

Listening to God
Series: Days of Elijah
1 Kings 19:1-18
July 31, 2016

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Welcome again to worship. I'm so glad you are here.

How many times in our lives do we wish that we could hear God speak directly and even audibly to us? Certainly, there are certain times in life that we wish we clearly knew what God's will for us is.

- A Christian teenager who wants to follow the will of God would like to know what God wants them to do, where to go, to fulfill that divine purpose.
- A Christian young adult who desires God wants to know if there is a person God has chosen for them to marry.
- A Christian adult who longs to accomplish God's purposes in life in their career longs for clarity in their calling.
- A Christian parent earnestly wants to raise their children in the ways of the Lord.
- A Christian retiree seeks to continue service to the Lord in the remaining years of their life.

When Christ occupies the throne of your life, you want to do His will completely: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Yet sometimes, we want or need confirmation of what that will is for us.

I invite you to turn to 1 Kings 19.

We have been talking about the Old Testament prophet Elijah in our series "Days of Elijah."

Last week, we saw that he too had his low moments.

After Elijah defeats and kills the 850 prophets on Mt. Carmel, Queen Jezebel threatens to kill him on sight. So what does Elijah do when he hears Jezebel's threat? Verse 3.

*Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life...*¹

He was afraid and ran for his life. He had just won a great spiritual victory. 850 to 1 odds were no big deal to him, but 1 to 1, Jezebel verses him... that's too much to take. The shock of Jezebel's resistance after Mount Carmel led Elijah to forget the power of God, so he fled from Jezreel in the north to Beersheba in the far south of the Promised Land – as far away from Jezebel as he could get. The distance from the top of Mount Carmel to Beersheba was about 120 miles, which would have taken an ordinary single traveler around six days, but less if he ran part of the way.²

But Elijah is not just afraid. Look at verse 4.

*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."*³

Why does he think he is no better than his ancestors? Because he realized in those 6 days of fleeing Jezebel that he had disappointed God with his lack of faith. He

¹ 1 Kings 19:3a (NRSV)

² English Standard Version Study Bible, 1 Kings 19:3

³ 1 Kings 19:4 (NRSV)

had stood up to the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mt. Carmel, but had turned tail and run when threatened by Jezebel. He thought his witness for God was completely tarnished because he fled.

So God has to get ahold of Elijah His servant, stand him back up on his feet, restore his faith and confidence, and send him back out there.

YOU'VE PROBABLY HAD TO DO THAT WITH YOUR CHILD. LEARNING TO RIDE A BIKE. GOING BACK UP TO THE PLATE. TRYING AGAIN AFTER FAILING. JOHN WESLEY BEFORE ALDERSGATE.

That's what God does here. Look with me at 1 Kings 19:5-10:

Then [Elijah] lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him 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." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "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."⁴

When Elijah fled to Mount Horab, which is Mount Sinai, he was returning to the sacred place where God had met Moses and had given his laws to the people. Obviously, God gave Elijah special strength to travel this great distance—over 200 miles—without additional food. Like Moses before him and Jesus after him, Elijah fasted for 40 days and 40 nights.⁵

When he gets to the end of his 40 day fast, God asks Elijah, "What are you doing here?" And how does Elijah respond?

"I alone am left." Elijah seems to have partially forgotten his past: miraculous provision by the brook and in the widow's house, the raising of a dead child, mighty acts of God on mountaintops. He mentions none of these, but talks only of Israelite apostasy and prophetic casualties. The resistance of one person (Jezebel) has turned massive victory into overwhelming defeat, in Elijah's mind. He is certainly not the only one left, but that is how he feels.⁶

Lonely and discouraged, he forgot that others had remained faithful during the nation's wickedness. When you are tempted to think that you are the only one remaining faithful to a task, don't stop to feel sorry for yourself. Self-pity will dilute the good you are doing. Be assured that even if you don't know who they are, others are faithfully obeying God and fulfilling their duties.⁷

Then we have this wonderful encounter with God. Verses 11-13:

He 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

⁴ 1 Kings 19:5-10 (NRSV)

⁵ See Deuteronomy 9:9; Matthew 4:1, 2

⁶ English Standard Version Study Bible, 1 Kings 19:10

⁷ Life Application Study Bible, 1 Kings 19:10

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.”⁸

Not in the wind ... not in the earthquake ... not in the fire. The emphasis on Mount Carmel had been on God’s spectacular ways, particularly his use of fire. The emphasis here is on God’s quiet ways. He is not to be found in the spectacular elements of the storm outside the cave but instead in a low whisper.⁹

Elijah knew that the sound of a gentle whisper was God’s voice. He realized that God doesn’t reveal himself only in powerful, miraculous ways. To look for God only in something big (rallies, churches, conferences, highly visible leaders) may be to miss him because he is often found gently whispering in the quietness of a humbled heart. Are you listening for God? Step back from the noise and activity of your busy life and listen humbly and quietly for his guidance. It may come when you least expect it.¹⁰

I’VE HEARD GOD’S VOICE IN MY LIFE SEVERAL TIMES.

AT TIMES WE WANT THE BIG DEMONSTRATION FROM GOD.

Yet, there is in fact a suggestion in the text that Elijah does not particularly wish to understand what God is saying through these events. He has always claimed to “stand before the Lord”¹¹; but here on Mount Horeb, in spite of the command of verse 11 (“Go out and stand ... before the Lord”), he apparently stays in the cave until the storm is over and he hears the “whisper.” See that in verse 12? And then when he does go out, it is with his mantle, his cloak, over his face, which makes it difficult for him to “see.”¹²

How do you make it easy to hear and discern the voice and will of God?

First, realize that God speaks through His word. Your daily devotions are your first and primary place where God speaks. You can hear the voice of God every day in reading and praying the Scriptures.

Second, give time for the Lord to respond. Elijah had to wait 40 days. Sometimes, we have to wait. And why is that? Usually it is for 3 reasons:

1. We have something in our lives – like Elijah’s mantle – that is blocking us from hearing God’s voice.
2. Or we are not ready to hear God’s voice because we need to learn to wait. Remember the “Trust Jesus” video?
3. Or God’s timing is not our timing.

Finally, earnestly desire God’s will in your life. “God, help me catch the wave that you are sending.” Start listening for the voice and call of God in your life.

My friends, don’t stay in your cave of weakness and fear. Go out and stand on the mountain, in the wind, in the earthquake, in the fire, then hear God’s still small voice in your life. Trust Him, and He will make your paths straight.

⁸ 1 Kings 19:11-13a (NRSV)

⁹ English Standard Version Study Bible, 1 Kings 19:11-12

¹⁰ Life Application Study Bible, 1 Kings 19:11-13

¹¹ See 1 Kings 17:1; 18:15

¹² English Standard Version Study Bible, 1 Kings 19:13-14