

Oct 24th 2010: Reason why I still believe Series: Elijah: 1 Kings 19:1-18
"The Voice That Penetrates"

When that mine collapsed in Chille, and 33 men were trapped underground, God had his man already in place. Jose Hendriques has become known as 'the evangelist'. A 56 year old believer, he encouraged the other trapped men to trust in God, and he was the one who asked for 33 bibles to be sent down to the men.

The presidential chaplain Rev. Alfredo Cooper, after the rescue drew attention to a little-reported fact: 'Many of the miners went down as atheists or unbelievers or semi-believers and they have come up to a man testifying that they were not 33 but that there were 34 down there – that Jesus was there with them and that they had a constant sense of his presence and guidance.'

A tough assignment given by God to a tough man, and it reminded me a little of the tough assignment that God gave to His prophet Elijah.

You see God's chosen people had got themselves into this huge mess. Separated by civil war into the two nations of Judah and Israel they had become a people who were moving steadily away from their commitment to God, and this was especially the case with the Nation of Israel. Ahab the king had married a foreign queen called Jezebel, who actively supported the religion of Baal and had set out to destroy the worship of Jehovah in the land. She had killed many hundreds of the Lord's prophets and would have wiped out those that remained but for the bravery of people like Obadiah, who hid and fed 100 prophets in two caves, away from her murderous intent.

Into such a dangerous situation God sent His servant Elijah with perhaps the toughest assignment ever. For his job was to let God's errant people know that God still existed in might and power and that He was very displeased with their behaviour. Not the type of assignment most of us would volunteer for!

Yet Elijah reveled in it. He fronted up to king Ahab straightaway and told him that there would be this major drought that wouldn't end till he said so, and it was all because they had gone against God. Then later on he challenged 450 prophets of Baal to the ultimate 'burnt offering challenge' on the top of Mount Carmel. The champion would be the one who offered a burnt sacrifice to their God without using fire. The losers would perish. God and his prophet

won the day. After this Elijah prayed for rain and it came and he won a foot race against the chariot of the king.

Along the way God honoured Elijah's trust by feeding him from the beaks of some ravens. Made the oil in the widow's jug keep on flowing and the flour in her pot to keep on multiplying at Elijah's word, so that they both had food during a time of famine. And He enabled Elijah to raise a child from the dead. God cause the people to respect Elijah and the king to fear him. Elijah was a winner for God in a land of losers. He had such a strong and powerful presence about him, and he was so bold in his faith because of the strength of the trust he had in God.

Then after his greatest victory ever for God there on Mount Carmel, and because of the threat of a woman, he crumbled. Miserable, depressed, suicidal, we read this about Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-5

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. 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.

It doesn't sound like the same ultra bold Elijah that we have just heard about, does it??

Here he is fresh from this mighty experience where he, along with all the people, had seen just how powerful God was. The Queen's power base made up of all these prophets of Baal had been decimated. In reality her threat lacked the power it would have had before her 450 prophets had been killed. On top of that the king was scared of Elijah. King Ahab had seen the fire come down. He had heard the noise of support from the people when they cried out, "The Lord He is God"—he was in no mood to pursue Elijah. Yet here we discover Elijah completely downcast, because, it seems to me, he has fallen victim to the terrible darkness of depression—a sickness that can bring low the strong, the weak, or the in betweens.

Today in Australia depression is recognized as a serious health issue:-

- **One in four women and one in six men will suffer from depression at some stage in their lives.**

- **Each year, almost 800,000 Australian adults will experience a depressive illness.**
- **In 2001, Australian GPs reported depression as the fourth most common illness that they dealt with in their practices.**
- **The World Health Organisation (WHO) has predicted that by 2020, depression will be the second biggest health problem world-wide, behind heart disease.**

Of course there are many symptoms of depression, but with Elijah in mind consider the ones that relate to feelings:-

- ***Hopelessness and helplessness***
- ***Unhappiness and loss of confidence***
- ***Tension and anxiety***
- ***Irritability, anger or fear***

We can see them all in Elijah, but the most wonderful thing is that God saw them too, and He cared.

