



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Elijah the Prophet

“Man of Like Passions, God of Tender Care,” 1 Kings 19:1-18 – TRANSCRIPT

Some of you are interested in what happened to me last weekend, and I just want you to know that last Sunday afternoon I got sick, and Monday afternoon, after the Cotton Bowl, I went to bed. [Laughter] So for the comfort of the Aggies I want you to know that it has hurt real deep. And that my men from across the Mississippi to the east didn't come through for me. I just want you to know that I really envy the position you have in the audience at the present time. It was really tough.

Now for this morning, in our Scripture reading, I want you to turn to 1 Kings chapter 19, as we continue our series of studies in the life of the Prophet Elijah. 1 Kings chapter 19 and verse 1. Now remember in our studies of Elijah to this point, the prophet has appeared before King Ahab, has announced that there would be a drought in accordance with his own word. He has been called by God to Cherith, was fed by the ravens. Then to Zarephath in Sidon, where he was provided for by a widow woman, and there restored the widow woman's son to life. And then in the 18th chapter, in our last study, we have considered the great conflict between Jehovah and Baal, as represented in his prophet, the prophets of Baal, and that tremendous victory which Elijah obtained for the Lord on Mt. Carmel.

Now today we’re turning to the 19th chapter and continuing the story. You’ll remember at the conclusion of the 18th chapter, the prophet has preceded Ahab’s chariot to Jezreel, where the palace was, and now the story continues,

“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. 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 tomorrow about this time.’ And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, ‘It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.’ And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, ‘Arise and eat.’ And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. 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. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto (the Hebrew text says *the*) cave, (apparently, the same cave that God had revealed himself to Moses by) and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’ And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 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: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. 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? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

May God bless this reading from his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of coming together as a company of believers in Jesus Christ, and lifting our voices to Thee in petition and praise and thanksgiving. We want to thank Thee for him who has spoken to us in a still, small voice, and brought us to faith in the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

We thank Thee for the good news concerning Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the way in which the Holy Spirit has enlightened us and in wonderful grace has brought us to him. We recognize, Lord, again, before Thee, as we have so often done so, that it is not

in ourselves that we have any merit whatsoever before Thee, but only through the finished work of Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for him.

We thank Thee also for the blessings of life, that come through the fact that we have a God who is omnipotent, to whom we can appeal in times of trouble and stress.

And we thank Thee for the lessons contained in Thy word. Today, Lord, as we listen to Thy word, we pray that it might minister to us, and draw us closer to Thee. Enable us to see the great principles whereby Thou dost bless men and enable us by Thy grace to lean upon Thee in a way that will bring glory to Thy name.

We pray for this company of Christians, and ask for Thy guidance for them, as a company, and as individuals. We pray, O God, that Thou wilt use us for the glory of Jesus Christ. Wilt Thou move in our midst, and enable us to become more effective in our Christian testimony.

We thank Thee for our visitors who are here. We pray Thy blessing upon them in a spiritual way. May today, as we study together, and as we listen to the word of God, may each of us be edified.

And again we pray for the whole church through Jesus Christ, and pray, O God, Thy blessing upon it, wherever any member of it may be. And we pray for this land and its leadership, and pray, Lord, that Thou wilt give us direction and guidance among the nations of the world. And now may Thy blessing be upon the remainder of this service.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] This is the fifth in our series of seven messages on the life of the prophet Elijah. And the subject for today is “Man of Like Passions, and God of Tender Care.”

1 Kings chapter 19 is full of dramatic surprises. The prophet of Carmel, who in brilliant triumph ran before Ahab to Jezreel, now in bitter terror, runs before Jezebel. One of the commentators on the life of this man has said this Asahael, a reference being to one of David’s relatives who was fleet of foot, this “Asahael, swift of foot and mighty of soul

degenerates into a craven and coward.” So it is a chapter that is full of tremendous surprises, and tremendous interests for that very reason.

This past week, some of you may read in *Time* magazine an account of a book which contains children’s stories about God. I was interested in one in particular, a letter that a child had written to God, and he had written this:

“Dear God, I read your book, and I like it. I would like to write a book someday with the same kind of stories. Where do you get your ideas?
Best wishes, Mark.” [Laughter]

Now, when you read a chapter like 1 Kings chapter 18, if you were a writer, I’m sure you would like to say the same thing, “Where do you get your ideas?” Well, of course, the ideas of God come from human nature. It is really an historical accounting of the facts that occur in the lives of men. And there are some tremendous and astonishing surprises that occur in the lives of each one of us. And there are further surprises in this 19th Chapter than the one I have just mentioned.

