

The Still Small Voice

Elijah is one of the major characters in the Old Testament. Elijah's extraordinary faith can only be understood in contrast to the spiritually impoverished time in which he ministered. His culture was remarkably like ours. He appeared on the scene in a dark time. He prophesied to a disobedient nation. He confronted a decaying culture. Elijah was a man of humble origins from a region of little significance and a town of no reputation. But by God's transforming grace, Elijah became one of the most extraordinary men of the Old Testament. He lived a life of remarkable courage and stamina.

Yet, there was one time when Elijah was profoundly discouraged. His frustration and fear built up to the point where he had a total spiritual breakdown. In order to restore him to usefulness, God used a vivid series of object lessons to teach Elijah that God's ways are often mysterious. God's ways are rarely what we expect. God's ways, however, are always superior to the ways of men. The details are found in 1 Kings 19:8-18. This passage was a reminder to the prophet that God's work in this world is usually not spectacular or miraculous. God works all the time through means that are unseen, unappreciated, and inscrutable to human observation. God is at work invisibly accomplishing his purposes according to a perfect plan, even during those seasons when we wonder if he really knows what he is doing. He is at work even when we wonder if God is there at all. In 1 Kings 19:8-18 we find three specific truths that God taught Elijah.

The first truth is that God's Word is effective even when it comes in a whisper. Verse 9 reads, "And there he (Elijah) went into a cave, and spend the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him...." Verses 11-12 say, "And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and a strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the 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 still small voice."

Three times the same expression is used. "...the Lord was not in the wind..." (verse 11) "...the Lord was not in the earthquake..." (verse 11) "...the Lord was not in the fire" (verse 12) It certainly doesn't mean that God had nothing to do with bringing about the wind, the earthquake and the fire. These were obviously miraculous, not natural, phenomena. God definitely caused them. But God was not in them in the same sense that he was in the still, small voice. In other words, there was no self-revelation of God in the miraculous phenomena.

When God was ready to speak to Elijah, he did it in the most unspectacular way possible. God spoke to Elijah in a whisper. The lesson is very clear. God's Word is more effective than all the spectacular physical displays of divine power you can imagine- even when it comes in a whisper. Encouragement and strength and power are found in the Scriptures. How does God speak to you today? The voice of God is a still, small voice- as you read the Bible. Elijah needed to rise above his discouragement through meditating upon God's Word.

The second truth is that God's righteousness is perfect even when his judgments are delayed. Elijah's state of mind was one of deep discouragement. In verses 10 and 14 Elijah made the same speech twice to God. This was evidently something he had rehearsed. He didn't think God had dealt fairly with him. He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (verses 10, 14). It did not seem fair to Elijah for God to ignore the sins of Ahab, Jezebel and the wicked Israelites.

What Elijah did not realize was that God had already worked out the means by which he would judge Ahab and Jezebel and the whole nation. "And the Lord said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place'" (verses 15-16).

God was still on his throne. The Lord was working his plan. Elijah's legacy would continue. In fact, Elijah's work would outlast Ahab. Ahab's offspring would never sit on the throne of Israel. But Elijah, who had no physical offspring, would be remembered as the father of all the prophets.

The third truth is that God's redemptive plan is on track even when his people are merely a remnant. Elijah thought that he alone was left faithful to the Lord. But again, the Lord was working behind the scenes, secretly, to accomplish his purposes. God told Elijah, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

God is sovereign. He is at work in people's heart drawing them to himself. The Lord had seven thousand who were still serving him. Elijah needed to learn that he could trust the work of God even when it was not spectacular or immediately visible. God would save the lost. He would judge the wicked. He would accomplish these things in his own way and in his own time. God's work is accomplished through his word in a still, small voice. The Lord's work is most often not shouted from the housetops the way Elijah would have preferred. God's plan was not derailed by the appearance of opposition. Elijah needed to learn not to lose heart in the midst of such difficulties.

This is a lesson that Elijah learned. He never suffered another lapse of faith. Don't be discouraged. God speaks today in the still, small voice of his word. His message is Jesus who died for us. God's judgments are always perfect. They are on God's time- not ours. Finally, the Lord always has a remnant. God always has those who faithfully follow his son.

Ethan Hansen
Pastor, Faith Bible Fellowship
Big Lake, AK
ehansen@biglakefaithbible.org