He didn't upbraid Elijah or chastise him. Neither did he tell him to 'pull himself together' and to start acting like a prophet again. Instead He sent an angel to feed him and to make sure he got a good sleep.

And that is so interesting, because two of the best things for depression, with or without medication, is rest and a good diet. I'm not too sure what was in that loaf of bread the angel gave Elijah but there's no doubt God knows how to treat depression.

Another good thing that helps the depressed person is exercise. And we are told that when the angel came back a second time: 1 Kings 19:7

"He touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."

It seems that God wanted Elijah to travel by foot for 40 days and nights till he reached Horeb, the very special mountain of God. Plenty of time for Elijah to be rested from the stress of ministry and to exercise.

Then of course one of the best helps for depression is the ability to talk it through with someone who can help you. Talk to your doctor, Pastor/Counsellor, or a friend. And it's at Mount Horeb we find God

encouraging Elijah to talk it through. Notice in 1 Kings 19:9 the open-ended question that God directs at Elijah:

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

It was a question that opened the flood gates for Elijah. There in that cave he was able to express out loud exactly what he had been feelings. All the stuff that had been churning within his mind and his heart. .v10...(CEV)

10He answered, "LORD God All-Powerful, I've always done my best to obey you. But your people have broken their solemn promise to you. They have torn down your altars and killed all your prophets, except me. And now they are even trying to kill me!"

And God's response is so beautiful. He says to Elijah in verse 11(CEV)

11"Go out and stand on the mountain," the LORD replied. "I want you to see me when I pass by."

And it seems that Elijah at first, doesn't move. There is this great wind, earthquake, fire, but the Lord is not in them. And Elijah knows it. He knows that God is all those things. He is great and mighty and powerful. But that is not the character of God that Elijah needs to relate too at that moment in time. And God knows that. So when God does appear it is in the sound of a gentle whisper.

It is then Elijah comes forth from the cave, his face covered as he stands in awe before Almighty God who has come to whisper his name.

And God asks again that very same question:- "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And it used to puzzle me that Elijah gave the very same response, until I realized that Elijah is in a counseling session here with the ultimate Counsellor.

And in speaking back the same words to God, Elijah is now able to see all his concerns in a different way. To see them from the new perspective that having heard the voice of Almighty God whisper in one's heart and mind, gives you.

Then God speaks again, and gives Elijah insight into the current situation in Israel. That he is far from alone—things are nowhere near as bad as he thinks. That there are still 7,000 faithful believers like him out there.

After that He tells Elijah that He still has a job to do for the Lord. That Elijah is needed. Has a purpose to fulfill.

Then finally the Lord lets him know that the Lord has prepared a friend to walk alongside Elijah. One who would continue the work that Elijah had started.

And now as Elijah walks away we note a freshness in his step. His healing has begun....the process of recovery has commenced.

A fascinating and wonderful story indeed, and the one, I believe, that Elijah would make reference to if we were to ask him that question we have already put to Abraham and Job. "Elijah, why are you still a follower of God?"

With all the experiences in his life that Elijah could have made mention of, I reckon he would reply:- "I am still a follower of Almighty God because when I was down and just about out, He whispered into my heart".

What a precious experience that would have been for Elijah, and what a blessed experience it still is for us. Because God speaks directly to our hearts too. All we need to do is to seek Him out and listen.

I was reading on Friday a devotion by Selwyn Hughes who, in talking about the revival that God loves to bring about in our hearts, passed on the following definition of revival:-by **Christmas Evans**

"Revival is God bending down to the dying embers of a fire just about to go out and breathing into it until it bursts once again into flame."

Wherever you are in your walk with God, He is with you. But maybe today you especially need to hear Him as he quietly whispers your name. There is no other God who cares for you as He does, and none other who has stooped so low to lift you so high. Turn to Him anew this morning and speak the words that young Samuel spoke so many centuries ago when he called out to God and said:- 1 Samuel 3:8

"Speak, for your servant is listening."

