

## DID YOU HEAR THAT?

### I Kings 19:1-15a

#### Intro

As is the case with most accounts of history, depending on where in the timeline of events that you pick up the story, you can either be a little bit confused as to who the individuals are and the actions that are taking place, or you can be completely lost and be without any understanding as to what you are hearing. As far as I am concerned, the following passage falls into the latter category.

Therefore, I'll do my best to set the context a little bit.

When the events of the story begin to take place we are located in the northern kingdom of Israel in and around the year 860 BC. Although the kingdom, under the leadership of King Ahab, was rather strong militarily and therefore politically, it was his marriage to Jezebel, and her importation of religious idolatry to the god Baal, that ended up bringing the upset and ultimately the wrath of God, as was articulated through the prophet of God Elijah, to the region.

How did this upset manifest itself? In the form of a drought. The drought was so great and so hard that the king knew that divine intervention was needed in order to bring rain.

Therefore a contest was set up between the 450 prophets of Baal against Elijah, the prophet of God. Whichever group's god was able to light a sacrifice ablaze without the assistance of human intervention would be declared the one true God.

Can you guess which direction that whole deal went?

As we would expect, the God of Elijah lit this sacrifice and consumed it completely while the 450 prophets of Baal were left wondering what just happened. At the conclusion of this 'contest' these 450 prophets were put to death.

That last action did not please Jezebel one bit.

These 450 prophets were her people and their death enraged her so much so that she sends a message to Elijah saying very simply, 'I am going to have you killed by tomorrow for what you have done'.

What happens next affirms to me that even the most faith-filled individual can succumb to worry and fear.

Elijah, who has just beaten the prophets of Baal and has proven that he is working for the one true God, the God who is able to control fire and rain, Elijah receives this message and runs to the hills and prays that he might die. It is while he is running that God comes before him to tell Elijah what he will need to do next.

However, what caught my attention was not so much what God said but how the Almighty came to Elijah to speak. Take note of how God comes to speak to him, and while you do, ask yourself, if you had the choice, how would you prefer to know that God is in your presence? The scripture reads this way.

## **I Kings 19:1-15a**

**19** Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup>Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." <sup>3</sup>Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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." <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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?" <sup>10</sup>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."

<sup>11</sup>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 after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; <sup>12</sup>and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. <sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>14</sup>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." <sup>15</sup>Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus;

## **"Did You Hear That?"**

As I mentioned last week, one of events that is prevalent in the lives of families all around the country are the reality of graduations. My family was a part of that this year as Austin was able to graduate 8<sup>th</sup> grade from Readington Middle School. It was a thing. And the realities that Austin deals with certainly make something that's already 'a thing', *a thing*. Specifically, we had to get a particular transport chair and his walker, like the one that is here at church, from the middle school over the high school. His teachers and aide then did their magic and not only allowed him to be a part of the processional (in the transport chair) but then gets him up and using his walker so he could walk across the stage to receive his diploma, where they helped him back into his transport chair for the rest of the proceedings.

It was remarkable and something that we will cherish for the rest of our days.

So as I sat down on Friday morning, still basking in the feeling created by this awesome event, I started to think about when I was in school (you know, because I was pretty much stuck in a loop!).

Not long after, a memory kicked up in my head of a college professor who I remember being known for using the line, 'when I was in school'. But in particular, one story that he told after using that phrase: 'when I was in school'.

He described how he was in his last few months of his senior year at college, you know, when he was in school.

He already had his graduate school lined up and was looking forward to heading there when he ended up receiving a job offer that was just too good to be true. Great position, great location, great salary and all of a sudden a life direction that seemed to be a no-brainer by heading to grad school had turned into a raging internal debate: work or school?

Which to choose?

He had always wanted to teach, he knew that he would be good at it, and he loved to do it. The grad school offered him that track, but the job offered him the financial security that he desired so as to not go too far into debt if he still felt called to go to school at a later point. He felt that he knew what he should do in continuing on to grad school,...but the job offer had caused him to buckle and waver.

It got so bad that he was unable to sleep at nights and would toss and turn, waiting for the morning to come.

One of these nights, he couldn't stand it anymore and he got dressed and started to walk the campus.

Being a person of some faith, he began to pray out loud. If there was anyone around to see him at such an hour, they would have thought the guy had lost it because he was having what was growing into a very heated, seemingly, one-way debate. This dispute came to a head as he found himself outside the chapel and he looked up at the bell tower and literally shouted, 'God, if you want me to go to school, give me a sign! Ring the bell! Let me know that I'm doing the right thing!'

