

TITLE: "What Are You Doing Here?"

TEXT: I Kings 19:1-17 (OT p. 326)

Introduction – You think YOU have problems?

A few months ago, Milt Trombley and his wife moved to Maine after retiring from down Boston way and they started a small farm. It wasn't long before things got too much for Milt and the doctor sent him away for a rest cure to soothe his jangled nerves. The following is a conversation between Milt and farm hand Virgil Bliss upon his return. This is adapted from the "Burt and I" series.

"Virgy, thank you for coming to the station to pick me up. Well Virgy, I know the doctor said not to give me any news while I was away, but now tell me all that's been happening, what the news?"

"Well, there IS no news .....Except your dog died."

"Oh no! Not my dog Theodore. How did he die?"

"...Well, he ate some of that burnt horse flesh."

"Burned horse flesh, where did he get that?"

"...Well, when the barn burned...."

"The BARN burned, how did THAT happen?"

"...Well, the sparks flew from the house, caught the barn on fire. The barn burned, burned up the horse, the dog ate some of the burned horse flesh and died."

"The HOUSE! How did the HOUSE catch on fire?"

"...Well, it was the candles. The candles caught onto the curtains..."

"CANDLES, what were you doing with candles? You know I have never allowed candles in the house!"

“...Well, the candles were around the coffin...”

The COFFIN? Who died?”

“...Well, it was your mother-in-law.”

“My mother-in-law, well I’m sorry to hear about that. How did SHE die?”

“She died of shock after your wife ran off with the stable boy. ...Other than that, there IS no news.”

### 1. We all have problems

It seems old Milt certainly had his problems. In our text for this morning, the prophet Elijah had problems too. Even though Elijah lived 3,000 years ago, his problems, and what he learned from them, are very applicable to each of our lives here today.

Just prior to the text, Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and Queen Jezebel, who worshiped Baal, was not pleased. Here’s what happened:

[King] Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.’ Then [Elijah] was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: ‘It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.’ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.

There are times in life when you reach the end of your rope. When you lose your job, when the car breaks down and you don’t have the money to fix it or buy another, when a long term relationship disintegrates, when a child is ill, or when caring for children and aging parents simply gets too much. At such times, we may be tempted to throw up our hands and say to God, “I give up and I might as well just curl up my toes and die.”

## 2. Be grateful for what God is already supplying

That's pretty much what Elijah did, so let's see what happened after he did.

Suddenly an angel touched [Elijah] and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' [Elijah] got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

When things are going badly, we are usually tempted to do something, anything, to make things better. And often times, we may be tempted to do something that we know is wrong. Resist that temptation; it will just make matters worse. It's tough to wait, I know, but waiting is what God often tells us to do.

While Elijah was waiting, an angel gave him some bread and water. Fairly simple fare, but after walking in the desert, it must have looked like a feast to Elijah. When we are facing problems, it's easy to focus on the problems themselves and lose sight of the many blessings that God has already provided. God HAS provided us with the basic necessities of life and we need to be grateful for them while we are waiting for our problems to be solved.

## 3. God is in charge

When God finally appeared to Elijah, God did something completely unexpected. Instead of an ANSWER to Elijah's problems, God asks, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah answers God with a list of his problems: "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

Then God said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

God said again, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Again Elijah answered with his problems: "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

What God wanted ELIJAH to know, and what God wants US to know this morning, is that God IS the answer. Just like Elijah, we want concrete answers, we want solutions to our problems, we want ACTION and we want it NOW! In Psalm 37:4 God says: "Take delight in the Lord, and God will give you the desires of your heart."

God wants us to be still and know, KNOW, that God is God and that it is GOD who made us and not we ourselves. If it seems like we have to spend a long time waiting, it's usually because it takes us a long time to reach the point where we are willing to get in TOUCH with God, to delight in God and to trust God alone.

In that sheer silence, Elijah finally stopped focusing on his problems and started trusting God. Then, and only then, did the Lord give him concrete answers. The LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place."

Elijah could then go back knowing that God would protect him and knowing that God had chosen someone to succeed him as prophet.

Conclusion – "Angels in the post office" (General WORD)

Well, I began with a story about a dog dying and I will close with another. This came to me by email a while ago.

Our dog, Abbey, died Aug. 23, and the day after Abbey died, my 4-year-old, Meredith, was SO upset. She wanted to write a letter to God so that God would recognize Abbey in heaven. She told me what to write, and I did. Then she put 2 pictures of Abbey in the envelope. We addressed it to God in Heaven, put two stamps on it (because, as she said, it could be a long way to heaven).

We put our return address on it, and I let her put it in the drop box at the post office that afternoon. She was absolutely sure that letter would get to heaven, and I wasn't about to disillusion her.

So today is Labor Day. We took the kids to the museum in Austin, and when we came home, there was a package wrapped in gold on our front porch. It was addressed to Meredith. So, she took it inside and opened it.

Inside was a book, *When Your Pet Dies*, by Mr. Rogers (Fred Rogers). On the front cover was the letter we had written to God, in its envelope (opened). On the opposite page was one of the pictures of Abbey taped on the page. On the back page was the other picture of Abbey, and this handwritten note on pink paper:

"Dear Meredith, "I know that you will be happy to find out that Abbey arrived safely and soundly in heaven. Having the pictures you sent to me was a big help! I recognized Abbey right away!

"You know, Meredith, she isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me (just like it stays in your heart) young and running and playing. Abbey loved being your dog, you know. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep things in--so I am sending you your beautiful letter back with the pictures--so that you will have this little memory book to keep.

"One of my angels is taking care of this for me. I hope this little book will help. ...Thank you for your beautiful letter. Thank your mother for sending it. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you. ...God blesses you every day and remember, I love you very much. By the way, I am in heaven and everywhere there is love. Signed, God and one of his special angels (who wrote this letter after God told her the words)."

When you get to the end of your rope, remember these three things:

1. We all get to the end of our rope.
2. Know that God loves you and that God IS the answer to our every problem.
3. Wait patiently and God will give you the desires of your heart.

Amen.