

Ready to Give Up?

✠ **the big let-down (vv.3-5)**

✠ **new life in the LORD (vv.6-8)**

In the name of Jesus, the Angel of the LORD, dearly redeemed servants of God:

Something was really bothering Elijah! Can you believe he wants to die? So deep in depression, what kind of prayer is this for a prophet? ***“Enough, LORD....Take my life; I am no better than my fathers.” Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.*** Elijah foreshadowed ***“the spirit and power”*** (Luke 1:17) of John the Baptist, Jesus forerunner! Elijah was the most heroic prophet next to Moses!

Some downward spirals take a while. Sometimes a pointing finger can burst our bubble. But this is a strange part of our human condition. On the outside looking in, let’s say with a sales clerk lacking people skills, we rarely ask, “Could she be having a bad day?” It’s more like: “What’s her problem?” Americans in particular will look at someone down in the dumps like Elijah and either go sunny with Polly Anna: “Oh, it will get better...,” or descend like a drill sergeant, “Buck up, soldier!” Elijah had that Type-A personality of Paul: *The harder you push, the harder the push-back.* But not here. Something’s wrong. Could it really be that one of the strongest servants of God is **Ready to Give Up?**

✠ **the big let-down (vv.3-5)**

If you look at events leading up to the worst day of Elijah’s life, it’s even more strange to see **the big let-down**. There were at least seven miracles proving God’s power for this man whose name means *“My God is Yahweh.”* He appears out of nowhere to tell wicked King Ahab, ***“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”*** (1 Kings 17:1 NIV84) Guess what? No rain! To hide Elijah the LORD commanded the ravens to bring him bread and meat morning and evening. (17:6) When the brook dried up, the LORD sent him out of the country to Zarephath of Sidon and said, ***“I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.”*** (17:9) A destitute widow, of all people! But her tiny supply of flour and oil never ran dry, feeding her and her son and Elijah until the rain came again. And when her little boy died, God enabled Elijah to raise him from the dead. ***“Now I know that you are a man of God,”*** said the joyful widow, ***“and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”*** (17:24) God’s Word always comes true.

Elijah’s main miracle our kids can remember from Sunday School: the big showdown against the prophets of Baal. 450 of them ranting and raving, dancing and cutting themselves all day long, but the fire never came down from heaven for their sacrifice. ***“Shout louder!”*** Elijah taunted them. ***“Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened...But no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.”*** God is always in control.

Remember how Elijah made sure this miracle was no accident? No spontaneous combustion here! Four large water jars he had filled and dumped three times, twelve more reasons to believe God heard his evening prayer: ***At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”*** (18:36–39) 450 false prophets all executed. Heavy rain fell as Elijah prayed. King Ahab now seemed more like an ally as a victorious Elijah ran fifteen miles in front of Ahab’s chariot all the way back to Jezreel. And that may give some of you a clue about **the big let-down**.

Everything was cool with the king, but not with his wife. If I say her name, you'll know why. You can say it sweetly, but not discretely: *Jezebel*. With a name like that it's got to be bad. Her gross idolatry was shattered, and she demanded vengeance on the man responsible. *Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."* (19:2) Who could blame Elijah? He ran for his life....

For most of us **the big let-down** is not so dramatic. But part of what bothers me when I feel that way is how little reason I have to be down in the dumps. It's not just the blessings of the land where we live. How can it be that during one of our worst economic depressions the main health problem on everybody's mind seems to be obesity? But "comfort food" can't calm my whining heart. I've never experienced a drought of three years with no rain. Never had a day with there literally was no food in the house – or no money to go buy some. God has given us healthy children and grandchildren. We've been privileged to worship the LORD together for nearly a quarter century. I could go on and on with reasons to be thankful. But don't all of us have to admit that some days it seems our happiness was as durable as a soap bubble kids chase across the lawn? One bony finger, one careless comment and, oops....

✠ **new life in the LORD (vv.6-8)**

Do you know why God spends so much time on stories like Elijah? Why do you care so much about your kids? Why is it that when someone you love is suffering, you would gladly trade places rather than see them suffer? God wants you to see through Elijah how much He cares for you. He wants you to know what He said through another prophet Jeremiah: *"For men are not cast off by the LORD forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men."* (Lamentations 3:31–33 NIV84) He wants us to learn through trials and tribulations how sincere His love for us really is. It's in the valleys that we grow. Down there where the sun won't shine, our Best Friend comes looking to give us **new life in the LORD**.

It happens so simply, maybe you don't notice. Elijah's trauma drove him hundreds of miles from home on foot. But it's the spiritual fatigue that's eating him. That's why his bedtime prayer is to die. But God's tender loving care is "to die for" – as with His own Son Jesus tempted in the desert. No sappy songs. No strict drill sergeant. *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.* Did you ever think God could be so patient that He would wait for you? Did you ever cradle a sick child in your arms, hoping and praying he'd get better? Then *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."* Tender, loving care from God! Elijah traveled hundreds more miles to the mountain where the same LORD God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses in another fast of 40 days and 40 nights.

Will it ever come to this in our land? Rulers hunting God's people like Jezebel after Elijah? Perhaps. But this we know for sure: God will always be with His people to care for us, watch over us, and lead us home to glory. And now when we may someday look back and say, "These are the good old days," God will help us in our sadness, even if no one understands, even if sometimes we don't understand ourselves. God will give His tasty food, His water of life Word and the body and blood of our Lord in the Holy Supper of forgiving grace. Treasure these gifts as God feeds you so tenderly, so freely.

Daily *Meditations* books are in your mailboxes. We have extra copies for visitors and loved ones. Help us get them to hurting hearts. CDs of Pastor Patterson's sermons have blessed my soul too, and in that way *A Reason for Hope* has been a blessing to you. On our website you can find sermon themes to match your every need. Sometimes God's grace is so surprising. This week after giving Communion to a member shut-in, Charlotte Warnest showed me a copy of my sermon at her husband's funeral almost four years ago. I asked if she wanted me to read Gus' sermon to her. I didn't remember what I wrote, but it was hard not to choke up. The testimony of Gus' life in that Word of God was exactly what I needed now. How gracious our God! How sincere His love shines through His cross and empty tomb. He says for Jesus' sake: *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:6f) Amen.

For the study behind this sermon or for copies email m.cordes@comast.net .
You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife .

New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126