

1 KINGS 19:3-16

³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." ¹¹ The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." ¹⁵ The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.

¹⁶ Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

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SOME PEOPLE EQUATE A SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE TO NECESSITATE SOME TYPE OF SPECIAL EFFECTS, LIKE MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH. THEN THERE IS SAUL'S (AKA-PAUL'S) CONVERSION, WHERE THE RISEN CHRIST APPEARS TO HIM IN A VISION, KNOCKING HIM TO THE GROUND AND SAYING HE WILL BE HIS APOSTLE.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN PARTICULAR GOD APPEARS IN FIRE, IN POWERFUL STORMS, AND IN EARTHQUAKES. INDEED WHEN WE THINK OF ALMIGHTY GOD, WE OFTEN IMAGINE POWERFUL SIGNS AND A LOUD VOICE.

HOWEVER THE BIBLE ALSO TELLS US ABOUT GOD APPEARING IN THE CRY OF THE NEWBORN BABY JESUS. THEN THERE IS THE SAVIOR HIMSELF. WHILE JESUS CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE PROJECTED HIS VOICE TO PREACH TO LARGE CROWDS, THE ONLY TIME THE BIBLE SAYS HE CRIED OUT IN A LOUD VOICE, WAS FROM THE CROSS.

JESUS' QUIET TEACHING AND PREACHING WAS NONE THE LESS POWERFUL. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SPOKE TO THOSE WHO QUESTIONED HIS CLAIM THAT HE WAS SENT FROM HEAVEN, NOT BY SHOUTING AT THEM, BUT TALKING TO THEM, INVITING THEM TO LISTEN AND LEARN.

HE TRIED TO PERSUADE THEM THAT HE WAS NOT WRONG, IT WAS THEIR PERSPECTIVE AND CLOSED-MINDED STANCE THAT WAS THE SOURCE OF THE ERROR.

THE PROBLEM WAS-MANY SHUT THEMSELVES OFF FROM GOD'S MESSAGE, BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY THOUGHT THEY KNEW ABOUT JESUS AND HIS FAMILY BACKGROUND, AS WELL AS ABOUT GOD. EVEN SO, JESUS PROMISED GOD, HIS FATHER, WOULD DRAW THOSE WILLING TO LISTEN, CLOSE TO HIMSELF.

LISTENING TO GOD, RATHER THAN JUST HEARING WHAT GOD SAYS, AND THEN FORGETTING OR IGNORING HIS WORD, IS AN IMPORTANT BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE. GOD OFTEN SPOKE TO HIS PEOPLE IN POWERFUL AND SOMETIMES LOUD WAYS- DEMANDING AND COMMANDING, SCOLDING, AND INSTRUCTING.

THERE IS HOWEVER, SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT ABOUT POWER THAT WE OFTEN FORGET. REAL POWER, ESPECIALLY ALMIGHTY AND ALL POWERFUL GOD, CAN SPEAK OR ACT IN A QUIET VOICE OR GENTLE WAYS AS EASILY AS WITH SHOUTS, OR FIRE, OR IN A HURRICANE OR AN EARTHQUAKE.

TODAY'S OLD TESTAMENT READING IS USUALLY UNDERSTOOD AS A STORY ABOUT THE PROPHET ELIJAH HAVING A COMPLETE MELT-DOWN, AND FALLING INTO DEEP DESPAIR.

THIS IS NOT THE ONLY WAY TO LOOK AT THE STORY, WHICH IS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN THE PROPHET'S PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL BURNOUT. ANOTHER WAY TO VIEW THAT STORY'S MESSAGE, IS TO DO SO FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOW GOD RESPONDS TO HIS PROPHET.

GOD IS AS MUCH A SUBJECT OF THIS STORY AS IS ELIJAH. AND IN THIS PASSAGE THE LORD, THE ALMIGHTY, RESPONDS IN A CALM AND GENTLE MANNER.

IN ORDER TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF THE STORY LET US TURN TO A DIFFERENT ONE TOLD BY TOM BOOKER, THE AUTHOR OF "THE HORSE WHISPERER".

ONE OF HIS TALES IS ABOUT A HORSE THE WAS SPOOKED BY A LOUD CELL PHONE THAT RANG NEAR THE STABLES. THE ANIMAL BECAME SO FRIGHTENED THAT IT BOLTED TO THE FAR END OF THE FIELD. RATHER THAN CHASING AFTER IT AND RISKING INCREASING IT'S AGITATED STATE, BOOKER WALKED SLOWLY INTO THE FIELD AND SAT DOWN SOME DISTANCE FROM THE HORSE.

