

When the people saw what had happened, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD (Yahweh, the self-existent ONE), He is God; the LORD (Yahweh the self-existent ONE), He is God." (I Kings 19:39).

Elijah, then, had the 450 prophets of Baal put to death. A great shower of rain came upon the land, as a result of Elijah's prayer. The biblical God showed His mighty power over the false gods of Baal.

When Jezebel, king Ahab's wife, heard about what had happened on Mt. Carmel, she was furious. She sent a threatening message to Elijah that she would have his life taken as he had taken the lives of her prophets.

Hearing those words, Elijah took off and ran for his life. He went about 120 miles south to Beersheba. There he left his servant, and evidently wandered in the wilderness for another day. There Elijah found a juniper tree, a dessert shrub that can grow 10 feet tall.

Sitting under that juniper tree, Elijah requested of the LORD that he might die. He told the LORD, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." (I Kings 19:4).

What's happening here to Elijah?

I. Elijah's condition is desperate (I Kings 19:1-5a).

I can't go on. In fact Lord, I did a great feat for you on Mt. Carmel. But now someone wants to take my life. There is no use going on. In fact, circumstances are not going to change. It's just the way it is. I am ready to throw in the towel. Life is hopeless. I am no better than my fathers, who tried to eradicate idolatry but failed just like I did. Yes, life for me is not worth living. It's a hopeless mess. I want to die.

Why is Elijah thinking and talking like this – indicating his condition is beyond solving – is hopeless???

I would suggest to you that Elijah is thinking and talking like this to the LORD because he is thinking only about himself. It is all about Elijah.

Note Elijah's words again.

"HE requested for HIMSELF that HE might die. It is enough now, O LORD, take MY life, for I am not better than MY fathers (Elijah felt he had failed in eradicating idolatry from the land like his fathers had failed). He was hopeless and useless.

Why did Elijah start thinking only about himself, when he finally started talking to the Lord after going 120 miles away from Bathsheba who wanted his neck?

Why did Elijah start thinking about himself first when faced with a challenge, in this case, a challenge to his life?

The answer has three parts.

(1) Elijah became obsessed personally with the challenge before him.

He became obsessed with Jezebel's threat on his life. That obsession caused him to want to die before she killed him. Elijah thought that his feelings could not change. There was no way out of this awful situation. He needed to die. That would solve the challenge, for from his perspective everything was hopeless. There was no way the situation could change.

(2) Becoming obsessed with the threat of Jezebel wanting to take his life, Elijah lost his focus.

When he was having God's victory on Mt. Carmel, he was strong and mighty. He was a real man of prayer, and God answered his prayer and rain came after 3 ½ years of drought.

But when Jezebel threatened to kill him, Elijah became so afraid that he went 120 miles away from where Jezebel lived.

In the process, Elijah lost focus about who God was, and what God could do for him, and as a result everything resolved around himself, his own little world. In so doing, the bigger picture of what God was about got all out perspective. Instead of asking God to help him keep his focus, he started feeling sorry for himself and asked that God would take his life.

It's easy to let the challenges of life, and not wanting to change, to so affect our lives that we lose focus of who God is and what He wants to do in our lives. It can happen to us as adults, to our young people, and our children.

I was in a store the other day and a mother was there with her two children. The one little fellow was really upset about something. He was crying and very belligerent. The mother was attempting to calm him down. But everything was centered on his little world at that moment and he wanted his way regardless of what someone was the right thing to do. He was the focus.

That's why Paul told the Corinthian believers that when he was a child, he spoke like a child and acted like a child, but when he became a man, more mature, he put away childish things, meaning he began to understand that the focus in life in following the Lord was upon the Lord not upon himself.

(3) One of the reasons Elijah lost his focus was that he was physically depleted, physically exhausted.

Having told the Lord that life was hopeless, Elijah laid down and slept under the juniper tree (I Kings 19:5a).

That's what Elijah needed first of all. He needed a good night's sleep, for evidently he and his servant had traveled the distance from Jezreel to Bathsheba without any sleep since Elijah was so afraid that Jezebel would kill him.

