

1st Kings 19: 8-14 – “A Still Small Voice”, Message # 10 in the series –
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, A Bible Study conducted
by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 6th, 2017,
for those gathered at his home.

We have seen in our past times of looking at Elijah’s life, that he was mightily used by God to confront the prophets of Baal, and to call down fire from heaven when they could not do a thing to prove that their god was real or living. He then instructed the children of Israel, by God’s authority being exercised through him, to have those false prophets put to death. And when Jezebel was told what had happened, instead of repenting of her sins of false worship, she declared to Elijah in a message – “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” Having done so much to prove to everyone in Israel, the truth about God, that He was the only true and living God; and having proved to everyone’s satisfaction that Baal was a false god, he really expected that a thing like this would not happen; that Jezebel would still hold on to her gods and seek to take his life. He thought that she and Ahab would repent and use their authority to destroy the false worship of Baal. They wouldn’t be out to kill him.

And so, Elijah fled. He went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree it says in verse 4. And he prayed that he might die. “It is enough!”, he said. “Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!” It was discouragement which caused Elijah to say this. Tonight we want to see just how God addressed this discouragement in Elijah. He addresses it in four ways; two of which we want to look at tonight. 1st – God addressed Elijah’s discouragement by asking him a pertinent question: What are you doing here Elijah? And 2nd – He addresses Elijah’s discouragement by showing him the truth about Himself in the still small voice. I want you to see in this study, that although we may not be able to avoid discouragement coming to us, sometimes, in relation to the work of the Lord, that the Lord Himself will be taking steps to help us to deal with it, and get us back on the right track. Our responsibility will be to take to heart the lessons which He will teach us.

1st of all – In order to deal with Elijah’s discouragement God began by asking him a pertinent question. (verses 9 and 10)

Verse 9 says that Elijah “went into a cave, and spent the night there at Mt. Horeb; and behold the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” “So 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.” Now let us see that God’s question to Elijah was a very pertinent question, for it was not as though God did not know why Elijah was there at that time. God knew that Elijah was discouraged and that he wanted an answer to his question. Elijah’s question was – “Why, if I have been zealous for the Lord, and fulfilled the will of the Lord, why weren’t Jezebel and Ahab changed to repent of their sins and worship the true and living God? Why, if the children of Israel have torn down Your altars, and the prophets have been killed, and I alone am left, why do You not work to change these people, O God? And why am I now having to suffer persecution and the humiliation of thinking that nothing will ever change in the hearts of wicked men? Because Lord, they have now seen Your acts of power, and yet they still want to take my life. These were probably some of the thoughts that Elijah was thinking.

If this was the reason for Elijah’s discouragement, then let us also ask ourselves whether this might be the reason for our own discouragement in some situations? Discouragement in the work of the Lord is something that can happen to the most godly of people. But they need to

understand that God is the best of teachers, and the best of friends to His people, if they will only know it; if they will only believe it. Turn with me over to Psalm 103, verses 11-14 – “For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” Perhaps you have not seen the results that you were looking for, from the most zealous of your actions. But will you not believe that God still loves you as His child? He has forgiven you of all of your sins. He has removed them as far as the east is from the west. He pities you, and all who fear Him. He remembers that you are but dust. He knows that you may have some sinful weaknesses and even sins of infirmity; sins of weakness which you want to deal with. He knows that the way that you will deal with them is by seeing His strength to give you wisdom and grace and power to turn away from all sins and to pursue, and do, righteousness. And to remember that His mercy is as great and high as the heavens are above the earth.

Perhaps you are discouraged for the same reason that Elijah was discouraged. You have worked hard to communicate the truth of the Bible to people around you, and they not only did not receive it, but they believe that you are foolish to believe the way that you do. They will not only not receive the truth but they are now speaking against you, the person who has cared for them. And so you, too, may have fallen into a subtle form of self-justifying pride and unbelief. You may think – If I have done these zealous things, then why doesn't God hear my prayers and honor the efforts that I have put forth? Why doesn't He grant the results that I am looking for? Elijah thought that things should have worked out in the way that he had expected; that the king and queen of Israel would repent. And they did not. And why not? One of the reasons, behind the scenes, was that God wanted to show Elijah His ways and purposes with people and with nations, that they were higher than his.

Dear Christian – Will you not remember that it is God's purpose that He would teach you His ways, and in teaching you His ways, He would have you to rejoice because of the greatness of the grace and power that He gives to you, to live the Christian life and to face oppositions of various sorts. Matthew 5, verses 11-13. “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.” “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” “It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” But Elijah could not rejoice, when the results were not so good. These people did not repent, and even worse, they went on to perpetrate more sins of false worship, and some of them were still thinking to kill him. When Elijah saw this, he gave up trying; he began to lean upon his own understanding. This was something that was not from the Spirit, it was from his flesh. And God knew it. But God knew that Elijah should have been rejoicing. And He knew that if he remained in that state that he would be like salt which had lost its savor.

The beautiful thing in this situation was that God does not directly reprove him over it; he rather asks him a straightforward question. He reasons with him. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” God knew that He was going to have to teach Elijah something more of His ways in order to pull him up out of this discouragement, so that he would not lean upon his own understanding in this matter, He began with this question as a form of subtle reproof which implied His praise of what Elijah had been doing for Him in the past. He appealed to Elijah's sense of duty. He was saying in effect – Elijah, is it right for you to be in this state of mind, and to be in this place so far away from where you should be? Should a man who has been so zealous for me, so bold on behalf of My cause of righteousness, so brave in defending My glory and honor, be found having to run away to this mountain to seek the answers that he needs to his questions? So too, you should learn to ask yourself when you fall into discouragement: What am

I doing here? Is it right for me to be discouraged or disappointed in God because things have not turned out the way that I wanted them to? What am I doing here, in this mindset of unbelief? Where is my faith? Perhaps I need to remind myself that God is not impotent to change any situation.

