

“Under the Broom Tree”

1 Kings 19:1-8

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Elijah had seen God do some pretty miraculous things, but now in chapter 19, we find him running. He probably felt like all his long years of sacrifice and witness were about to pay great spiritual dividends, but instead, his life is threatened by the evil queen, Jezebel. So, what does our hero do in response? He runs. He runs away – some 80+ miles away, and then goes another day’s journey by himself and sat down under a Broom Tree. Under that tree, Elijah wrestled with despair. *Despair is the sense of being utterly and completely devoid of hope; a sense that you just can’t go on; that you are incapable even of putting one foot in front of the other.* Despair is a response to a specific situation or set of circumstances, and it can come on very suddenly, very powerfully, very unexpectedly.

Maybe today, you are in that same place. No, not literally under a broom tree, but figuratively speaking, you are. That is, you are wrestling with a feeling of despair. You feel like nothing you’ve done is making any positive difference; you feel like your life is utterly meaningless and insignificant; you want to have hope, but you just don’t see how it’s possible.

Jezebel’s refusal to accept the truth of who God is must have blindsided Elijah – after all, everyone on top of Mount Carmel who had witnessed God’s miraculous answer to Elijah’s prayers (first for fire, then for rain) seems to have been thoroughly convinced. Jezebel refused to believe it, not because of a lack of evidence, but despite the presence of tremendous evidence.

Indeed, maybe you have had bombs dropped into your life, too; a medical diagnosis, a job loss, the death of a husband/wife/mother/son/father/daughter, the dissolution of your marriage, or the foreclosure of your dream came out of nowhere and you didn’t know what to do . . . so you ran. You ran home and cried or ran off to the bar and drank or ran off to the office and buried yourself in work. You ran from one job to another, one relationship to another, one town to another, yet trouble still found you, didn’t it? You ran when life got hard, but eventually, you found yourself under the broom tree, wrestling with a sharp and powerful feeling of despair. I’ve been there, and so many others have too. If that’s you today, then God has a word for you. And if it’s not you today, maybe it was you at one point, or maybe you know someone who is under that broom tree right now. God has a word for you, if that is the case. God wants you to know that even under the broom tree, you are not alone.

When you're under the Broom Tree, keep on believing. Elijah had seen the deliverance of nearly an entire nation; fire from heaven; restoration of life; miraculous provision and the unwavering presence of God, and yet he ran. In his thoughts, we find no semblance of hope; he just can't see any way that things were going to get any better. He felt forgotten.

But God hadn't forgotten him. The God who showed up on top of Mount Carmel is the very same God who was about to show up in a very different way under the broom tree. Elijah left an amazed and passionate crowd on top of Mount Carmel, fled from Jezreel with only his servant by his side and went to Beersheba, where he left alone. Maybe you can understand that. When you're wrestling with despair, the innate desire to be alone often makes the situation worse. It's easy to start to incorrectly believe that no one cares or that no one can relate to your situation. Remember that the God of the mountain is still the God of the valley. Don't allow a feeling of fear (or any other feeling) to overwhelm your faith in the enduring faithfulness of God to His promises.

When you're under the broom tree, keep on relying; don't isolate yourself from God or from others. Elijah went from the crowded Mount Carmel to the town of Jezreel and then Beersheba, where he left his servant and went on alone. He increasingly isolated himself from others, and went to despair all alone under the broom tree. One danger of isolating yourself is that, even though it was you who pushed people away, you can start to feel like no one cares, because they are not there.

Elijah had worked so hard, served, prayed, sacrificed, obeyed . . . but things aren't any better now. The same can be said for you, can't it. You may not be 'better off' because you have faithfully served the Lord, but then again, that's not really how it was ever supposed to work, was it? Worshipping and serving the Lord is not for what you can get from God, but for what you can give to God – a heart fully surrendered and a life fully engaged in God's work in your life and in the lives of others.

Though you may have been trying to push Him away, God has not – and will not – forsake you. Though you've run from Him, disobeyed Him, ignored Him, pushed Him away, yet His presence endures (Psalm 139:7-10.) Don't isolate yourself from others; they are able to relate to your situation more than you may realize. And don't isolate yourself from God, though you feel like you can't get a break, or you are filled with fear and dread, or when life doesn't turn out as you expected. Hold on...

When you're under the broom tree, keep on praying (have honest conversations with God.) Elijah prays that God would take away his life. Fortunately, God does not answer this foolish prayer, and in fact, Elijah is (ironically) one of only two people that the Bible says never died (Enoch). Elijah is just feeling like a total failure – like none of it mattered; all the miracles, all the prophecies, all the faith – didn't make any difference.

That's how despair can hit you – hard, and often overwhelming; it robs you of perspective and becomes a lens through which you see everything in your life. Elijah felt like life was sinking fast, and he just wanted God to let it swallow him up. He is in a very dark place, and he has a really honest conversation with God. That is just what God wants – He doesn't *want a filtered version of you. Bring your hurt, your pain, your doubts, your fears, and God can handle hearing all about them.*

After he prays, Elijah is exhausted, so he lays down and falls asleep. Verse 5 tells us that an angel came down, gives him food and water, and then allows him to go back to sleep. He does not give advice or psychoanalysis – he simply shows up and provides, saying, “The journey is too great for you.” God never says this life would be a cakewalk (John 16:33) but He did promise that He would be with us when we walk it (Romans 8:38-39). When you're under the broom tree, keep on going (your journey doesn't end there.) God will be with you when the journey is long; when your strength is not enough; when you feel like giving up.

Strengthened by the food God provided and the rest that God authorized, Elijah gets up and starts walking to Horeb (AKA Mount Sinai, where God had given Moses the 10 Commandments) – a journey of about 260 miles. When you're under the broom tree, remember that your journey is not over. Don't quit hoping – don't quit praying – don't quit living. *When you can't walk the next mile, take the next step.*

Every journey has a destination, and that means it won't last forever. Your journey does not end under the Broom Tree, but God is not saying, ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps.’ Rather, He is saying, “I won't leave you; I won't abandon you. You can't do this on your own, but hey – you won't be on your own. I'll be with you. You are not as alone as it seems, you are not as powerless as you feel.” The journey ahead is too great for you on your own, but God will be with you; He will never leave you or forsake you; He will provide for you and meet you where you are, even at your lowest point. He is faithful and His name is blessed, even when you find yourself . . . under the Broom Tree.

Takeaways from this message.

DESPAIR is the sense of being utterly and completely devoid of HOPE.

When you're under the Broom Tree...

... keep on BELIEVING (the God of the mountain is still the God of the valley)

- **God hasn't FORGOTTEN you!**

... keep on RELYING (don't isolate yourself)

- God has not FORSAKEN you!

... keep on PRAYING (have honest conversations with God)

- God doesn't want a FILTERED VERSION of you

... keep on GOING (your journey doesn't end here)

- When you can't walk the next MILE take the next STEP

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?
2. *What role does fear play in your life? Distinguish the difference between healthy fear and unhealthy fear.*
3. *Lava lamps don't really have lava in them, you know. (You did know that, right?) What do you suppose that stuff in there is, then?*
 - *NOTE: according to several websites, the 'lava' is mostly paraffin wax, with a few other ingredients added to aid the melting/cooling process, and to increase the density.*
4. *Elijah was exhausted. Describe the things he did 'right,' and the things he did 'wrong' in dealing with his feelings.*
5. *Describe the areas of your life in which you are feeling exhausted. How can you learn to rest, even if your situation never changes?*
6. *What good advice do you have for someone who's struggling with despair?*
7. What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?