I understand that Dr. Chafer, a past president of Dallas Seminary, used to tell his classes that the first thing they needed was 8 hours of sleep.

Certainly, our physical condition can affect us mentally, emotionally, and above all spiritually.

Sometimes, in some circumstances, medical attention is needed if one becomes so despondent and depressed.

But here, Elijah was so tired physically that he became obsessed with the challenge to get away from Bathsheba and lost his focus of trust in God's sovereignty and love to protect and care for him.

So what did God do for hopeless Elijah?

II. God brought His loving encouragement (I Kings 19:5b-8).

1. The negative that could have happened.

God could have said, "Okay, Elijah, if that's the way you feel, I'll let you feel hopeless, and I'll take your life. You are no longer useful to me."

In other words, God could have answered Elijah's prayer for God to take his life. But God is a God of life not of death. Elijah had done nothing to warrant God punishing him in this way, and God was fully aware of that. So God didn't answer Elijah's prayer the way that he requested.

God is all wise as to when to say, "Yes," and when to say, "No," to our prayers.

2. The positive that did happen.

(1) The angel of the LORD touched Elijah's once.

The angel of the LORD came and touched him the first time to rouse Elijah from sleep. How beautiful is that. The angel just touched Elijah, a gentle touch, to wake him up so that he could take the nourishment that he had brought – a cake of bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water for drinking. The very bread and water that the angel of the LORD provided for Elijah was telling him that God was a God of LIFE.

God performed for Elijah a miracle right before His eyes, providing physical sustenance for him, to tell Elijah that He was with him and that He cared for Elijah.

After eating, Elijah was still physically exhausted, so he laid down again to sleep. Evidently, Elijah was still physically strung out from the long 120 mile journey in fleeing from Jezebel.

(2) The angel of the LORD touched Elijah a second time.

After some time had passed, the angel of the LORD touched Elijah a second time. He awoke and the angel told Elijah to eat for the journey ahead of him was great.

But don't miss here what God is doing to and for Elijah at this hopeless time in his life where he thinks nothing can change in his life, while he thinks that his life is at stake, and he wants to die. He feels that he is utterly useless to God and everyone else.

1. Note who is caring for Elijah - It's the angel of the LORD that is caring for Elijah at this time bringing him physical nourishment and encouragement.

Who is the angel of the LORD? It is felt that the angel of the LORD in the Old Testament is actually the pre-incarnate Christ. For the angel of LORD does not appear in the New Testament, and when the angel of the LORD appears he is also referred to as God where the angel of the LORD and the word, God, are used to refer to the same person (Genesis 21:17-20; and in our text, it says that the "word of the LORD came to him (that is Elijah)" (I Kings 19:9).

If such be true, what a heart-warming and encouraging experience for Elijah, as the LORD comes to take care of Elijah physically, and encourage him spiritually.

A reminder for all of us today when we think that we can't change, or we are in a situation that at the time seems hopeless.

In the midst of our hopelessness, the LORD is there to provide his loving encouragement, for He sympathizes with our weaknesses, meaning the LORD identifies with us in what we are going through at the time. That's why His throne is called a throne of grace, not a throne of judgment. It's that place where the believer in Christ can draw near with confidence so that he may receive mercy (not get what we deserve) and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

When you or your circumstance seems hopeless, the Lord is telling us that "I am there to minister to you. I am not delaying. I come to you in your hopelessness. I have not left you. I never leave you nor forsake you no matter how you may feel."

2. The LORD deals with first things first.

The LORD could have grabbed Elijah by the shoulder and said, "Elijah wake up. Be a strong in the LORD and the power of His might. You should be trusting me rather than running from Jezebel. You know better than that. Come on. Shape up spiritually, and get back to your ministry."

Know the LORD doesn't deal that way with Elijah. The LORD knows that Elijah is physically spent, so He deals with that issue first. God having created all of us, knows that how we feel physically can affect all the other areas of our life, particularly our spiritual lives.