HE SAT WITHOUT SPEAKING OR MOVING A LONG WHILE, UNTIL THE HORSE, WHO HAD CALMED SOME, BECAME CURIOUS. IT BEGAN TO SLOWLY MOVE TOWARDS HIM, PAUSING AND WATCHING AND LISTENING, READY TO BOLT AGAIN IF NEED BE.

FINALLY IT CAME CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE MAN TO TOUCH HIM. ONLY THEN DID BOOKER SPEAK IN A QUIET VOICE, OFFERING REASSURANCE. FINALLY HE REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED THE HORSE, AND WAS ABLE TO BRING IT BACK TO THE STABLE.

THIS, IS NOT UNLIKE WHAT GOD DOES WITH THE PROPHET ELIJAH. NOW ELIJAH WAS NO HIGH STRUNG BEAST. INSTEAD HE WAS A POWERFUL MAN WHO SERVED GOD IN WORD AND DEED.

HE CONFRONTED KING AHAB AND HIS PAGAN-WORSHIPPING QUEEN JEZEBEL. HE BROUGHT A DEAD BOY BACK TO LIFE, AND ALSO MIRACULOUSLY PROVIDED FOOD FOR HIM AND HIS WIDOWED MOTHER. ELIJAH'S PRAYER BROUGHT ABOUT A THREE-YEAR DROUGHT AND THEN ENDED IT.

HE BROUGHT FIRE FROM HEAVEN TO PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF THE LIVING GOD, AS OPPOSED TO THE LIFELESS IDOL BAAL, WHO WAS WORSHIPED BY THE QUEEN AND MANY OTHERS, INCLUDING, AT TIMES, BY HER HUSBAND.

FOLLOWING THAT INCIDENT ELIJAH, ACTING ON GOD'S COMMAND HAD SEVERAL HUNDRED FALSE PROPHETS EXECUTED.

WHEN THAT NEWS REACHED QUEEN JEZEBEL, SHE WAS ONCE MORE ENRAGED AT THE PROPHET AND SENT A MESSAGE TO HIM THAT HE WOULD BE DEAD BY TOMORROW.

AFTER HEARING ABOUT HER WRATH AND RECEIVING HER MESSAGE- ELIJAH BOLTED. HE RAN INTO THE WILDERNESS UNTIL HE COULD RUN NO MORE AND THEN HE RESTED UNDERNEATH THE SPARSE COVER OF A SMALL TREE.

IT WAS THEN HE PRAYED FOR GOD TO TAKE HIS LIFE. NOW THIS MAY SOUND STRANGE BECAUSE ELIJAH FLED FROM THE THREAT OF DEATH, AND YET HE ASKED GOD TO KILL HIM.

BUT REMEMBER, HE WAS STRESSED, EXHAUSTED, AND DEPRESSED. HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY RATIONAL, BUT WAS ENGULFED IN DESPAIR.

ELIJAH FELT ALL HIS WORK WAS IN VAIN, THAT HE WAS A FAILURE, AND FELT HE COULD NOT STAND UP TO JEZEBEL, SO HE JUST GAVE UP.

NOW WE MIGHT EXPECT GOD WOULD COMMAND HIS SERVANT TO STOP FEELING SORRY FOR HIMSELF AND HAVE MORE FAITH, BUT HE DOES NOT.

INSTEAD, GOD LETS HIM SLEEP A WHILE, AND THEN SENDS AN ANGEL TO CARE FOR HIM, BRINGING BREAD AND WATER, AND THEN COMMANDED HIM TO EAT.

ELIJAH DOES SO, AND THEN SLEEPS SOME MORE, UNTIL THE ANGEL WAKES HIM A SECOND TIME WITH MORE FOOD AND DRINK.

HE WAS STRENGTHEN ENOUGH BY THIS SUSTENANCE TO MAKE THE FORTY DAY JOURNEY TO MOUNT HOREB, BETTER KNOWN AS MOUNT SINAI.

THIS WAS THE MOUNTAIN WHERE MOSES RECEIVED THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. ELIJAH CLIMBED THE MOUNT AND RESTED IN A CAVE.

