

“DEALING WITH SETBACKS”

1 Kings 17;1-26

INTRODUCTION

*Many of you have heard the story of New Life Church, Col. Springs, CO

1. *“The future never seemed more uncertain...”*
“I thought we were done...”
“My faith was at an all time low...”
“I was convinced we would not recover from this...”

*I was struck by those phrases

2. Have you ever found yourself thinking those thoughts? Just about everybody has those thoughts. We’ve all faced setbacks, difficulties and challenges that felt overwhelming.

Eg. Maybe that’s one of the reasons why superheroes appeal to us so much as children, and even as adults. We’d love to have the powers of Superman to leap tall buildings in a single bound or the power of Batman to overcome the forces of evil around us, or some other superhero’s powers to overcome the forces of darkness.

Of course, most of all we’d love the abilities of “Pastorman.” You’ve heard about “Pastorman”...he preaches exactly 15 minutes. He condemns sin, but never embarrasses anyone. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight and he’s also the janitor.

He is 28 years old and has been preaching for 25 years. He loves to work with teenagers and spends

countless hours with senior citizens. It’s amazing what you can do with powerpoint!

Well, you get the idea. We’d all like to have super-human powers to conquer the setbacks of our lives.

4. The truth is, we tend to view the characters of the Bible a bit like superheroes. It’s easy to think that the characters of the Bible who had some special access to God in a way we don’t. But that’s not true.

That’s why...

Today, we start a new series on the life of Elijah. In James 5:17, it says t Elijah was *“a man just like us.”* Elijah was an ordinary man. The men and women of the Bible faced fear, depression and failure. They succumbed to greed, lust and relational conflicts. Many of them experienced periods of great faith followed colossal failure.

So, when we come to the life of Elijah, we discover a man who was just like us.

5. Now, Elijah lived during a time of terrible leadership in Israel. The nation experienced 19 consecutive kings who did evil in the eyes of God over a span of 200 years. It wasn’t just a matter of irresponsible leadership during Elijah’s day... it was evil leadership. And the man who was king when Elijah appeared on the scene of human history was the worst king in that sequence. His name was Ahab. The Bible says in 1 Kings 16:30:

[Ahab] *“did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.”*

King Ahab had married an evil woman named, Jezebel from Sidon Coast of Lebanon. Somebody called Jezebel the original *“desperate housewife.”* Together, Ahab and Jezebel led the Nation of Israel into horrible idolatry

worshipping the gods of Baal and Asherah. Ahab and Jezebel promoted prostitution as a part of this ideology. They even advocated the sacrifice of children as a form of worship. It was a horrible time in Israel. The society was in shambles.

6. But when God decided to work, He didn't raise up an army. He raised up one man who would take a stand in that culture for God. That one man was Elijah.

He might want to do that with you. He might want you to be a student who stands for sexual purity in your high school. He might want you to be a parent who will stand against the immoral behavior of other parents. He might want you to stand in your office against the unethical practices that are happening there.

Now, you'd think if God chose Elijah as He faced a number of major setbacks along the way, He'd make it easy for him. But that wasn't the case. We pick up Elijah's story in 1 Kings 17.

If you have a copy of the Scriptures why don't you turn there with me? This morning we want to glean four important lessons from the life of Elijah that help us to deal with our own setbacks in life. We launch this new series called, “*Just Like Me*” from the life of Elijah. When we come to this chapter, Elijah explodes on the scene. He has no introduction. He's not appeared anywhere else in Scripture. He simply emerges as a man on his way to see King Ahab.

In the ancient world, just as today, rain was essential to life. It mattered more than electricity matters to us. Without rain, the people couldn't grow crops. They couldn't feed themselves. They wouldn't survive.

That's why Baal, the Canaanite god of rain, so tempting to these people. Whenever a drought occurred, it was easy for them to give up worshipping the true God and turn to the god of rain, Baal.

So, God sent Elijah to say, “*Do you want to meet the god of rain? I'll show you the god of rain! Do you want to know who really is in charge of the weather? Meet the God of heaven!*”

And for 3 ½ years, not a drop of rain fell in Israel. The land turned into the dustbowl of the ancient world. Eventually, the people repented and gave up their worship of Baal. The wicked regime of Ahab and Jezebel was crushed and the nation was saved.