The fear and frustration of the prophet becomes the occasion, not so much for the judgment of God, as we might expect, as for fresh evidences of God’s care for him. So in the time we have this morning, I want you to look at this chapter, and I want you to look at three pictures, and the first picture is the picture of human frustration, which is recorded for us in the first four verses of this chapter.

Now remember, Elijah has been a man of tremendous purpose, a man of tremendous power, a man of tremendous prayer. So much so that he is singled out for us often in the word of God as an illustration. And particularly, we think of the passage in James chapter 5 in which he is stated to be a man of like passions with us, and a man of tremendous purpose in prayer. But now, in the 19th chapter of 1 Kings, he is a man of pusillanimity, and a man of panic, and he is hung up on Jezebel, as we might say.

Now, when I was little, I often heard a little stanza that went like this, and we used to sing it: “O the grand ol’ Duke of York, he had ten thousand men. He marched them up to the top of the hill, and he marched them down again. And when they were up, they were up, and when they were down, they were down, and when they were only halfway up, they were neither up nor down.”

Now Elijah was a man who was either up or down. There was no halfway with him. And he has just had this tremendous victory in 1 Kings chapter 18 in which he has overcome the prophets of Baal, and seems at first glance to have the king on his side. And so Ahab arrives back in Jezreel, and in the 19th chapter we read, in the first verse, that Ahab does something that no man should ever do, and that is tell his wife everything. And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done.

Now let’s take a look at this a moment and try to analyze exactly what is stated in this verse. You’ll notice that the text states that Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done. Now he did not say, it does not say, that he told Jezebel all that God had done. He apparently laid a great deal of stress upon Elijah, did not lay a great deal of stress upon the fact that it was God, Jehovah, who had done it.

And furthermore, he does not add the word false before the prophets, even though the false prophets have been shown to be false prophets by what has transpired on Mt. Carmel. We read, and withal he had slain the prophets with the sword. Now what do you imagine happened that day? I don’t know exactly how to imagine exactly what happened, because I’m not sure of the precise feeling that Ahab had when he came into the presence of Jezebel. He might have come in very enthusiastic. He might have come in and said, “Wait just a minute, Jezzy, until I tell you what happened out on that hill out there! I’m sure you won’t think so much of your false prophets afterwards.” Well, he might have come with that attitude.

But from what I know of Jezebel, I rather think that he came quietly, that he thought he was going to run into a thunderstorm at home, and sure enough, that’s exactly

what he did. And so he probably came in, and she said to him, “Well, Ahab, how did things go out to the west? It must have gone very well because it’s rained.” And he said humph.

And she said, “How did things go?”

“Well, things didn’t go so well.”

“Well, what happened? Why are you so untalkative?”

“Well, I’m not sure you’re going to enjoy what I have to tell you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’re not going to like it, Jezzy. I want you to understand this, now.”

And so she says, “Go on, tell me. What happened? Where are my prophets?”

“Well, Jezebel, it was like this.” And Elijah [sic] unfolded the story, and you can just see the rage in Jezebel’s face as he continued to tell, and finally when he concluded with the prophets of Baal, well, they’re all floating down the river toward the Mediterranean at the present time. They’re all dead. Elijah slew everyone of them.

And she exploded with this. She said, “I’m not going to let any fanatic fundamentalist preacher of an old time religion slay all of my prophets!” So she calls for John the messenger and she says, “John, I want you to take a message and take it right over to Elijah and tell that prophet so let the gods do to me and more also if I make not your life like the life of one of those that’s floating down the river at the present time!” And so the messenger comes to Elijah’s place, it’s not hard to find him in Jezreel. He’s quite popular now. The people are extolling the praises of this great prophet who has overthrown the prophets of Baal, and so he comes with the message.

Now, I would like to suggest at this point that I don’t think Jezebel wanted to take the life of Elijah. I’m not sure about this. The text doesn’t say. I can only think that if she had really wanted to take the life of Elijah, she wouldn’t have sent a messenger over with a letter, or a note. And I think it was a note, because the third verse says that “when he saw that,” and I assume that he must have seen something. So he saw her handwritten

note. Now if she had wanted to slay Elijah, she would have probably sent that person over with a dagger instead of a note. But after all, to slay the prophet while he was so popular would have been an unwise thing, and if there’s one thing that Jezebel is – she’s a witch – but she’s also very, very intelligent. And she has a lot more sense than her weak-minded husband, too, who is a mouse.

