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Alone? - Not Alone!

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord" (1 Kings 18:22).

"I, even I only, am left" (1 Kings 19:10,14).

"Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal" (1 Kings 19:18).

"Then he mustered... seven thousand" (1 Kings 20:15).

"Elijah... a man of like passions (nature) with us" (James 5:17).

It is a gracious thing that, in recording the lives of His most used and representative servants, the Lord has never hidden their weaknesses. Most biographers seem to feel that it would harm their subjects, weaken the testimony, or do injury to the work to which they were called if they dwelt upon their human nature on its weakest side and pointed out when and where they broke down. There is also a mistaken kindness in this omission; the idea that, all of us being so faulty, we should never refer to the weaknesses of others. If the life was truly glorifying to God as a whole, and the work was really a work of God, it only enhances the grace of God to show how He was with, and blessed, such *very* human and imperfect vessels, and no one who really loves the Lord will take that fact as a cover and condonation of repeated failures. At the same time it is true that God is the only One Who has the right to speak of human weaknesses, and everyone who does so under His direction must do it with deep humility and fear: the reason for this is recognised in such representative cases as Moses, Elijah, David, Peter, etc. Even in the case of Christ Himself, although He did *not* succumb, yet this factor held good, and in His case the fact is definitely shown. That factor is this:

Satan Knows Our Weakest Moment, and Uses It.

It was when the Master had fasted for forty days and nights and hungered that Satan came with his testings. Whatever other factors were present in the cases of Elijah and others, there is no doubt that the physical and nervous drain of recent experiences gave the cowardly enemy very promising ground for his assault. When Moses made his great mistake at the rock it is evident that he was an overwrought man, and although the weakness is given full uncovering and the result shown to be very grievous in a temporal way, he was never afterward repudiated in history as a failure; rather was he with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. David still held his place of high honour and value in Divine purposes, and his name runs to the end of Scripture with Divine recognition despite the grievous fallings in the way. He suffered, it is true, but God knows that in the lives of those who count for Him there are forces at work which are extra to the ordinary human weaknesses. This is made so clear in the case of Peter, whose terrible failure was said by the Lord to be the work of Satan; and there is no doubt but that Satan knew Peter's weak point and weak moment.

We must, however, bear in mind that, while the Scriptures on these matters are given us for our comfort, and to magnify the grace of God, they are not meant to weaken us or excuse our weakness, but to make us aware of how Satan can get an advantage, and to indicate the danger points along the way of spiritual usefulness.

In the case of Elijah before us, there is one thing that we want to note, and the noting of which we feel will be a help to some. It is this: in the moment of his weakness Satan sowed a lie in Elijah's mind, and Elijah accepted it. Our Lord said of Satan that "he is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44). In this case he begot the lie that Elijah was the only faithful prophet of God left in Israel. There was ground for that seed. The man was fighting a lonely battle; ploughing a lonely furrow; walking a lonely path. There is no doubt about that.

Loneliness is a Part of the Price of Leadership

If we are seeking to go on with God to any degree beyond that which is commonly accepted as a true Christian life; if we are called to pioneer the way for any further advance in spiritual life or Divine service; if we are given a vision of God's will and purpose not seen by the general mass of God's people - or even the larger number of the servants of God - ours will be a lonely way.

There are many other ways in which we may feel aloneness. It may be for geographical reasons; or it may be because of an inward experience through which we are passing; an experience or phase which cannot be shared by another, even the one closest to us. All these and other reasons may respectively become our "wilderness" in which Satan comes, and, while there is a basic occasion, his business is to push things into the extra realm of untruth and tell us that we *are* actually and utterly alone. It is not a rare thing for him to tell a child of God that God has left him or her.

Elijah verily believed that he was the only one left in faithfulness to God, and he repeated his plaint several times, "I only am left." He had lost sight of the possibility that the prophets reported by Obadiah to have been hidden might still be in that underground faithfulness, or some of them at least. But the Lord knew better and told him of seven thousand unsundering saints who would not capitulate to Jezebel or Baal. The fact is that what Elijah believed was positively not true. If we look at things horizontally we shall only see so far, but if we look from heaven we shall see much more.

Well, what is the answer? Firstly, the Lord's love has taken the *full* measure of human frailty before ever He called us to Himself, and therefore that love, being all-knowing, does not give up because it comes upon something unforeseen and not already accounted for.

Secondly, the Lord asks for nothing more than a heart toward Himself. That is the ground upon which He will go right on. *Only* positive, definite, and persisted-in unbelief and disobedience will make the Lord say, "Look here, My child, I love you and want to go on with you, and I *will* go on if only you will trust Me and respond to Me. But we cannot go on until you have adjusted; we must just stand here and wait for that."

Thirdly, if it is true that the Lord neither leaves nor forsakes His own, it is equally true that they are not alone as to others of the Lord's own. There is the *fact*, altogether apart from the teaching, that the body is one, and hath many members (1 Cor. 12:12). That *fact* does not depend upon the doctrine, it is just a fact. Moreover it is constituted by the Holy Spirit Himself. He is the Spirit of unity; there is "the communion of the Holy Spirit"; i.e. the communion of believers in and by the Holy Spirit. There are always believers praying for "all saints," the vast majority of whom are utterly unknown to them in this world. If we would take our stand on God's fact in this matter, and, by faith, take the value of "all prayer for all saints" we should find a wonderful relief and reinforcement in our aloneness.

But let us face the fact that a certain measure and kind of loneliness *will* connect with any particular value which the Lord already has, or is seeking to have, in us, and we must accept this with courage, reminding ourselves that were it otherwise that particular value might not be possible. Jesus was able to meet many a difficult situation because He had learnt the secret in aloneness.