

Victory! Complete and total victory! After everything that had happened, there's no way anyone there could deny that the Lord is God. 450 of Baal's prophets danced and shouted and cut themselves for hours and couldn't get a single spark to appear to light some wood. Then, a single prophet of the Lord calls quietly on his name and the fire of the Lord consumed not only the bull, but also the water-soaked altar, and even the water in the trench around it. It was no contest. And when Elijah ordered that the 450 prophets of Baal be put to death, there was no argument from the people. The prophets were put to death. Yes, the showdown at Mount Carmel is probably one of the most impressive events in Old Testament history. The Lord unquestionably demonstrates that he is the only God. And Elijah, after years of service was finally starting to see what he had been waiting for; the nation of Israel returning to worship the true God.

You see, ever since King Ahab came to the throne and promoted nothing but false gods and Baal worship, God had placed Israel under a drought. That drought was not to end until God said so, through his prophet Elijah. Now that the showdown at Mount Carmel was over, Elijah prayed for rain and the prayer was answered. This was even further proof King Ahab's reign was about to end and the people would return to the true God. And so Elijah ran all the way back to Jezreel and waited for the good news to pour in about the spiritual resurgence in the land.

Meanwhile, King Ahab got back to the palace and told his wife Queen Jezebel what had just happened. Now, there's no two ways about it, Ahab was kind of weak king, and it was really his wife Jezebel who wore the pants in the family. So, her response to the events? She sent a messenger straight to Elijah that said, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one of those prophets." The first part of that statement was a common oath form used at the time, and the content of her oath, if you can trip your way around her grammar, she was saying in essence, "in 24 hours you're dead." So, here's Elijah, waiting to be handed the keys to the city and everyone fall down and say, "you're right, we were wrong"... and instead he gets a death threat. Let's take a look at how he reacted... <read text 1 Kings 19:3-8>.

Elijah was terrified! He ran clear out of Israel and into Judea and didn't stop until he got to Beersheba, which is in the southernmost edge of Judea. There, he slowed down long enough to leave his servant behind, and he kept on going into the desert... the same desert that the Israelites had wandered in for 40 years with Moses. After about a day's worth of walking into the desert he collapsed under a broom tree. (What's a broom tree? Think something similar to a palm tree and you've probably got a good idea of what this was like.) This was a single broom tree in the middle of nowhere, making it quite clear that this was a very miserable place to be. And here Elijah asks to die. "I've had enough, Lord," he says, "take my life, I am no better than my fathers." Now, here when Elijah says, "I've had enough" a better translation is perhaps, "it's too much for me Lord."

Have you ever felt like Elijah? I'm fairly certain most of us have. Sometimes it's external forces that seem to keep piling up against us. The weight and worry of our responsibilities in this world try to drag us down. Our own bodies fail us, and we can't live up to the standards we often set for ourselves. As we struggle with fulfilling our obligations and keeping to the right course, we constantly let ourselves and others down as the sin within us gets the better of us. And that's to say nothing of the situations where we've done nothing wrong and yet nothing comes out right for us anyway, just like Elijah here. We get sick to our soul and just want it all to end. All we can seem to focus on is how badly we failed. We feel overwhelmed and we too cry out, "it's too much for me Lord! I can't handle it anymore!"

Guess what? It is too much for you.

It's too much for you and it was too much for Elijah. Look at what happened to Elijah next. An angel appeared there and prodded him awake. "Get up," the angel said, "and eat". Elijah looked around and saw that right there by his head was a bread-cake that was still warm and a jug of water. He ate and he drank and went back to sleep. A second time the angel came and woke him up. "Get up," he said again, "and eat, for the journey is too much for you."

The journey is too much for you...that same word in the Hebrew crops up again. The word Elijah had just used to describe his own predicament. The angel says that yeah, it is too much. That is completely contrary to what we would expect, isn't it? Imagine if Elijah showed up on your doorstep all worn out like this one night, poured out his heart to you and looked at you expectantly. What would you come at him with? "Come on Elijah, you're a pretty good guy. Rise above it...you can do it. This stuff isn't your fault. You got a few more rounds left in you! Don't give up now, get back to it!" But does God send him any of that advice? No. He says, "The journey is too much for you." Now, how is that supposed to get Elijah up off his duff and get him going again? How would you like that? Imagine you're in pain, you're hurting from just trial after trial after trial. Imagine losing your job and your house all in one day and when you talk to your best friend about it he tells you there's no way you could possibly pull your life back together.