He stood there and waited. Five seconds, ten, twenty, a minute and then two pass by and you know what happened?

That's right, not a blessed thing.

He wandered back to his dorm room disgusted, just as frustrated and just as confused as to what to do as when he started wandering around campus.

The next morning he rolled out of bed, the circles under his eyes so deep and dark that even a blind person would be able to tell that the individual before them was mentally and physically exhausted.

It was during this day that he was meandering around the library, looking for anything to hold his attention for more than a minute or two when a freshman, who he was a teaching assistant of, came up to him patted him on the back, and said, (he thought because he looked as tired as he did), 'Yeah, it has to be tough leaving a school like this. But don't worry: you'll probably end up getting a job here before you even finish your doctorate. Thanks for being such a great help to me in class.'

He shook his hand, turned and walked away.

In that quiet moment, as my future professor encountered one of those 'when I was in school' experiences, he understood that the God whom he prayed to just a few hours earlier was listening, but

that His answer was not to be found in the miraculous nature of a bell tolling, but in a short conversation in the quiet of a library.

The awe inspiring wisdom of God can be felt in a whole lot of ways.

This was something that Elijah innately understood as he remained concealed in a cave.

It was after he had been led to this place, after running away in fear, that he was told that the Lord was about to pass by. There were three forces of nature that rained down upon the outside of that cave with such powerful force that the 'mountains were splitting' and the rocks were 'breaking into pieces'.

And that was just the wind.

It is easy to surmise that the wind, earthquake, and fire were controlled by God. But God was not in these amazing and, at times, frightening circumstances.

No, instead God was located in what came next: sheer silence. This silence was so deafening that the author of this section of I Kings says that God was in the sound of sheer silence.

Try and imagine that for a second.

For me, those sorts of moments generally took place while I've been out in nature, in the forests, up in the mountains, out by the ocean as the sun begins to rise or is finishing its setting. You don't hear any cars or any other human machine. If there are voices to be heard, you're able to filter them out.

It seems to be just you and the world.

The thing is, in all of those circumstances there was always some sort of background noise. In some cases it was the animals speaking their own forms of language, while in others it was the wind rustling through the landscape.

So try and put your memory into that type of situation . . . and then take away the background noise. Try and imagine that.

This is what Elijah experienced.

Once Elijah heard this great expanse of nothingness, which was able to speak of everything, he knew that it was time to voice his concerns. But then, and this is even more important, listen to what was going to be said.

To direct that lens at ourselves: when do we begin to speak to God? Too often we get caught in the habit of just crying out, or bemoaning the negative situations that we find ourselves in.

Now mind you, God is absolutely okay with receiving the negative stuff that is so very real in our lives.

But, we need to follow the example that is very clearly articulated in the midst of scripture, not just this passage, but throughout its pages. We need to, after crying out, stop and listen.

The world is so loud. Take the time to stop and listen.

Again, look at Elijah.

He knew that he was on the correct side of the fight that he was in. He knew that he was serving the one true God, and yet when he was threatened by Jezabel, he ran. He needed to be reassured, strengthened, and empowered to continuing serving the Lord in a very stressful situation. He found the answer to his prayers, but it was not in the roar of wind, the shaking of the earth, or the heat from fire.

Instead, it was in the sound of silence.

How many times do we know that we are on the correct side of an issue and yet we back down in the face of opposition?

My professor knew which direction he needed to head by following his first love of teaching and yet he became too worried that he might not be doing the right thing and he began to back away.

In these periods of time, when we need God so badly, listen! Listen for the voice of God. The voice might not be loud and bombastic. Sometimes it is, but many times it is not.

However, the voice of God is speaking to us.

What this means to us is that we have to allow ourselves to be able to hear what is being said, which means, very bluntly, we need to shut our mouths, quiet our minds, and listen. The voice of God is not heard by us continually tattering on about all of the problems that we do face.

No, the voice of God is heard when we allow God to quiet us down so we might be able to listen and know where we are to go.

So cry out!

Then stop...and listen.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

O most blessed and loving God, we pray this morning that You might convict us of our tendency to speak so much. Whether that be audibly or only in the echoes of our minds, we end up being unable to hear all of the ways that You are speaking to us, even in the midst of the stillness of silence. Lord, grant us that which we need so that we might be able to hear how You are calling out and whispering to each of us. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.