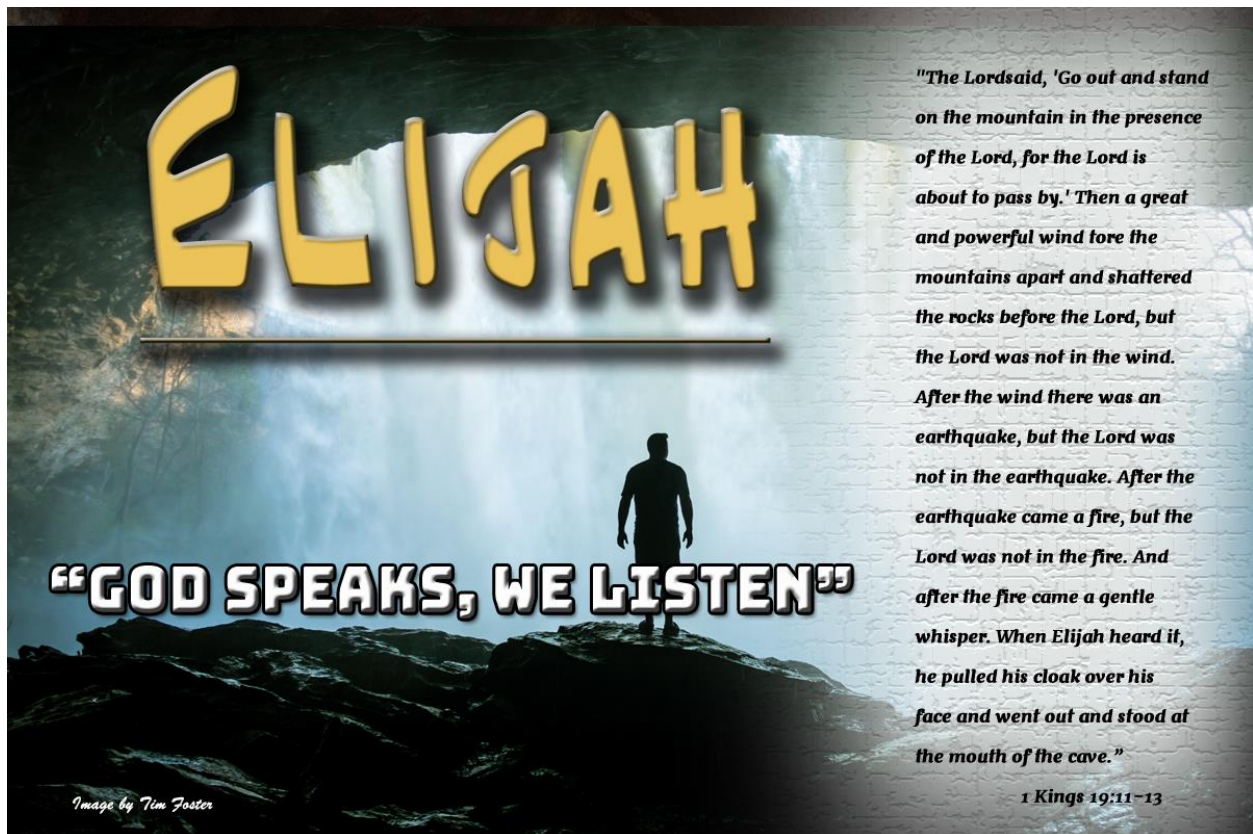


February 27, 2022

God Speaks, We Listen

1 Kings 19:9-15



Special Music: "Whispers" Destiny Worship Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPcAuemjqig>

1 Kings: 9-15

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.”

WHISPERS

I find the wind annoys me
It causes trees to creak
And rocks to crack
Disturbing my thoughts
And interrupting
My meditations
Inhibiting access
To my spirit.

The walls around me sway
As the rock gives way
Trembling earth
Beneath my feet
Dust and debris
Of an unfocused life
Caught in the grips
Of a struggling shrug.

I step back from the fire
Heat scorching my face
Crackles and sparkles
Of burning embers
Flinging themselves
Through the air
Bringing light
Without substance.

And then comes the whisper
A soft voice calling me
Without the snare
Of oratorical air
Or bargain basement shenanigans.
There is power
In God's whispered secrets,
Shades of his phrases.

Knowing the source
Of utterances in my ear.
I cover my face
To hide my disgrace
And step
With purposeful intent
Towards the whisper
And the presence of God.