3. There is not one ounce of condemnation of Elijah.

There is no condemnation by the LORD of Elijah feeling hopeless, feeling useless. God only brings His encouragement to Elijah.

Why? The LORD understands how Elijah feels in his hopelessness.

Yes, the LORD is touched by our weaknesses and our desperate situations. God told Moses when He came to Moses before He called him, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmaster, for I am aware of their sufferings. I have come down to deliver them" (Exodus 3:7-8a).

The biblical God identified with the sufferings of His people.

Later on the cross what did Jesus cry out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

At that moment when Jesus was made sin for the sins of the world, He became your and my sin bearer, it seems that the LORD felt in His humanity hopeless – that God had forsaken HIM.

Jesus Christ can identify with our hopelessness because He has experienced those kind of feelings on the cross.

And He is there for our hopelessness because He is a God of HOPE not a God of hopelessness.

He told Israel in captivity that He had plans for the nation not for calamity, but to give the nation a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

That's why Paul in Romans 15:13, penned, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

The biblical God came to Elijah in his hopelessness **because HE IS THE GOD OF HOPE. HE IS THE GOD WHO COMES INTO A HOPELESS SITUATION AND CAN MAKE SOMETHING GOOD OUT OF IT. FOR GOD MAJORS IN THAT WHICH IS HOPELESS.**

THAT'S WHAT ROMANS 8:28 IS ALL ABOUT. IT'S TRUE BECAUSE OF THE CROSS, A SEEMINGLY HOPELESS SITUATION TURNED INTO A VICTORIOUS LIVING ETERNAL HOPE, FOR JESUS CHRIST DIED TO PAY THE PENALTY FOR OUR SIN, WAS BURIED, AND CONQUERED THE GRAVE BODILY. NOW HIS LIVING HOPE IS AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO TRUST IN HIM AS THEIR PERSONAL SAVIOR.

The Text continues, for there is more to come.

III. Elijah enters God's school of renewal (I Kings 19: 8-18).

Elijah went in the strength of the food he ate the second time, 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb, which was Mt Sinai, where Moses, of course received the Ten Commandments (another miracle here – that God used the food Elijah ate to give him strength to go that long before arriving at Mt. Horeb).

Mt. Horeb was about another 200 miles south of Beersheba. It would take about 14 days to walk this distance if one went directly there. So Elijah must have wandered around in the area that Israel wandered around in many years before. Of course the second generation entered the promised land under Joshua's leadership.

Forty days and 40 nights Elijah wandered around as he went to Mt. Horeb.

The saying 40 days and 40 nights is used at different times in the Bible. The flood in Noah's day was for 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:12). Moses was on the Mt Sinai 40 days and 40 nights while receiving the 10 commandments (Exodus 24:18). Israel wandered in the wilderness 40 years (Exodus 16:35). Of course our Lord fasted 40 days and 40 nights before being tempted by the evil one (Matthew 4:2).

The number 40 in Scripture has something to with the individual's waiting, and preparation, and God's testing and then a time of renewal forthcoming.

1. The journey.

We are not told what was going through Elijah's mind during the 40 days and 40 nights he was making his wandering way to Mt. Horeb. He probably was thinking about the fact that Jezebel was still after his life. He must have also been thinking about how gracious God was in providing him something to eat when he was so physically spent. He may also have been thinking about the reality that God did not condemn him whatsoever, but only ministered to his physical need.

Regardless of what the LORD had provided for him, Elijah still seemingly felt hopeless, and was still thinking about himself. He hadn't got his focus back on the Lord in his hopelessness. That may be why he was wandering around so much. He was despondent and hopeless, still thinking about himself and how awful his circumstance was.

2. The destination.

When Elijah arrived at Mt. Horeb, he found a cave. It should read, "the cave." Perhaps this was the very place that God revealed Himself in His glory to Moses many years before.