But along the way, Elijah didn't have an easy ride. Even though he was God's man for the job, he experienced setbacks, adversity and difficulties that challenged his faith. If you've ever walked in those shoes, this morning is especially for you, because the great lesson we learn from Elijah's experience is ...

❖ Our faith is forged in the setbacks of life.

From Elijah's experience, I want to draw some lessons that will help us understand how that happens. First, I want you to see the value of...

1. **DELIBERATE DEPENDENCE ON GOD**

Let's pick up the story in 1 Kings 17:1-6:

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to 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.’”

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ‘Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.’

So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there.

The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook” (1 Kings 17:1-6).

Now, think about this for a minute: God had chosen Elijah to confront the king. He’d given Elijah a very specific message. You’d think if God had chosen Elijah, God would make it easy for him to do his job. Wrong!

In verse 2, we’re told that God tells Elijah to “*hide in the Kerith Ravine east of the Jordan.*” That word, “Kerith,” means “cut down” or “cut off”. It’s the word that’s used for cutting down a tree.

It’s as if God is saying to Elijah, “*I’m going to allow you to be cut down for a while so you can learn some things you wouldn’t learn any other way. I’m going to allow you to walk through some deep waters. I’m going to do something in you so that later on I can do something through you.*”

Does this sound familiar? Some in this room feel like you’ve done the right things, made the right choices and lived the right kind of life only to experience setbacks and heartaches. It’s easy to ask in those moments: “*Where is God in all this?*”

Some of you are saying, “*Bob, that’s me. I feel like I’m going through a ravine. I’m facing a setback. I’ve lost my job. I am facing a health crisis. I’ve experienced financial*

loss. I’ve got a family problem. Nothing feels right about this.”

If you know Mike and Emily McCaman-you know that’s what they’ve experienced.

Times when it doesn’t seem fair!

Now, I don’t believe God causes the pain in our lives. But, I do believe He can use the pain in us to prepare us for something better. He allows us to go through setbacks and heartaches so He can do something even more special through us later on. *Great Classes-Bridgeworks, Divorce Care, Grief Share

If that’s going to happen, the first lesson we have to learn is one of total dependence on God.

God provided water from the brook during a time of drought. He provided food from ravens for Elijah to eat. I want to remind you that ravens are scavengers. They come when things are dying.

Eg. One of the men in our church has innocently attracted some turkey vultures to his yard. Every day in the good weather, he walks outside and sees these turkey buzzards. He can’t get rid of them!

Now those are nasty looking animals. Those birds are attracted to things that are dying. How would you like to have them staring at you every day?

That’s kind of the way it was with Elijah. God used scavenger birds to bring him food. Talk about irony!

I’m reminded of the man who said,

“When you discover that all you have is God, you realize that God is all you need.”

Paul says it like this to the Philippians:

“My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

For some of you in this room, you are walking through a deep ravine right now. Perhaps God has your attention like He never had before. He wants your complete and total dependence on Him. He wants you to turn to Him in faith, receive His forgiveness in Christ, and allow Him to direct every facet of your life if you’ve never done that.

The first lesson we learn from Elijah’s experience is one of deliberate dependence on God. But there is a second lesson we learn from Elijah’s story. It’s the lesson of...

2. DAILY PROVISION BY GOD

Let’s pick up the story in verse 9: God says to Elijah

“Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.’ So he went to Zarephath.

When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, ‘Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?’

As she was going to get it, he called, ‘And bring me, please, a piece of bread.’

‘As surely as the LORD your God lives,’ she replied, ‘I don’t have any bread - only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug.

I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it - and die” (1 Kings 17:9-12).

The brook dried up, so God told Elijah to go to Zarephath of Sidon. Most us don’t have a clue where that is, but do you know who else was from Sidon? It was Jezebel, the queen.

This is remarkable. God doesn’t send Elijah to the house of royalty, He sends him to the poorest and most vulnerable member of that society – a widow. She was the last person who could help.

God takes Elijah from the place where he was safe in the Kerith Ravine and puts him right under the nose of his enemies in the house of a woman who doesn’t have a job and is about to starve to death. Does that make any sense?

If you lost your job and were on the verge of losing your house, would you go to a homeless man and ask for help? I doubt it. But that’s what God wanted Elijah to do. Remember this... just because you don’t understand what God is doing - God could still be working in your life to accomplish something in you so that later He’ll be able to do something through you.