It doesn't seem like the nice thing to do, but God was teaching a valuable lesson to Elijah here. The journey was indeed too much for him. But it's not too much for God. Elijah, who had been fed miraculously by ravens, who had lived with a widow whose flour and oil never ran out and whose dead son had been raised to life, Elijah who had just witnessed the awesome power of God on top of Mount Carmel had forgotten that God was his power and that God was in control. And you know what? On the strength of that one meal in the middle of nowhere Elijah was able to last 40 days and 40 nights in the desert wilderness of Sinai until he came to the mountain of God.

Not a single one of us who is being honest can say they've fared better than Elijah at times like this. We've all had our moments of despair, our times of introspective navel-gazing. We sit and moan "Woe is me!" until we're blue in the face because of something we've failed in or some way we've messed things up. And it is at these times that we forget the power of our God. We forget that he has taken us miserable sinners and made us his own. And now think about this, what is it when we're saying, "I can't do it anymore"? What's really behind the attitude of "This is too much for me"? You know that God is in our lives and works in them. By telling God that it's too much for you, what are you doing but telling God that *he's* messed up! He's either burdened you beyond what you can bear or he's not doing his job helping you enough. That very accusation alone should be enough to make God turn his back on us and say, "fine, see how you like handling it on your own." For those thoughts of despair and self-pity, accusing God of failure to care for us properly...we deserve for God to leave us to our fate and be cast into damnation.

But God doesn't work that way. He didn't say to Elijah, "fine, go and wander in the desert until you're dead then." And he doesn't treat us that way either. Yes, we don't usually have an angel show up and give us bread, but we have something far better than that. We have the words and works of Jesus, the son of God, which has been communicated to us directly. Jesus came to this world and lived that perfectly life we could not and died the death we deserved, and in doing so has freed us. Faith has been created in our hearts and we are recipients of his promise of heaven.

So now, when we are at our worst, when we are doing nothing but crying out against God and bemoaning how awful our fate is, only looking down at our feet, God comes to us and says, "look up!" Whether it's a friend or just a fellow believer who urges us to look to God for the answer or whether it's hearing the word on a Sunday morning or wherever it comes from, our God comes to us when we need it most and he feeds us. He feeds us with his Word so that we may take comfort in all his promises. He *has* promised not to let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. He *has* promised to be with us always to the very end of the age, he has promised that he is in control of the world...and he has promised that the gates of Hell will not prevail against his church, no matter how dire the situation appears. He will remind us that the suffering we experience here is only temporary, that we cling to Jesus and we cling to heaven as our home. And keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, there is nothing in this world that can keep us down because we know it is only shadows and dust, soon to be replaced with the coming age.

And God reminded Elijah of a number of these truths too, even though Elijah did not know the savior by name then. When Elijah came to the mountain of God he had a chance to talk with the Lord. And after Elijah finished his rant about how horrible things were, God simply told him, "Anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet...Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." In telling him to anoint those kings, God reminded Elijah that he was still in control of the world. In telling him to anoint Elisha, he was telling Elijah that he would have a successor and that the work of the Lord would indeed go on. And finally the Lord flat out tells Elijah that there are still 7000 people in the land of Israel who have not given themselves over to Baal worship, who still cling to the Lord as their God. The situation was not nearly as dire and hopeless as Elijah wanted to believe.

And neither is our situation. No matter what happens to us in this life, no matter how bad things can get, our God comes to us and reminds us that we have a risen and living savior who has taken up all our sins and made us perfect in the eyes of God. Heaven awaits us. St. Paul says, and rightly so, "**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**" (Rom 8:18)

Our God is a powerful and loving God, and so when we are at our worst, when we are down and out, he comes to us and feeds us with his word and says, "look up." And his word is power and it is strength to those who believe. Yes, the journey is too much for us. But it is not too much for God. Amen.