

THE STILL, SMALL VOICE

1Kings 19:11 *And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks 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:*

1Kings 19:12 *And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*

Elijah's ministry was built on spectacular demonstrations of God's power. From the time he is introduced in chapter 18, his life reads like one non-stop action thriller without a dull moment. How does one deal with a minister who is talking to you one moment and vanishes the next only to be found many kilometers away? Even Obadiah, a man who feared God greatly, appeared frustrated: "And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth" (1 Kings 18:12). Famously, Elijah shut up the heavens through the sheer intensity of his prayers. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5:17). For three and a half years there was a severe drought in Israel because of one man's prayers. There never was a man more wanted in the entire nation as Elijah was – everything about Elijah was grandiose.

1Kings 18:38 *Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.*

1Kings 18:39 *And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.*

Elijah's striking ministry culminated in the fire of God falling from heaven and consuming the sacrifice that triggered national repentance and sealed the doom of the 450 prophets of Baal. Whatever Elijah did was done on a giga scale: note again that he prayed for this divine fire to fall from heaven; we do not read that God commanded him to operate in this fashion. This may come as a surprise to you but bear with me. A careful and meditative re-reading of the spiritual crisis that Elijah experienced, and God's handling of his crisis, leads to one conclusion: Elijah's ministry relied too heavily upon the spectacular. It appears God is issuing a warning through his ministry: while God is gracious and may at times acquiesce to his servants' prayers for miracles, God wishes humans to be persuaded by his Spirit and Word. "Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto

Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). Let us examine this lesson through what transpired after Elijah’s victory on Mount Carmel.

1Kings 19:1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

1Kings 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.

Jezebel did nothing spectacular; no miracles or supernatural signs through demonic powers. Yet her message was a still, small voice that had a devastating impact on Elijah. Words spoken in the right place and at the right time always have the most devastating impact. We remember the subtle words of the serpent in the Garden. “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). It was the still, small voice of Jezebel that induced fear, panic and even suicidal thoughts in the mind of Elijah, and so he fled to Horeb. Elijah must have reckoned that since God had abandoned Israel, the only other place he dwelt must be Mount Sinai. Clearly, he was wrong about this, but God facilitated his journey to the holy mountain, for an angel was sent to feed him. “And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee” (I Kings 19:7). God is good! Even in our mistakes, he is compassionate. Finally, Elijah arrived at his destination. Until this point in his life, it was all action. Most of the action was initiated by him, through his prayers. Now, for the first time, he was a quiet, beaten man and appeared to lack any new initiatives or ideas. This was the perfect time for God to teach Elijah the golden lesson. But first, God’s own display of raw, divine power.

1Kings 19:11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks 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:

1Kings 19:12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

First a mighty wind that smashed the rocks, then an earthquake and finally a fire. God was not in any of them. We appear to be looking for God where he is not. God was basically saying to Elijah, “Why do you rely so heavily on my power to sway and change the heart of Israel? Look at the results so far! How many have genuinely turned to me in heartfelt

repentance?” What was the point of the three and a half years of drought or killing the 450 prophets of Baal? Israel has returned to Baal once again. Was this not the same predicament of the multitudes who followed the Lord Jesus Christ? They were not interested in his teaching, the still, small voice of God, but his miracles – and the miracle of providing food in particular. “Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). In the end, everyone abandoned the Lord when he was apprehended in Jerusalem.

Thankfully, however, God was and always has been in his own voice – his still, small voice. Note carefully that God caused the mighty wind, the earthquake and the fire, but he was not IN these natural phenomena. Such spectacular acts could induce fear and cheap emotions, but God is not in them. Mary Magdalene was in the tomb looking for the Lord Jesus, but he was not there – he was to be found in his word which said he would arise the third day. Look for God in his Word – the still, small voice. If the serpent and Jezebel may have had still, small voices that caused major devastation, how much more will the still, small voice of God heal, restore and empower? It was when Elijah no longer had an audience and no longer relied on divine fireworks that the still, small voice of God could begin restoring and edifying him. Until then, Elijah thought he could beat everyone in submission through fearful divine acts, but now God showed him that he must persuade souls through the Word of God alone.

***1Kings 19:13** And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?*

How many miracles did God do on behalf of Israel when they left Egypt? How many were permanently changed? Just a handful! The still small voice of God caught the attention of Elijah; he knew God was present in his voice and was revived. The voice of God asked Elijah probing questions about his own conduct, “What doest thou here, Elijah!?” Elijah was full of grievances about other people, but God’s voice focused on Elijah’s own conduct. This is one confirmation of the voice of God – in the right place and time, he will ask us probing questions about our own conduct, not others. The voice also corrected and comforted Elijah with knowledge he was unaware of – he was not alone, there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There is a time to separate ourselves from the crowds, come to Jesus alone and wait to hear his still, small voice. Let us respond, “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth” (I Samuel 3:9). Let us persuade people with the voice of God and not rely on the spectacular!