3. The encounter.

God had not left Elijah. He was with Elijah at Jezreel. He was with Elijah at Beersheba (120 miles away from Jezreel). God was now with Elijah at Mt Horeb another 200 miles away from Beersheba. Now Elijah was 320 miles away from Jezebel.

Why did Elijah go to Mt. Horeb, or Mt. Sinai? Perhaps it was because he knew that's where God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses for the nation Israel. That is where God had said there should be no idolatry. Elijah had been living among an idolatrous people who followed the idol Baal. Here he was reminded that God is God and beside Him there was no one else. Evidently, Elijah went to Mt. Sinai for a reaffirmation of his faith, for he thought that he was the only one who loved and served the Lord in Israel.

Note how God approaches Elijah.

(1) First encounter of God and Elijah (19:9-10).

**The LORD – "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

How gracious again is the LORD with Elijah. God knows why Elijah is in the cave, and He also knows Elijah's name.

**Elijah – "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

Although Elijah brings God into the picture here that he has been zealously serving HIM, he is still thinking about himself. He is the only one left in Israel who loves and serves the LORD, so he thinks.

(2) The second encounter of God and Elijah (19:11-12).

**The LORD told Elijah to go and stand on the mountain before Him.

The LORD would pass by - -

A wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks – the LORD wasn't in the wind.

An earthquake then shook the mountain – the LORD was not in the earthquake.

A fire came by – the LORD was not in the fire.

Finally, there was the sound of a gentle blowing- hearing that

**Elijah went out of the cave and stood at the entrance of the cave, and a voice came to him.

(3) The third encounter of God with Elijah (19:13-14)

**God asked Elijah again - -

What are you doing here, Elijah?"

**Elijah's answer was the same, "

"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

Elijah insisted again his commitment to the LORD in the midst of idolatry, but he was the only one left in Israel who was still committed to the LORD.

(4) God's final encounter with Elijah (19:15-18).

1. God told Elijah to do three things.

**To return to Damascus and anoint Hazael king over Aram.

This was for the purpose of destroying Baal worship in Israel.

**To anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel

**To anoint Elisha as prophet in Elijah's place.

2. God gave Elijah a wonderful reassurance.

There are 7000 in Israel who haven't bowed their knees to Baal. Elijah was told that he was not alone in loving and serving the true and living eternal god. Even though Jezebel was after him, there were others who believed like he did. What a reassurance to Elijah who thought everything was hopeless because he was the only one who stood up for God.

3. Elijah you are still useful to me.

Life, as you see it, is hopeless. But if you get back focusing on me life you are useful to me and life is full of HOPE. I am the God of power over nature, but what I really am about is restoring you to full strength physically and spiritually personally. Regardless of what has happened to you, I still love you and have work for me to do. So, let's get back to serving me filled with MY HOPE!!

What a fantastic historical account of how God helps us when we feel hopeless in life!.

Let's me try to summarize for us what God is teaching us from this dynamic passage in I Kings 19.

IV. The summary God has for us regarding His HOPE He has won for us through Jesus Christ.

1. The biblical God is the God of HOPE.

As Romans 15:13 says, "The God of HOPE fill you with all joy in believing."

That's why the Psalmist says in Psalm 39:7 – "My HOPE is in YOU" talking about the LORD.

The word hope means the anticipation and expectation that something good is going to happen. It is not I hope I hope as the world talks about. Rather, God is the HOPE of the God of a LIVING HOPE?

Why is the God of HOPE the God of a LIVING HOPE

2. God has an eternal basis for HIS HOPE.

That is why Peter pens in I Peter 1:3:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a LIVING HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

God says here that I have defeated sin, evil, the old nature, the evil one, death itself, through the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of my Son, Jesus Christ.

What does sin, evil, the old nature, the evil one, and death cause us to experience in our lives? Certainly different things, but really all of these various areas cause us to be hopeless, there is no lasting hope in this life and the life beyond when you keep trusting in your limited ideas and the various philosophies and religions of men.