Now, the messenger arrives, and Elijah hears the message. I want you to—by the way, before we notice the response that Elijah makes to this—to notice that faith does not come through the miracles of God. Elijah had had an opportunity to perform these mighty miracles, and then Ahab had had the opportunity to tell these miracles to Jezebel. And not only has Ahab not come to faith in the God Jehovah, but Jezebel does not either. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, and if the word of God does not speak to the hearts of men, miracles are not going to speak to the heart of men.

It is often thought that if we could just see one of those miracles that the apostles or our Lord performed, that we surely would believe in God. But that is not true. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And when Jezebel did not respond to the words, why it’s quite obvious she’s not going to respond to any miracles purportedly performed by the Prophet Elijah. So she’s heard all about it, but she’s still in her heart set upon disobedience to the Lord.

And so the messenger comes to Elijah, and what would you expect Elijah to do? After all, he’s the great prophet who has been able to stand up against King Ahab. He had some months before entered into the court and had announced to him that there was not going to be any rain, except according to his word. He had stood on Mt. Carmel, and he had defeated the prophets of Baal with all of the people round about. Well, you would expect that he would just have laughed at the threat by the woman Jezebel. But we read in the fourth verse, or the third verse, he arose and went for his life. Now, watch this. Did you notice that this third verse says that when he saw that, he arose and went for his life?

Now, I want you take your Bibles and turn with me back to the 17th chapter, and let’s just read two verses, and I want you to notice the different mood in which the Prophet Elijah is, and what he does in this situation. We read in the first verse, “And Elijah the Tishbite who was of the inhabitants of Gilead said, ‘As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.’” And you’ll notice that he regards himself as standing before the LORD God of Israel, and this God is a living God. And so he regards himself as a person who stands before the living God.

But notice the second verse, “And the word of the LORD came unto him saying, ‘Get thee hence.’” In other words, the prophet is amenable to the word of God. Notice the eighth verse of the 17th chapter, “And the word of the LORD came unto him saying, ‘Arise, get thee to Zarephath.’” Then notice chapter 18 and verse 1, “And it came to pass that after many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah saying, ‘Go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.’”

But we read nothing about the word of the Lord here. We read, simply, when he saw that, he arose and went for his life. Now it is obvious that Elijah has not waited for God’s directions. And when he does not wait for God’s directions, you can be sure that he is going to step outside the will of God.

May I make a very obvious application? It should be obvious to us as believers that if we are to experience the presence of God, and the power of God in our lives, we must be sure that we are in the will of God and our actions must be governed by the word of God and by the direction of the Holy Spirit who has been placed by God within us to give us this guidance.

Last week, when I was in Colorado, I spoke to the college kids on the subject of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And in the course of the message, I referred back to that wonderful provision which God made for Israel in the Old Testament, when he gave them the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. And he gave them very

specific instructions. He told them that when the pillar of cloud moved, they moved. When the pillar of cloud did not move, they were not to move. If the pillar of cloud stayed in one place for one day, or a week, or a month, they were to stay there. If it moved from day to day, they were to move from day to day. In other words, if the cloud moved, so were they to move, because that cloud was the commandment of the Lord.

As a matter of fact, if Israel at night, for example, if the pillar of fire moved and they did not move, they soon were in darkness. And if they moved, and the pillar of fire did not move, they moved out into darkness. In other words, the place of light was the place of the pillar of fire at night.

Now the same thing is true in the believer’s life. The place of light for us is the place where God wants us to be. If we are, if God desires that we be somewhere else, and we stay where we are, we soon are walking in darkness. If we move when he does not want us to move, we move out into darkness, spiritually. Now Elijah has made a fatal mistake. He has not listened to the word of God.

Now there’s nothing wrong in being afraid, and there’s surely nothing wrong in being afraid of a woman, because we men have known this fear. It’s a terrible fear, you know, to be afraid of a woman. And the thing that Elijah should have done, of course, is to go immediately to the Lord with it. But he doesn’t do it at all. As soon as he sees that little word with the telltale, Palmer Method writing of Jezebel, he goes for his life, so the Scripture says. He wants to recite that passage in the Psalms that says, O that I had the wings of a dove that I might flee and find rest.

By the way, that text was once repeated by a Scottish deacon in a prayer meeting over and over again. Every weekly prayer meeting he would get up, and then somehow or another, in the middle of his message, he would say, O for the wings of a dove that I might fly away and find rest. And someone got finally a little disgusted with this repetition each night and was heard to mutter in one of these prayer meetings, “Lord,

stick another feather in him and let him go.” [Laughter] So Elijah is now a man who wants to flee, to get away.