When I was a boy in South Dakota, I learned about world affairs. I remember the drills as we performed 'duck and cover' and hugged the floor beneath our desks in school. Living on an Air Force base, I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. I remember when my mother received a call from my dad (totally against regulations) that we, my mother, my sister, and me, should go to the basement and not go back upstairs until he called again. For seven days we lived in our basement, only going upstairs to use the bathroom or grab some food. I did not understand the concept of global nuclear destruction. I only remember being fearful about something unseen. Those days still haunt me.

As I write this message, the people of the world once again stand on the brink of war. While we bicker over the border crisis, COVID, masking, vaccinations, racial discrimination, and the focus on police interactions, Russia has crossed the border into the Ukraine while shelling numerous cities, marching towards Kiev, diplomacy having failed. Once again, innocent people are dying while political leaders play chess. And while we feel that the conflict may be half a world away, there is a renewed fear that the world super powers, capable of destroying the world multiple times over, are once again at direct odds with each other. And with the world distracted by the events in the Ukraine, China stands by eyeing the gem known as Taiwan. I am not saying that the border crisis, COVID, masking, vaccinations, racial discrimination, and the focus on police interactions are not important. Far from it. But there are times when we have to set aside our differences in order to deal with even greater issues.

The Ukraine is not a member of NATO at this time, but the escalation of US involvement to protect NATO interests cannot be discounted. We remind ourselves of the words of Thomas Paine in his pamphlet *The Crisis*, “THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.” In another paragraph, Paine writes, “I have as little superstition in me as any man living, but my secret opinion has ever been, and still is, that God Almighty will not give up a people to military destruction, or leave them unsupportedly to perish, who have so earnestly and so repeatedly sought to avoid the calamities of war, by every decent method which wisdom could invent. Neither have I so much of the infidel in me, as to suppose that He has relinquished the government of the world, and given us up to the care of devils;” Mr. Paine wrote those words on December 23, 1776. It is a central theme to each of us as Americans, although we often forget the source and the impetus of the circumstances that generated them.

It is also important to us as Christians as we seek to protect our right to worship in a world turning in on itself. While God seeks to bring peace to our lives, the world seeks to drag us into war. While God brings grace to our souls,

the world seeks to corrupt us. While God encourages us to love and care for his children, the world seeks to kill those children. While God whispers to us, the world shouts at us.

Have you ever noticed how when people are shouting at us, we tend to stop listening, but when people whisper something to us, we draw closer to make sure we hear what they have to say, even to the point of asking them to repeat it if we are unable to understand something? There is something in our human nature that seeks to avoid people who are loud and boisterous. Not only do we not want to listen to them, but we also seldom want to be around them at all.

We even try to avoid that person at a party who is laughing so loud it almost hurts our ears. Or the preacher that shouts at us. Even though he or she might not be saying anything accusatory, the mere fact that they are shouting at us can be offensive and causes us to close our ears.

How often do we raise our voice to try and make a point in a conversation or argument? We may not think that we are being obnoxious, but the other person starts to shut down or walk away. Or maybe they start shouting back, at which point the conversation is no longer a conversation, because no one is listening at all.

So, I ask this question is all seriousness. Why do we think we need God to shout at us to make his words understood? Why do we believe that the message that we are receiving from our Creator isn't valid unless God raises a Divine voice to us? Could it possibly be that we are not listening for God's whisper in our

ears? Perhaps we are just too busy to pay attention to God's whisper or that we believe that a loud booming voice is more of an attention-getter and validation that it is God speaking to us. Here's a little secret that I will pass along to you. If you hear nothing else in this sermon, please burn this into your brain. Satan can shout, too.

The third message in this series on Elijah was entitled "We Speak, God Listens." In that message we talked about Elijah was talking to God, praising his Creator and also declaring Elijah's position as God's servant. The event surrounding this prayer was the raising of the widow's son from the dead after the young man died from an illness.

Today, we reverse that dynamic. Today we are focused on those moments when "God speaks, we listen." How do we shut out the cacophonous rantings of a world gone mad, in order to hear God speaking to us? What can Elijah teach us about this?

When we left off our story about Elijah, he had been on the run from the army of Jezebel and had taken a respite in the desert under a broom bush, telling God that he was too tired to go on and just wanted to die. Instead, God sent an angel to minister to him, provide him with food and drink, and encouraging him to rest. Then he got up and traveled 40 days to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. It is at this point we resume our story:

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.”

We talked about this before in a different message, but it is an important part of Elijah’s journey. He spends the night in a cave at the top of Mount Horeb. While he is sleeping, God is starting to instill a message to him. There is no shouting. As a matter of fact, God has removed Elijah from any distractions of the world. Here, in this cave at the top of Mount Horeb, there is no army of Jezebel to draw his focus away from God. He is able to rest without worry. Because his rest is deep and restful, he can hear the whispers and utterances of God in his mind and his soul.