But God says, "Wait! Don't live a life of hopelessness. My Son, Jesus Christ, has conquered the grave. Death has been defeated, sin can be forgiven, the evil one is defeated, the old nature is defeated, there is a LIVING HOPE in My Son, Jesus Christ."

Yes, we are born into hopelessness for we are all sinners needing God's LIVING HOPE.

How does one receive that LIVING HOPE of Jesus Christ.

3. We need to experience God's LIVING HOPE in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote this to Titus – Titus 3:5-7:

"He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the HOLY SPIRIT, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE."

The Scripture is telling us that we don't get accepted by God by our good deeds, for they are polluted with our sins, but God in His mercy provides us His cleansing, through the blood of Jesus, at the time a person accepts Christ. When a person accepts Christ, he or she is regenerated, given a new spiritual birth, given Christ's eternal life, His resurrection life

The believer in Christ is regenerated, receives the very eternal life of God, and in that new LIFE is the LIVING HOPE. For what does Paul add in Titus 3:7? The believer is an heir of God according to the HOPE of eternal life.

This is seen even more clearly in Colossians 1:27 when Paul says this about the believer in Jesus Christ. "Christ in you the HOPE OF GLORY."

But we don't just receive God's LIVING HOPE at the time we accept Christ as personal Savior.

4. We have God's Living Hope to be there for us when we think that we or our circumstances are hopeless.

Of course this is the challenge of living a life of faith with the LORD.

In the midst of our challenges, we can become like Elijah, we lose our focus on the God of HOPE and we become despondent and depressed. Sometimes, as I mentioned we may need medical help. Or we may need just physical rest.

When we lose focus, we can have feelings of shame, inferiority, passivity, loss of creativity, isolation, withdrawing from others, yes, become critical of others and circumstances, yes even envious of those who are full of hope.

But like Elijah, if we fall into hopelessness, we need to take time to get alone with the LORD and get into God's Word and let the LORD change our focus to look to HIM who is the God OF HOPE in any situation. This is God's school of renewal for us as the Lord brings a believer in his hopelessness back to being filled with God's HOPE. For whether we live or whether we die we belong to the LORD.

That's why Paul tells us in Romans 5:2 that having received an introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in the HOPE of the glory of God. Even in our challenges, Paul continues that even in all our different challenges we have HOPE, and God's HOPE does not disappoint.

That's why Psalmist (Psalm 42:5) in the midst of despair and hopelessness talked to himself, which is not a bad idea if you are feeling hopeless, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? HOPE in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence."

Note He turned from himself, as Elijah had to do, as all of us have to do in our hopelessness, and turned to the LORD who was the source of HIS HOPE.

But the Psalmist, as Elijah discovered, the LORD was there with him in the midst of his hopelessness. He was there to encourage Him on and to help Him trust in the GOD OF HOPE.

Living in the HOPE of Jesus Christ is a learning process. It's a daily deal. For we walk by faith not by sight. But in the midst of us believing that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose, we keep looking for the blessed HOPE, and glorious appearing of the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Believing in Christ, believers at conversion are giving Christ's living HOPE to help them in living for the LORD to enter into the LIVING HOPE each day in the challenges of life, aware that that HOPE could become a lasting reality in God's presence when the LORD returns in the air.

Yes, our HOPE is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. YES, the Lord Jesus Christ is the believer's HOPE. He is the anchor of the soul. No matter what the believer experiences. Jesus Christ is the believer's eternal HOPE.

Perhaps God may give you an opportunity to minister to someone this week who needs the LORD's hope. Listen, refrain from any accusations, and offer the Lord's help as the Spirit leads. Perhaps, you may even know someone who needs a meal, a touch of the Lord on his or her life.

Paul says that God comforts us so that we can comfort others. We are encouraged by the LORD to be hopeful so we can minister to others who think life is hopeless.

Thank the LORD that He is the GOD OF HOPE!!

It's not hopeless around here.

Rather, with the LORD present HIS HOPE REIGNS THROUGH THE BELIEVER IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE GLORY OF GOD!!