THIS JOURNEY ITSELF IS IMPORTANT. IT PROVIDED TIME FOR THE PROPHET'S MIND AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS TO BEGIN TO HEAL, AND IT HELPED TO BUILD UP HIS PHYSICAL STAMINA.

AFTER A NIGHT OF REST IN THAT GAVE GOD SPOKE TO ELIJAH ASKING, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?" IN OTHER WORDS, GOD WAS INVITING HIM TO SHARE HIS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, HE ALLOWED HIM TO EXPRESS ALL HE NEEDED TO EXPRESS.

AND THE PROPHET WAS NOT SHY ABOUT VENTING TO THE LORD HIS GOD. HE PROCLAIMED HIS INTENSE DEVOTION TO THE LORD, SHOWN BY HOW HE DID EVERYTHING GOD COMMANDED HIM TO DO.

HE COMPLAINED THE ISRAELITES HAD ALL FORSAKEN GOD TO WORSHIP IDOLS, AND ONLY HE HAS REMAINED FAITHFUL. HE THEN TELLS GOD HIS LIFE IS IN DANGER BECAUSE OF HIS SERVICE TO THE LORD.

NOTICE, GOD DOES NOT RESPOND IN ANGER TO THESE COMPLAINTS AND THE UNSPOKEN IMPLICATION THAT GOD HAS DONE NOTHING TO HELP HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT.

INDEED, INSTEAD OF SAVING HIM FROM THE WRATH OF THE QUEEN, THE PROPHET IMPLIES THAT GOD HAS ALLOWED HIS LIFE TO BE PUT IN JEOPARDY.

HIS UNSPOKEN MESSAGE WAS THAT ELIJAH HAD HAD ENOUGH, HE COULD NOT TAKE ANYMORE STRESS.

THE LORD REPLIED TO ELIJAH WITH A SIMPLE REQUEST, THAT HE STAND OUTSIDE THE CAVE AND WAIT FOR GOD'S PRESENCE TO PASS BY HIM.

BUT BEFORE HE COULD MOVE TO OBEY-HE WITNESSED THE DISPLAY OF GOD'S POWER AND MIGHT JUST OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVE.

SUDDENLY A VIOLENT WIND COMES UPON THE MOUNTAIN, THIS IS FOLLOWED BY AN EARTHQUAKE, AND THEN FIRE. BUT ELIJAH SENSED THAT THE LORD WAS NOT PRESENT IN ANY OF THOSE USUAL MANIFESTATIONS OF HIS PRESENCE. BUT THEN SILENCE FILLED THE AIR.

IT WAS IN THE SILENCE OF, THE "STILL SMALL VOICE" AS IT IS RECORDED IN THE KING JAMES VERSION, THE PROPHET FINALLY SENSED GOD. HE HUMBLY COVERED HIS FACE IN REVERENCE FOR THE LORD, AND STOOD OUTSIDE THE CAVE TO MEET HIS GOD.

THE MESSAGE HE RECEIVED BEGAN WITH THE SAME QUESTION ASKED OF HIM WHEN HE AWOKE IN THE CAVE: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, ELIJAH?"

THE PROPHET REPLIED TO THE QUESTION, WITH THE SAME FORCEFUL VENTING OF ALL HIS TROUBLED THOUGHTS, AND HIS FEELINGS OF DESPAIR.

AND AGAIN, THE LORD DID NOT TELL HIM TO "SNAP OUT OF IT", TO "STOP HAVING A PITY-PARTY", OR ANY OF THE OTHER THINGS PEOPLE SOMETIMES SAY TO SOMEONE WHO IS DEPRESSED.

INSTEAD GOD LISTENED PATIENTLY ONCE AGAIN TO EVERYTHING ELIJAH SAID, AND ALSO TO WHAT HE DID NOT SAY BUT WAS THINKING.

LIKE THE HORSE WHISPERER, IN THE STORY BY TOM BOOKER, GOD WAITED UNTIL ELIJAH HAD CALMED DOWN SOME.

EVEN THEN, THE LORD KNEW HIS SERVANT DID NOT NEED TO BE SCOLDED OR YELLED AT. DRAMA OF ANY KIND WAS THE LAST THING HE NEEDED OR WOULD RESPOND POSITIVELY TO.

