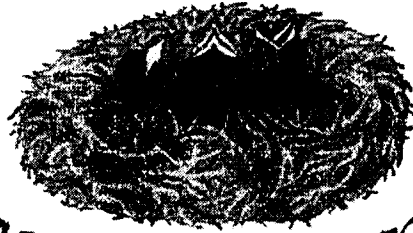


They shall mount up...

ON EAGLES' WINGS



AERY NUGGETS

...with wings of eagles.

Isaiah 40:31

October / November 2010

The Juniper Tree

1 Kings 19: 1-8

Steven J. Faulkner

In chapter 19 of the book of 1 Kings, we read about a very surprising development in the life of an obedient servant of God. Elijah was God's man for the time. He had been a man of prayer during Israel's years of spiritual decline, and God had prepared this prayerful servant to be used in mighty ways to testify of the LORD before Israel. Because of Elijah's faithfulness in prayer, God had closed off the heavenly storehouses of rain, and the result was a drought and subsequent famine that would last three and a half years, the purpose of which was to turn the hearts of the people of Israel back to their God. This faithful servant of God had boldly proclaimed the message of this drought before King Ahab, then had learned the lessons of dependence and faith out in the wilderness and at the distant village of Zarephath, where God had protected him from the king's wrath and had demonstrated His mighty power to save and to sustain life. Then, at the command of the LORD, Elijah had gone once again before Ahab, and had stood before the forces of darkness assembled at Carmel. There, he had proclaimed the God of Israel in the powerful testimony of the fire from heaven which consumed the offering, and this had led to the slaughter of all of the prophets of Baal. But now, in the aftermath of such a mighty victory, we see this man of God running away before the face of the angry queen Jezebel, to a desolate place in the wilderness south of Beersheba over a hundred miles from where God had originally sent him. Here, the mighty man of God sat beneath a juniper tree all by himself, discouraged and disheartened, weary of life and asking to die. Who could have predicted such a turn of events? We read in verses 1-

4: "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

It is a little surprising, don't you think, that this man of God should have such an illustrious career of service, only to be plunged into such a state of discouragement and soul weariness? But, this is what can happen to the child of God if our eye is taken off the Lord and we focus instead on the situation around us. Consider Peter as he stepped from the ship on that stormy sea in Matthew 14:22-33. Peter's focus on the Lord was distracted by the fury of the storm around him. Perhaps as he got further from the ship, he became uneasy with the sea boiling beneath his feet, or the wind whipping spray in his face, or perhaps he heard the sounds of the ship behind him being lashed about by the boisterous wind. In any case, he momentarily forgot that he was following the direction of the Lord Himself who was there right in front of him

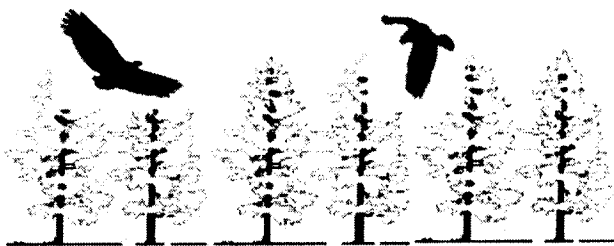




on that sea. Suddenly, the wind and the waves became more real to him than the Lord who was before him, and he

began to sink. Still, it was just at such a time that the Lord Jesus reached out to help His fearful disciple, and He brought him up from the boiling sea and delivered him safely to the ship.

Similarly, it would appear that Elijah momentarily took his eyes off of God who had commissioned him and had equipped him for this present service before Ahab. Running away from the wrath of Jezebel, Elijah had sought a secluded spot under this juniper tree, far, far away from all his troubles, and there he simply sat down and gave up. This is a sad state for any child of God to be in, wouldn't you agree? And yet, how often we find ourselves in just such a place of discouragement and self pity after experiencing trials and challenges in our lives. Have you sought to hide away under such a juniper tree? Perhaps you have experienced a spiritual victory, only to find that it is followed by some challenge that seems threatening in the extreme, and which makes you want to run away and give up. Such times can try the soul! But, my dear friend, if you are a Christian, do not be surprised when you are challenged as you walk through this fallen world. I believe that our adversary, the devil, seeks to discourage Christians at every turn. His purpose is to resist the spreading of the Gospel and the testimony of the church in this world, and I believe that Satan uses demonic activity to accomplish these very results wherever possible. Remember the words of Ephesians 6, verses 10-13: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."



While it may be sad to find Elijah, the mighty man of God, under the juniper tree in such a disheartened state in 1 Kings 19, I find much encouragement in God's loving and gracious response in verses 5-8, "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

My dear friend, sometimes we too become weary and are ready to give up, and at times like this, we can become absorbed with our own failure and weakness, and we can begin to think that God can no longer use us or that He is setting us aside. But, I do not believe that God casts His obedient servants aside when they fail. God was clearly not finished with Elijah—He had plans for him yet. If God had been through with Elijah, He might have simply left him to languish in self-pity under that tree; but instead, with loving kindness toward his battle weary servant, He sent His angel to minister rest and nourishment, just the things needed to put this child of God back on his feet in order to get him ready for the work that still lay ahead of him. My dear friend, the same gracious God who did not cast aside, but rather strengthened His servant Elijah, has His eye on you just now: "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry," (Psalm 34:15). Perhaps, as in the example above of Peter in the waves, you can see the loving hand of the Lord Jesus reaching out to you just now, ready to lift you out of the troubled waters to safety. That same Lord Jesus is just a prayer away: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," (Hebrews 4:16).

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