

## **Nourished by/in Christ**

***“Arise and eat.”*** These words of God, spoken by an angelic messenger to Elijah in the midst of his crippling depression, don’t sound very “divine” or “Gospel-oriented,” do they? To some people, this sounds like nothing more than the ***old wives remedy*** that you need to ***feed a cold***. Of course, if you’re from my mom’s side of the family, you offer up food for every human condition—sickness, bereavement, joy, boredom, birthdays, funerals, Labor Day, just happened to be in the neighborhood and decided to stop by. ***Believe me: If more than two or three come together in my family for any reason at all, you can bet that we will be partaking in some old-fashioned table fellowship.*** Truth be told: We do this same thing right here within the family ties of our own congregation. If anyone among us is sick or shut-in for any reason, the ladies of the congregation are real quick to organize a feeding schedule. Our ladies will see to it that you are fed well when you are down and ailing! ***Perhaps*** this is what God intends for Elijah with this message and this gift of nourishment. ***A full belly always makes things easier.***

Of course, not everyone reads these words the same way. Some have argued that these words of the angel are intended to be a little more gruff, ***spoken out of “tough love.”*** ***“Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Get up and eat something! You have work to do!”*** I’ll admit that I’ve ***given and received*** this medication more than a few times in my life. Sometimes it’s good advice. Sometimes it’s exactly what needs to be heard. Sometimes it’s not. Still others have filtered these angelic proclamations through the theological lens of June Cleaver, reducing these words of God to nothing more than a ***“get up and eat because breakfast is the most important meal of the day. We’ve got lots of things to do still, and we can’t be doing them on an empty stomach.”***

***So...how are we to understand this short and pointed command of God’s messenger?*** This is where knowledge of the original Hebrew language really comes in handy. You see, the word that we translate as “arise” carries with it a far deeper meaning than simply ***“get up” or “stand up.”*** The word—*coom*—actually carries with it a ***profound theological meaning of resurrection; of rising alive to one’s feet from the slumber of death.*** Think about that for a minute. Elijah had been crushed under the weight of sin—his sin as well as all the sin around him. God had just displayed His almighty power and glory to wicked King Ahab and his Baal-worshipping minions ***through Elijah*** by sending fire from heaven to consume not only a soaking wet sacrifice, but a soaking wet altar, altar stones, and even the water in the trenches around the altar. Through one old feeble man, God thoroughly defeated the Baal worshippers, ***not only showing His might and power,*** but then punishing the wicked false worship of the Baal priests with justly-

deserved death. We're told that Elijah ordered the Israelites who were gathered for the showdown to round up all the false prophets and priests—**over 450 of them**—and then he slaughtered them. Now, you would think that such a display would bring about **a certain kind of penitent fear within the hearts and minds of everyone else**, right? It didn't, at least not in the heart and mind of wicked Queen Jezebel, who vowed to Elijah that by the same time tomorrow he would suffer the same gruesome and miserable death.

This is just too much for Elijah to take. Not only does God's divine display fall on **blind eyes and deaf ears**, but he gets the blame for it, becoming public enemy number one—all for staying faithful and carrying out his ministerial calling. Elijah's soul has been crushed. **He's been emotionally eviscerated—gutted.** “*Why bother? No one cares! O Lord, take me out of this hell-hole! Let me escape! Deliver me, for I am miserable!*” This is what it means to be poor in Spirit. Everything else in life is gone; your pride, your hope, your confidence, your sense of independence. All that is left is faith in God; a faith that is probably extremely battered, bruised, and on the ropes. This is where Elijah is at. He flees the region and ends up wandering out into the desert. After just one day in the desert he finds a shade tree and lays down, **waving the proverbial white flag of surrender and asking that God just end it now.** “*Take me. I'm ready. I've tried and tried and I can't do any better than any of the guys before me. Just let me die in peace.*”

And what does God do? **Not what Elijah wants!** He sends His angel to Elijah, bringing him life-giving bread and water. Not only that, but the angel also brings the very Word of God, saying to him, “*Arise,*” that is, **“be resurrected unto new life;”** the Word of God that God Himself attaches to this ordinary bread and water. Maybe it's just me, but this talk of bread, water, eating, and drinking—all connected to God's Word of resurrection **seems quite sacramental-ish**, doesn't it?