So he went for his life. And he came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there when he saw that. Doesn’t that remind you of Peter? When he was walking on the water, this tremendous experience in which he got out, out of that boat, walked out, and the waves and the lightening were there in all of their force, and as he got right into the presence of the Lord Jesus, Matthew says, and when he saw the wind was boisterous, he took his eyes off the Lord and looked at the circumstances, and when he did, he began to sink.

And so Elijah, when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba. Now we all talk about the 100 yard dash, but this is about the 100 mile dash. And I’m sure that Elijah made some fast time as he went south. As you know, the place in the north that was farthest in the land was called Dan, and in the south, Beersheba. So that to go from Dan to Beersheba is to go a long way. Well, Beersheba is in the southern part of the province of Judah. And so he races down to Judah in order to get out of Israel, where Ahab and Jezebel are.

Now he was accompanied by his servant, who some have thought was the widow of Zarephath’s son. But at Beersheba, he gets rid of his servant. He tells the servant to go. Now he was not really safe in Judah, because it just so happened that Jehoshaphat was on the throne, and if you’ll remember the text states that Jehoshaphat’s son had also married a daughter of Baal. And because of this marriage, Elijah was not really safe in staying in the Kingdom of Judah. And so he’s not happy with staying in Judah, and so we read in the fourth verse, “And he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree.”

As far as I can tell, a juniper tree is a broom tree. Now the broom tree in Palestine is a tree that grows ten to twelve feet high and it has white blossoms, and it does give a dense shade. And so the prophet gets over under one of these broom trees, and in the

afternoon, after a long day’s journey, he lies down upon the ground. And now, he prays. He finally has brought himself to the place where he prays, and he requested for himself that he might die and said it’s enough: “Now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.” Well, someone might have said, whoever said that you were better than your fathers, Elijah? He apparently had regarded himself as a person who was going to be used by God to bring about a tremendous revival in the land of Israel.

So he is despondent, and he is deflated. And furthermore, he is so frustrated that his actions contradict themselves. It says that he went for his life. In other words, Jezebel said, I’m going to take your life, Elijah, and so he fled for his life. But when he finally gets away from Jezebel he says, now Lord, let me die. So this is the contradiction of the man who is out of fellowship with God. He is a person who flees from death, but now he seeks death.

Have you ever felt that way? Well I have. I’ve been out of fellowship with God when the one thing that you thought that you desired, the next moment you desired just the opposite because you are tremendously unhappy. Frustration is the characterization of the man who is out of fellowship with God. And so, Elijah is out of fellowship with God. The torch of the prophet of fire certainly lay quenched and blackened at the feet of this man who now lay huddled around the broom tree.

What would you expect God to do? Well, you might expect him, at this point, to engage in some form of discipline for the prophet, some form of judgment. In fact, you might even imagine that God would say, OK, let’s let him starve until he comes to his senses. But that is not the way that God acts. And I think this is the second surprise in this chapter. Not only is it surprising that the prophet has acted as he has acted, but it is surprising that God acts as he acts.

And so we read in verse 5, “As he lay and slept under a juniper tree.” I must imagine that it must be still late in the afternoon. Elijah has arrived, and he is exhausted, and he gets around on the other side of the broom tree so the rays of the sun will not fall

upon him, and he falls down upon the ground and there he is asleep, under the broom tree. And we read, then, that as he slept, an angel touched him and said, Elijah, soup’s on. Now you know that must have been very good for this man. “He looked and behold there was a cake baken on the coals and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink and laid him down again.”

Now here is an astonishing picture of divine care. Remember, the prophet is a man out of fellowship of God, but remember, even in his peevish utterance under the broom tree that God would take his life, he still prays. Now that’s the difference between the man out of Christ and the man in Christ. Even though he’s out of fellowship with God, he still utters this prayer. He still offers a prayer, Lord take my life. He’s like a poor, battered down flower that at least does turn to the sun. And so Elijah’s been battered considerably but nevertheless, deep down in his heart, he belongs to the Lord, and so he offers his stupid, frustrated, contradictory prayer – at least it’s a prayer – and he addresses it to God.

And so he has supernatural succor. The angels come and they give him food. Now today, it is not common for people to believe in angelic beings. In fact, today in the 20th Century, the ministry of angels is largely thought to be a thing of the past. Personally, I know the Bible speaks a lot about angelic succoring of the saints of God in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. We have, for example, the angels delivering Lot from Sodom. We have the angels delivering Daniel in the lion’s den. We have the angels in the New Testament delivering the Apostle Peter. And, frankly, as far as I can tell, from the teaching of the word of God, there was a great deal of angelic activity on behalf of the saints of God in Biblical times.