AND SO, WHILE GOD FIRST REMINDED THE PROPHET ABOUT HIS POWER IN THE FORCEFUL DISPLAYS OF NATURE, GOD DID NOT APPEAR IN ANY OF THOSE DRAMATIC DISPLAYS. INSTEAD ELIJAH WAS STIRRED FROM THE CAVE BY THE QUIET SOUND OF THE LORD'S PRESENCE.

THEN GOD LISTENED PATIENTLY, EVEN WHEN ELIJAH REPEATED WHAT HE HAD JUST SAID TO THE LORD MINUTES BEFORE. AGAIN GOD DID NOT SCOLD HIM, BUT ACCEPTED EVERY ONE OF HIS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

IN RESPONSE, THE LORD GAVE ELIJAH BOTH DIRECTION AND HOPE, TELLING HIM TO GO BACK TO WHERE HE CAME FROM. BUT THIS TIME THE PROPHET WAS GIVEN THREE SPECIFIC TASKS TO DO, EACH OF WHICH CONTAINED A SUBTLE MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

THE FIRST TWO TASKS CONCERNED THE ANOINTING OF TWO KINGS, ONE OF WHOM, WOULD REPLACE AHAB AS KING OF ISRAEL.

BY THAT COMMAND GOD TOLD ELIJAH THAT THERE WERE OTHERS WHO WERE FAITHFUL TO THE LORD HIS GOD. THE COMMAND ALSO IMPLIED THAT GOD WOULD BRING ABOUT THE DOWNFALL OF AHAB AND HIS QUEEN.

THE FINAL COMMAND HE RECEIVED FROM GOD WAS FOR ELIJAH TO ANOINT ELISHA TO REPLACE HIM. IN OTHER WORDS ELISHA WOULD BECOME HIS DISCIPLE, AND WOULD WORK WITH HIM, AND LEARN FROM HIM.

THIS MEANT TWO THINGS, FIRST GOD HEARD ELIJAH'S NEED FOR A HUMAN PARTNER IN HIS MINISTRY, AND SECOND GOD WAS TELLING ELIJAH THAT HIS TASK WOULD ONE DAY END.

THUS, IT WAS IN A QUIET VOICE GOD GAVE ELIJAH WHAT HE NEEDED.

FIRST, HE NEEDED TO BE LISTENED TO. SECONDLY TO BE GIVEN DIRECTION AND SOME INSIGHT INTO GOD'S PLAN, AND THIRDLY TO KNOW GOD WOULD EVENTUALLY LET HIM REST. AND SO THE LORD CARED FOR HIS PROPHET, IN ANSWERING HIS PRAYER BY GIVING HIM NOT WHAT HE ASKED FOR, BUT WHAT HE REALLY NEEDED.

ELIJAH RECEIVED BOTH PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL PROVISION, ALONG WITH DIRECTION. HE ALSO HAD SOME TIME TO HEAL MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.

IN ALL THESE WAYS AND MORE, GOD SHOWED HE HAD NOT ABANDONED ELIJAH, EVEN IF IT HAD SEEMED TO THE PROPHET THAT GOD HAD DONE SO.

THE MESSAGE OF THE PASSAGE FOR US IS SIMILAR. IT PROCLAIMS THAT, EVEN THOUGH NO THINGS WILL NOT ALWAYS GO OUR WAY, GOD HAS NOT AND WILL NOT ABANDON US.

INDEED THE ONGOING MESSAGE OF BIBLE IS ONE THAT PROCLAIMS THE STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD.

THIS IS THE BLESSED PROMISE FOUND IN THE TESTIMONY OF GOD'S WORD IN SCRIPTURE, AS WELL AS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS, GOD'S WORD MADE FLESH.

OUR RESPONSE IS SIMPLE IT IS TRUST IN THE LORD. THIS INCLUDES RESTING, AND EVEN VENTING TO GOD WHEN WE NEED TO, BUT THEN LISTENING FOR HIS RESPONSE AND FOLLOWING HIS DIRECTION.

LET US PRAY:

O GOD, WE TURN TO YOU IN TIMES OF PEACE AND PERIL, IN MOMENTS OF REST, AND IN THE MIDST OF STORMS IN LIFE. HEAR ARE PRAYER. AND WHEN WHAT WE NEED THE MOST IS A QUIET WORD FROM YOU, HELP US HEAR YOU SPEAK TO US, IN THAT STILL, SMALL VOICE. GIVE US THE HOPE, THE PEACE, AND THE DIRECTION WE NEED. IN THE NAME OF JESUS WE PRAY. AMEN.

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