Now, does Elijah listen? Does he recognize the angel and his message for who and what they really are—the messenger of God Himself bringing God's own Word and promise and remedy to him? **Sort of.** Elijah did eat and drink, didn't he? He did heed that part of the command. However, did he listen and obey completely? Well...he did lie back down again, resuming his pity party. **But God doesn't let it continue.** This time He sends the “angel of the Lord.” At first glance, this probably doesn't mean anything to most of you. It probably just seems like a way of saying the same thing a little differently, perhaps with a little more **flare for emphasis.** It may surprise you to hear that this specific title, **“The Angel of the Lord,”** as it is used throughout the Old Testament, is often understood to refer specifically to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity—Jesus Christ, pre-incarnate. All other angels are just spoken of in a generic sense (i.e. “an angel”) or are specifically named (i.e. the archangels Gabriel or Michael).

Chew on that one for a while! *Elijah first sees and beholds a “generic/common” angel, who brings the very Word and gifts of God.* Elijah basically blows him off and goes back to what he was doing. We’re told that he ate and drank, but it was more less a picking at the food and nothing more. How many of you have felt terrible and didn’t want to eat or drink? **This is a classic symptom of depression.** But then comes the Angel of the Lord—Jesus Christ—speaking the very same thing. Notice, too, that the Angel of the Lord doesn’t bring *different* bread and water. He doesn’t bring *more* bread and water. He points Elijah back to the gifts of sustenance that had *already* been brought and basically ignored. The Angel of the Lord comes and proclaims *the same exact Word of God*, calling Elijah to be resurrected out of this pit of sinful despair and to eat and drink what God has already given him. Why? Because the journey; the plan that God has in store for Elijah didn’t involve throwing in the towel and laying down to await death.

*Elijah listened this time, didn’t he?* Can you imagine what this place would look like and sound like if Jesus Christ—in the flesh—stood here and spoke directly to you, instead of speaking to you through the simple and humble means of His called and ordained mouthpiece? Can you imagine how different communion would be received and taught in our land if Jesus Christ Himself—in the flesh—stood here and said, “*Take and eat...this IS MY BODY for the complete forgiveness of all your sins.*” Can you imagine the *stammering and stuttering* that would be heard throughout our land if Jesus Christ—in the flesh—stood here and said, “*Why are you keeping little children from Me in baptism? Why are you telling people that baptism doesn’t save them? I’ve already said that it most certainly does save them! Why are you demanding that people be fully immersed, or else they can’t consider themselves baptized? I have never said such a thing! You’re putting words into My mouth instead of letting My words come out of your mouth! Your plans are not my plans.*”

My friends: Before we close, I want you to understand that when the bad times hit in your life; when you want to just quit and lay down and die, your Lord and God does have a plan for you. This is a true and faithful statement. But...*what does this mean?* Does it mean that life will no longer be rough? As a child of God living in this fallen and sinful world, there are going to be—*rest assured*—trials, tribulations, and pitfalls. There are going to be those times when you do want to just wander off the grid, disappear from sight and call out to God, asking that He would make the *pain and suffering stop*. Guys: You don’t get a pass or immunity from pain and suffering simply because you have your name on a church’s roster.

When these things happen (*and they will*) cry out to your Lord and God in prayer. Call upon Him in times of trouble and He will deliver you. He hears you, and He will care for you, giving you **exactly** what you need. However, don't be shocked or surprised when you are directed by God's faithful "everyday" common messengers—your family members, your coworkers, your friends, your neighbors...even a perfect stranger; messengers *speaking Christ's Word to you*, directing you *right back here* to be fed and nourished by Christ Himself with His eternal and life-giving gifts of Word, Water, Bread, and Wine—His gifts of life that He graciously showers down upon you in *abundance* each and every week until that blessed time when He does finally call you home to *everlasting rest and peace in Him*. Until that blessed time, however; until that blessed heavenly homecoming, *arise now and eat*. Receive the very Bread of Life Himself in His Word and His Sacraments. Take and eat, for the forgiveness of all your sin...for the very gift of life itself.

May this peace, which surpasses all human understanding, and which is inwardly-digested through faith alone, strengthen and preserve you—body and soul complete—now and into life everlasting.

AMEN