

Read I Kings 19:14-21

It's coming. Says Jesus. You might be able to hear it in the distance. It might be very close. You'll know when it arrives. It may come from the phone call in the middle of the night that changes your life forever. It might come from the somber talk from your supervisor at work, when he says, "You're out of here!" It may come as you sit with the school counselor, as he taps the file of your 15 year old son. It may come from the uneasy look in your heart specialist's eyes as he begins to talk with you about your health. It may come when your spouse says, "We have to talk, I have something awful to tell you". It may come from your 18yr old son or daughter, who says to you, "I don't have to obey you anymore". It may be when a counselor says, "You need a drug addiction treatment program. It may be when you experience a flashback from a ghastly deed from the past. I don't know the form it will come. But it will come. Adversity.

Some of us will have a lot of it in our lives. Others not so much. That remains a mystery. But one thing is certain. Jesus says in John 16:33. "In this world, you will have trouble." Hardship, loss, pressure, tragedy, heartbreak, betrayal. It's going to happen. And you know, at times it seems what we face is something impossible to deal with. I can't take it any more. I don't think I can make it. But take heart says Jesus, I have overcome the world, and so can you. You can: "Be an Overcomer!"

In our text for today, the prophet Elijah just had one of the happiest days of his life. He had gone up against the priests of Baal and shown that His God was the true God. You remember the story. Both groups had set up altars. But Elijah had dug trenches around his altar, filled the trenches with water, and doused the cut up bull with water. Then he called to His God and fire from heaven consumed the offering and sucked up the water in the trenches. Meanwhile, nothing happened at the altar of the priests of Baal. The people then hollered out, "The Lord-he is God! The Lord-he is God!" The 450 priests of Baal were then executed, and it looked like Elijah had it made in life as a servant of the Lord. But shortly thereafter, Jezebel, the queen of Israel put a contract out on Elijah's life. She wanted Elijah dead for the loss of the priests of Baal. Elijah fled for his life. This was adversity. He sat down under a broom tree and said the words, "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors. Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep."

Our reaction is so similar to Elijah when adversity strikes. First we go into shock. "I cannot believe this is happening to me. I am a Christian. I go to church. This kind of stuff happens to other people, not me. In the case of Elijah, "I am a prophet. I serve the Lord. I can't believe something like this would happen to someone doing the Lord's work!" The next reaction is blame. "This is not fair, why me? Come on. There has to be a target here somewhere. And you know if we can't find a human target. We target God. "You blew it God, you let this happen to me!" We then proceed to withdrawal. We try to hide out. "I just want to be left alone, just leave me." We stew in self pity. In our text Elijah went off by himself into the desert, leaving his servant in Beersheba. Then, we get downright angry. Someone has to pay for this. Someone else has to hurt as much as I hurt right now. Finally if we are not careful, we could be led into depression. 15-20 million Americans suffer from depression. The most prescribed medication in America is one that treats depression. Elijah demonstrates the early signs of depression by not doing anything, but holing himself up under the broom tree, and just sleeping a lot.

Well friend, how are you going to handle adversity? Are you going to give in to the abyss? Are you going to grit your teeth and plow through what's now left of your life? Are you going to turn to wine or prescription drugs? Are you going to jump into an achievement frenzy, pleasure frenzy, relational frenzy, are you going to eat yourself into oblivion, or spend yourself into financial ruin? What do you do when adversity pushes you to the brink of defeat? What do you do? Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus says, "You don't have to cave in. You don't have to bail out. You don't have to give up. You don't have to do a swan dive into the abyss of defeat. Take heart, there is another way. I have overcome the world, and with my help you can too.

How does a nearly defeated person take courage? How does a nearly defeated person decide to resist defeat and walk in the direction of being an overcomer. Three areas. It is important to look at what you believe, how you grieve, and who you lean on.