The promise of the Bible is always that God will provide for our needs today. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:

“Give us today our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11).

In other words, God wants us to trust Him with what we need for today.

❖ Yet, many of us tend to live in the future.

Eg. Here's how this works: Today is February 7th. Many of us in this room have a concern about what's going to happen tomorrow. So, we spend all day today being worried about what's going to happen tomorrow. Or, maybe we have a concern about something that's going to happen next week or next month or next year. We tend to lose today because we live in the future worrying about the future.

Listen, God knows that's our tendency!

The Bible says,

“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

We lose the joy and the privilege today because we're worried about tomorrow.

Paul said it like this in Philippians:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

So, if I'm going to deal with the setbacks of life, I have to learn deliberate dependence on God and then the daily provision from God. Also, I must learn the lesson of...

3. DEDICATED GENEROSITY TO GOD

Let's read on in the story:

“Elijah said to her, ‘Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land’” (1 Kings 17:13-14).

Let me ask you a question: *“If you were that widow, what would you have said to Elijah?”*

I think I might have said,

❖ *“God, I think I'll have You go first...*

Elijah, you tell God to fill up the flour jug, and fill up the oil jar, and then I'll fix you something.”

But, God was asking the widow to do the same thing He asks you and me to do. His question simply was: *“Will you trust Me now to use what you have?”*

That's a basic truth. If I won't trust God with what I have, I won't trust Him when I get more. Getting more never builds more trust.

But let's read on. One of the most amazing statements comes next. Look at verse 15:

“She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family” (1 Kings 17:15).

Imagine the drama for a moment. This woman is a widow. Her son depends on her. She takes whatever flour and oil she has and dumps it out.

She's supposed to make a meal for Elijah with what she has left. I think I would have been tempted to make a cracker. She makes a meal and has nothing left. If God doesn't act, she and her son are dead!

Now look at verse 16:

“For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:16).

Every morning, God filled up the jar. One day at a time, God supplied her needs.

Who would have guessed that such reckless generosity would have resulted in this?

I want to pause here just for a moment. How are you doing with the dedicated generosity issue? Do you faithfully give from what God has given you? Are you responsive to the needs of people around you? Perhaps there is no greater example in the Bible of dedicated generosity than the story of two widows. This is one of the widows. The other one is mentioned by Jesus, in Luke 21.

“He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth,’ He said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others.

All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on”
(Luke 21:2-4).

Do you understand that God uses our possessions to show us who we are. The way we handle our money and our possessions will reveal our hearts.

Eg. Fred Smith said it like this:

“God gives us money to test us, as you give a toy to a child to prepare him to handle things of greater value later.”

The setbacks of life teach us about deliberate dependence on God, the daily provision of God and dedicated generosity to God. But there is one more lesson that setbacks provide for us. And that's the lesson of...

4. DIVINE INTERVENTION

Let's read the rest of the story starting in verse 17:

“Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.

She said to Elijah, ‘What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?’

‘Give me your son,’ Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.

Then he cried out to the LORD, ‘O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?’

Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, ‘O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!’

The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house.

He gave him to his mother and said, ‘Look, your son is alive!’

Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth’” (1 Kings 17:17-24).

As far as we know, this is the first time in the Bible somebody was raised from the dead. Apparently, Elijah trusted God to do what had never been done before because he had seen God provide for him in the Kerith Ravine and through the generosity of a widow who didn’t have anything.

Do you understand today that God is still in the business of raising dead things? He is in the business of raising dead marriages, dead careers, dead hearts, dead hopes and dead dreams!

The darkest three days of human history occurred when the forces of Evil struck down the Son of God on a cross 2,000 years ago. For three long days, Jesus was in the tomb.

But, the God of heaven, who specializes in raising dead things to life, brought His Son from the grave to conquer sin for all time. –He invites us to place our faith in Him!

Do you understand that God does some of His best work in ravines and during times of setbacks?

God is in the business of raising dead things, and when He raises something dead in your life, you know it!

Then, you’ll be able to understand that God allows setbacks so He can do something powerful in you, so that later He can accomplish something marvelous through you.

There is a reason for the setbacks God has allowed in your life.

CONCLUSION

1. I want to remind you of one final verse that many of you could quote. Paul says it like this in Romans 8:28:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

❖ How am I responding to the setbacks in my life?