What does that tell us? Centuries later, we find these words in the sixth chapter of Matthew that are spoken by Jesus,

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Can you see the connection here? When we remove the distractions of life from our one-on-one time with God, we can hear the whisper. We can begin to understand what God is trying to say to us. Satan is always trying to distract us by shouting in one ear while God is whispering in the other. When we close out the noise of the world created by Satan, there is no question as to the message being whispered to us by God. And God asks Elijah,

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

But Elijah still hasn't shut out the world around him. He is still fixated on the events that have led him to this cave. God has removed the distractions, but Elijah is clinging to them.

“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.”

Elijah seems to think that God needs a blow-by-blow description of everything that has happened. He just can't let it go. He can't seem to stop his mind from racing. He can't seem to understand that God wants his attention. God wants him to step back, take a breath, and hear the whispers.

“I'm a good Christian, Lord, and I have been working so hard to forward your kingdom. I truly try to be your hands and feet in this world. But people are so angry and tired right now. We've had this COVID thing, and don't trust the government. And we have this border crisis going on. Then there are the riots, and civilians and police officers alike are dying, and no one wants to take responsibility. There is so much shouting and noise, God. And now Russia is invading the Ukraine and I am worried about the people there as well as our own military and their families. These are such scary and trying times, God.”

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.”

God is telling Elijah that our Creator is in control. “Change the focus of your mind, Elijah. Get ready to meet your God. As important as all those things are, none of them are as important as your time with God and the message that God is trying to get you to hear. Focus on the now. Focus on being in the presence of God. You let me, the Creator of all that is, take care of all of that other stuff. Stop. Look right here at me. I am talking to you.”

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.

I want you to understand that this is a way for God to help Elijah clear his mind. It is difficult to think about the army of Jezebel when the wind is ripping boulders from the side of the mountain around you. It is hard to concentrate on the problems with the Israelites when you are standing in the middle of an earthquake. It is difficult to let the voice of Satan and the news of the world distract you when you are afraid of being consumed in a fire. God knows how to grab our attention and get us concentrating on our Creator’s words.

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.

Once God has Elijah’s full attention, only then does he whisper in his ear plain enough to be understood. It is at this moment that Elijah humbles himself,

covers his face, and goes to meet his maker at the mouth of the cave. Awe and fear can do that to us. We might think that all these distractions around us are of such significant proportions, that they need our immediate attention. And then God calls us into the presence of the Creator of the universe and we realize just how small and insignificant our problems really are.

At a time when we are told to duck-and-cover, crawl under our desks, hide in our basements, live in fear of the events happening around us, God calls us into His presence, shows us the expanse of Creation, all to remind us that God is in charge, and it is we who have forgotten that.

And what is God asking? What is God saying to us?

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

What are we doing here, cowering under our desks? We are the children of the Creator of the universe. Our God has welcomed us into his presence. Our God loves us so much that he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die for us, so that we could experience this moment in the presence of our Creator. “What are we doing here, worrying about things we can’t control, when there is so much to be done?”

Elijah 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.”

Elijah sounds like a broken record popping back into the same mindset over, and over, and over again. He is standing in the very presence of God, and he can't seem to let go. We have the very same problem. We stand strong in our faith. We pray. We sing. We preach. We teach. We witness. We serve. We listen intently. But we can't shut out the noise. That is because WE are trying to shut out the noise rather than asking God to shut out the noise. There are even some of us that welcome the noise because we don't want to have to face our maker and take on the responsibilities that God has for us. We use the noise as an excuse. "Pardon me God. I appreciate you showing up for me. But this problem over here is much more important than talking to you right now." And we put the Creator of the universe on hold while we try to fix a problem that He already has a handle on. A problem that keeps us from doing what he intends for us to do.

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."

Now wait a minute, preacher. What are you telling us here? What I am telling you is that, in spite of everything else going on around us, God has things for us to do. And while we may not think the things He is asking of us are near as important as the huge problems that we see around us, it is God that knows what needs to be done and we are the tools that He uses to accomplish His work. God may not need us to face Jezebel's army, but He may need us to anoint a king, feed the poor, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless, and visit the sick.

I want us all to think about that this week as we allow God to whisper into our souls and tell us where we can best serve. Don't be paralyzed by the

distractions around us. Instead, let us stand humbly, faces covered, in the presence of our Creator and listen to the whispers of God.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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