And 2nd – He addresses Elijah’s discouragement by showing him the truth about Himself in the still small voice. (verses 11-14)

“Then He said, ‘Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ “And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and 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.” “So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.” “Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ “And he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because 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.” The Lord tells Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain before Him. And as the Lord passed by him, he caused a great and strong wind to tear into the mountains and break the rocks in pieces before the Lord, and yet we find that it says – “The Lord was not “in” the wind.” Neither was He “in” the earthquake. Neither was He “in” the fire.

Now what does this mean? Surely God was the only One who could demonstrate His power in this awesome way of wind, earthquake, and fire. Then what does it mean when it says that “the Lord was not “in” these demonstrations of power? I believe that it simply means that the Lord was not “in” these acts of power in order to effect a change in any person’s heart by their display. It did not change Elijah’s heart. He saw God’s power displayed, but he still felt the same way – Disappointed and discouraged. And these acts of power took place “before” the Lord; that is, according to His sovereign will and power. But still, He did not choose to use them to effect any other result than that they were acts of great power. This was because He had not purposed any further effect to be made by them. They showed forth the majesty of His holiness and His power in accordance with His will, but they could not change a single heart.

And in this regard, these acts show us the difference between the law and the gospel. The law was given here in this same mountain; Mount Horeb, which is the same as Mt. Sinai. Here God revealed Himself to Moses in a bush which was burning and not consumed. Here the Ten Commandments were later given to Moses, and God caused the earth to tremble. And there He demonstrated thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And the people did not want the Lord to speak to them directly. (Exodus 20: 19) And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ In verse 13b of our text, we find that “after the fire came a still small voice”. But we do not find that it says there – “And the Lord was not in the still, small voice”. But rather, it says in verse 13 – “So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.” He wanted to know what God thought. And it seems now, that because of the graciousness of God speaking to him in a still small voice, he was no longer afraid to do so.

What we find confirmed for us here is that not one heart can be changed by the law. The law demonstrates God’s majestic holiness and His righteous expectations. It will strike fear into our hearts when we see that God has every right to be disappointed with us, and the way that we sometimes act before Him. Certainly He can demonstrate His wrath and make His power known. He can justly punish unbelieving men for their sins, their failures, and their shortcomings. But He cannot punish His own dear people who are trusting in Jesus. This is because He punished His dear Son, the Lord Jesus on the cross in order that when they fall into sinful

unbelief, He can not only forgive that sin, but He can also speak peace to His people; that He will then teach them, lead them, and guide them.

But the law cannot speak peace to us, and it cannot give us life. It is only when God comes to speak peace to a heart in His still small voice, and by His grace to whisper peace, that we really come to find the strength to turn from our fleshly discouragements and disappointments, and to really listen to what He would teach us. What He will teach us will bring us true joy. John Gill says on verse 12, on the still, small voice – “not rough, but gentle, more like whispering than roaring; something soft, easy, and musical; the Targum is, “the voice of those that praise God in silence”; and all this may be considered as showing the difference between the two dispensations of law and Gospel; the law is a voice of terrible words, and was given amidst a tempest of wind, thunder, and lightning, attended with an earthquake, Hebrews 12: 18, but the Gospel is a gentle voice of love, grace, and mercy, of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and may also point at the order and manner of the Lord’s dealings with the souls of men, who usually by the law breaks the rocky hearts of men in pieces, shakes their consciences, and fills their minds with a sense of fiery wrath and indignation they deserve, and then speaks comfortably to them, speaks peace and pardon through the ministration of the Gospel by his Spirit; blessed are the people that hear this still, small, gentle voice, the joyful sound....”

Let’s turn over to Psalm 89: 13-17 in closing. “You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand.” “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.” “Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance.” “In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted.” “For You are the glory of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted.” “For our shield belongs to the LORD (KJV – The Lord is our Defense), and our king to the Holy One of Israel.” (KJV – The Holy One of Israel is our king) Let us see where our all of our strength and joy and confidence come from. They come from trusting in the gospel to be saved, and trusting in the Lord to teach us how to rejoice in Him in all circumstances; to rejoice all the day, even when things do not turn out the way that we think that they should.

This pictures so well all of these things that Elijah was experiencing in relation to God, things which we also experience, when we go through discouragement; that the Lord sees us as we really are, and what we really need; that God has a mighty arm, and strong is His hand, and high is His right hand. He has the power to all things, beloved. And yet He is also righteous and just and these attributes are the foundation of His throne; His ability to rule, and to rule perfectly, to rule righteously, and to rule well. And mercy and truth, at the same time, go before His face. Isn’t that good? That is how it is with His people. And that is why it says – “Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound, O Lord, they walk in the light of Your countenance; that is, God’s countenance of favor upon them, and blessing upon them for Jesus sake. For the sake of all that Christ has done, which was applied retroactively to Elijah, so that God could show great mercy to him, in dealing so gently with him, when he was at his lowest point, and where his faith was almost non-existent in action.

But notice, how we can walk in the light of His countenance, rejoicing all day long. And, it’s in His righteousness, Christ’s righteousness, that we are exalted. For, You O Lord Christ, are the glory of their strength, and in God’s favor our horn is exalted; that is, we’re lifted up, and we are made strong, and we are brought out of our discouragements. The Lord is defending us. The next verse says – “The Lord is our defense; the Holy One of Israel is our King.” Now, that is really something to take heart at; when you realize that it is the Lord who is the One who will lift you up out of all of your discouragements.

