

## Our God Forsakes Us Not

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Old Testament Reading. **Elijah said, “The people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me too.” And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way . . . I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal.”** Here ends our text.

There was a man who felt like giving up. Things were going so terrible in his life and in the world. He worked hard, extremely hard, but his business was failing. He couldn't get work. More and more jobs kept going over seas. How would he support his wife and kids? He tried to be a good husband and father. But he worried about his kids. They were exposed to so many bad things. All the immorality that popped up at school, on the internet, or television. How could he protect them from it all? The government was no help. It was clueless about the economy. Seemed to promote laziness and immorality. Can't teach the Ten Commandments in school. Abortion is protected as a right. Corrupt executives and politicians caught every other day in some kind of scandal. Where was the justice? And when he opened the papers, things were even worse in other countries. Terrorism and tyrants, oppression and suffering. It seemed like evil was winning. The more he thought about things the more depressed he got. Where was God in all this? Had God forsaken him? Had he forsaken this world he created? The man felt like quitting, giving up on life.

There was a pastor who felt like giving up. Things were going so terrible in his ministry and in the church. He worked hard, extremely hard, but his church was failing. He couldn't get more members. More and more people were leaving the church. He tried to be a good pastor, but he worried about his flock. They were exposed to so many bad things. A media and education system denounced creation and promoted evolution. False teachers made truth relative, accepted alternate lifestyles, and taught that Christ was just one of many ways to God. Other churches denied the truths of the Bible. Other religions of old eastern mysticism were cloaked as new age. How could he protect them from it all? The government was certainly no help. Any denouncement of sin was being legislated as hate speech. When he checked the world statistics he saw that Christianity, the religion of mercy, was in decline while Islam, the religion of the sword was spreading rapidly. It seemed like evil was winning. Where was the justice? It seemed like even his own congregation was just sitting on the fence. Was he the only one who believed what he preached? He felt all alone. The more he thought about things the more depressed he got. Where was God in all this? Had God forsaken him? Had God forsaken his church? The pastor felt like quitting, giving up on the ministry.

In our Old Testament reading there was a prophet by the name of Elijah who felt like giving up. Things were going terrible in the kingdom of Israel. The people were exposed to so many bad things: all the false gods of the Canaanites, child sacrifice, and temple prostitution. The government was no help either. The wicked King Ahab and his idolatrous wife Jezebel were on the throne. They worshipped the false god Baal and the fertility goddess Asherah, and they led Israel to do the same. They persecuted and killed the prophets of the LORD. Where was the justice? On Mount Carmel, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a dual. The god who answered by fire, he was God. Elijah asked the people, **“How long will you waver between two opinions. If the LORD is God, then follow him; but if Baal is God, then follow him.”** But the people said nothing. They were on the fence. Of course, the LORD won the contest. Baal was silent, but the LORD answered in a great fire ball that burned up the offering. When the people saw this powerful demonstration, they jumped off the fence and yelled, **“The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!”** But this victory was short lived, built only on emotion. The people's response only lasted as long as that miraculous fire burned. They left Ahab and Jezebel in power. Then Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah. He was afraid for his life so he fled the country. He fled all the way to Mount Sinai and withdrew into a cave like a hermit. It seemed like evil was still winning. Where was God now? Had God forsaken him and his people? He was so depressed, he asked God that he might die. He said, **“LORD, take away my life for I am no better than my fathers.”** Elijah was quitting his job as the LORD's prophet. He was giving up.

But the word of the LORD came to Elijah. The LORD said to him, **“What are you doing here Elijah?”** A just question. How could the LORD’s prophet do any good holed up in a cave outside the country? Who was he going to preach to here? Elijah tried to explain. He said, **“I have been very jealous for you, but the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me too.”** But the LORD told Elijah to go stand before him outside the cave. A great wind came by and tore the rocks of the mountain into pieces. But the LORD wasn’t in the wind. Then an earthquake came, but the LORD wasn’t in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD wasn’t in the fire either. But then Elijah heard a low whisper. Then he went and stood outside. The LORD spoke to him in a quiet voice. He said to Elijah, **“Go, return on your way. Anoint Hazael king over Syria and Jehu king over Israel. No injustice will escape their swords. And anoint Elisha to be prophet after you. And I have reserved seven thousand in Israel who haven’t bowed their knees to Baal.”**

The LORD wasn’t in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire or any other fantastic phenomenon. The LORD wasn’t in any of those things that frightened the Israelites on Mt. Sinai when he gave his Law, his Ten Commandments. The LORD was there in his voice of encouragement, the quiet voice of the Gospel, with good news. God hadn’t forsaken his creation. Evil wouldn’t win. There would be justice. He would ensure it through the kings he placed in power. And God hadn’t forsaken his church. It wouldn’t fail. There were still seven thousand of his elect who believed in him. And God hadn’t forsaken Elijah either. He would give Elijah an assistant, some help, the prophet Elisha who would continue after him. God’s church would go on.

Elijah had withdrawn to Mt. Sinai afraid, worried, depressed, even suicidal. He was quitting his job and giving up on life. But after the Word of the LORD assured him and encouraged him, he went back down the mountain again. He believed the LORD, that he had not forsaken him. Elijah went back to his job. His life would be over when God decided, not him, when the LORD took him straight to heaven in a chariot of fire. Until then, the LORD had work for him to do.

Now sometimes people become depressed because of a chemical imbalance in their body. Because of sin in the world, their body doesn’t function as it should. But sometimes we get depressed *because* of the sin in the world. Day after day the world beats us up. The pressures and worries of life wear us down. All the immorality, all the injustice that pours in upon us. It’s like holding back the ocean. It seems like evil is winning. How can we deal with it all? It seems like it be easier to quit. Just give up. Quit being a husband or wife, a father or mother. Quit the job. Quit the church. Just withdraw from the community, withdraw into our homes, withdraw into ourselves. Maybe sometimes we’ve even thought, “LORD, I can’t deal with it. Just take my life.”

But just like he asked Elijah, the LORD may ask of us, “What are you doing here? This withdrawal and depression isn’t doing any good. This isn’t what I intended for you.” The LORD encourages us. But his encouragement isn’t found in his mighty displays of power, in storms or earthquakes that frighten us. His encouragement isn’t in some political or moral victory that plays on our emotions, gets us off the fence, but is often short lived. His encouragement isn’t even in his Words of Law. “Just suck it up. Get back out there. Do your duty.” But his encouragement is in his quiet voice of the Gospel. The Father says, “I have anointed my Son with the Holy Spirit to be your prophet, priest, and king. As your king he’s ruler over all nations. Don’t worry. He’ll see that justice is done. As your priest he sacrificed himself for your sins, even your sins of despair and loss of trust. For a time, he suffered your punishment when I forsook him on the cross. But I will never leave you nor forsake you. And as your prophet my Son will continue to preach his Law and Gospel to the end of the world. Remember how he promised, ‘I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.’ The Christian church will go on for I still have my chosen ones and that includes you. And I’ll give you help, Christian brothers and sisters who will walk beside you and share the burden. Now go, return to the way I intend for you.”

With his Words of the Gospel, the LORD assures and encourages us. He pulls us out of our depression and withdrawal. He gives us the power to return to our vocations and serve others as he intended. Our lives are in his hands until he decides to take us to heaven. For our God forsakes us not. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.