Let's start off with what you believe. Doesn't it seem that when tragedy occurs we get a sort of spiritual vertigo. That is we are fuzzy about what is true. We need to have clarity as to what is true. We need to shore up what we believe. That is not an easy thing to do. What then do we believe about adversity? First of all, remember that what you are going through is not a unique trial to you alone. In our text, Elijah looked at his situation with queen Jezebel and said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." I am the only one left. Nobody else has to deal with a situation like this. Not true. In the New Testament, the inspired writer Paul says, "No trial has seized you except that which is common to man. Elijah, someone else has had to deal with the adversity of rejection and persecution, and has made it through it, so can you. In fact, there are 7000 in Israel, that are willing to stand up for their faith in spite of persecution. The point. What you are going through in your life, another Christian has gone through with a few different variables. They made it through the adversity. So can you. Know what you believe. Second, God changes and helps people with the still small voice of his Word. God emphasized that to Elijah, when he brought a wind, earthquake, and fire. God was not present in any of those. Those unbelievers in Israel were not going to be changed by mighty acts of Judgment. There is only one way to change and help a person. And that is through the simple Word of God, speaking about a Messiah, a Savior from sin. Hearts are alone converted through the gentle gospel. Likewise, real comfort today against adversity comes through the gentle whisper of God's Word. For example, Isaiah 43 says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." Know what you believe. Third, God may allow us to be put into an impossible situation, but only to show us our total inability to handle it, and our need for His help.

God had given Elijah the assignment to preach to the nation of Israel, to call the nation to repent of their sins, and to return to the worship of the true God. God knew that people would reject the prophet's message, that they would persecute the prophet. An impossible task for the prophet.

But wait, this is the way of God. He puts us into a position to demand the impossible of us, then to show us our total inability to do the impossible, and finally

provides us with what is needed to accomplish his will. The Lord provided Elijah with what he needed to handle the situation. In our text, the angel of the Lord, provided a supernatural meal, that strengthened Elijah, so that he could carry on the work of a prophet. What is your impossible situation? A bad marriage, a serious illness, living with an active alcoholic, a tragic death of a family member, a reoccurring drug problem. On your own, its impossible to deal with, but with God helping you, you will overcome. Fourth, God limits my adversity, so that with his strength, I can handle it. God knows how much you can handle. He knew exactly how much Elijah could handle. Elijah was hit with a certain velocity of persecution, a velocity he could handle. He just lost sight of this truth. Fifth, the Scriptures tell us that God is always available to me. Underneath that broom tree, God was available to help Elijah. God was right there to help him. Psalm 34:17-19 says, The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.” Yes, I can talk to Him. He listens. He cares. Sixth, What I believe about Scripture, is that God is totally committed to forming something good and worthwhile out of the hardships, heartbreaks of my life. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work for the good of those who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.” What good can come from this? Perhaps the realization that when you follow Jesus, your life may still have some rough shakes but that God will sustain you. Perhaps to teach us that only the one thing is needful, the Word of God. It can help us deal with the issues of life. Perhaps the strengthening of our own faith as we hear the wonderful promises from the Word of God. Are you fuzzy about what you hold to be true? Let’s clear things up. Let your eyes in faith see that: The adversity you face is common to other Christians. Don’t look for big fireworks from God to help you deal with it, just the small voice of his Word. Remember God allows adversity to show us our inability to handle an impossible situation and our need for His help. God limits the severity of adversity so we can handle it. God is completely available to us. God is totally committed to forming something good and worthwhile out of our hardships and adversity.

You and I may indeed shed tears today. But our tears are tears of hope. One day , God will wipe all tears away from our eyes. As it says in Psalm 23:6, “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Let us all grieve thoroughly until our tears run dry, and then let’s get past it. There is a tomorrow and a good God who rules over it. He has good plans for us. We must go on.

Finally, don’t be shy to lean on friends at this time. Knock, knock, heh, I need help. Our leader Jesus followed the same procedure. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He had Peter, James and John along with Him. This helped him deal with what He was facing. You and I hate to be dependent. And yet, as Christians, that is what we are all about. “Carry one anothers burdens, and so you fulfill the Law of Christ.”

It’s Coming. It may be today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year. But its coming. Adversity. Maybe it is already here for you. Nevertheless, you are now prepared. Be an Overcomer!