Now today we do not see any angels. And yet the Bible says, are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are about to inherit salvation? So, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in the 14th verse of the 4th chapter of his book. So, I am inclined to think that there are many, many ministrations of angels that

are going on today, that you and I do not know anything about. In fact, many of the deliverances which you have had may well have been done through the ministry and mediation of angelic beings.

I am inclined to think that if the Bible is the word of God, that we have angelic ministry today just as we had then, only now we are not allowed to see angels in human form. I would imagine from texts like this that it is proper to say that we do have angels to minister to us. Whether it is proper to say I have a particular guardian angel or not, I’m not sure. There are some statements in the Bible that seem to imply even that; that we have some special one who has been designated to carry out ministry with reference to us. But I do believe it. And I think it’s true, and it’s rather comforting, too, to know that my Father in heaven has made that provision for me, that I even have angelic ministrations.

Now you cannot see my angel. And yet, I must confess, I am somewhat disappointed that I cannot at times. It’s a matter of faith. But yet it’s in the word. And here, the prophet of God receives supernatural succor. We read in the 6th verse, “And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baked on the coals and a cruse of water at his head, and he did eat and drink and laid him down again.” And I would imagine that he slept through the night. And then the seventh verse reads, “And then the angel of the Lord came unto him a second time and touched him and said, ‘Arise and eat because the journey is too great for thee.’” And so he awoke the next morning, and again there was food.

“And he arose and did eat and drink”—and notice—“he went again in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God.” So, not only does he have supernatural succor, but now, as a result of eating angels’ food, as Israel did in their wilderness journey, so here, Elijah is enabled to go forty days and forty nights unto Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai.

Why he made his way back to Sinai is difficult to say. It may have been just the guidance of God, the providence of God, that this man, who is the great law-restorer, should come to the place where the great law-giver was given the law of God. They are much alike, these two, Elijah and Moses. Moses had been given the law of God, and then of course Moses stood up against idolatry, and had been responsible for a great victory as the Prophet Elijah had been.

And then you’ll remember that in the 33rd and 34th chapters of the Book of Exodus he had finally said to God, Lord, if you don’t go with us, we’re not going. And God said, I’m going with you; my presence shall accompany you. And then Moses had said to the Lord, “Lord, show me your glory,” and the Lord said he would show him his glory. And he took him and put him in a cave, and he caused his glory to pass by. He told Moses, you cannot look upon me face to face, “No man can look upon me and live, but you shall see my back parts.” And so Moses had that wonderful experience of the theophany.

And in that 34th chapter of the Book of Exodus, when Moses is given this great revelation of God, it is stated that the word of God came to him, and stood there, or rather the Lord descended and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him and said, “The LORD God merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” And so Moses had this tremendous theophany, this experience of the presence of God. Somehow or another Elijah seems to be guided almost as if it’s an overhanging providence that guides him right to the place, so that he himself has a very similar experience to the experience that Moses had.

Now Elijah’s name means, “My God is Jehovah,” and he is the prophet of judgment, and he had expected to convert Israel. He had thought, apparently, that when he came and announced the drought, and the drought came to pass, and when he had performed the miracle of the resurrection of the woman’s son, and then, especially when

on Mt. Carmel, he had been able to defeat the prophets of Baal through that supernatural fire that came down from heaven and consumed his sacrifice. Apparently, Elijah thought that now was when Israel was going to be restored to the true religion. Now’s the time when the victory is to be won. And so disappointed was he when Jezebel did not respond. And apparently others did not respond. Then that accounts for the fact that he can say under the broom tree, “Enough! Now take away my life for I am not better than my father.” In other words, the great revival which I thought was coming, apparently is not coming.

And so now he is taken, as I say, almost by a strange hand upon him right back to the very place where the law was given. And he’s going to have an experience which is designed to show him that God does not work by the outward miracle, that he works in another way. So he came to Mt. Sinai, or Mt. Horeb, and the 9th verse begins this picture of divine revelation, the third picture in the chapter. “And he came thither unto the cave”—apparently the very cave that Moses had been hidden in by God, where he, too, had the theophony. And he’s going to learn here that miracles startle people, but miracles do not save people.

“So he came, and he lodged there, and behold the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him”—did you notice, by the way, the difference in expression here? It’s not as it was in the 18th chapter, “And the word of the LORD came unto Elijah saying,” but there is a difference in the construction. He came thither unto a cave and lodged there and behold the word of the LORD came to him, and *he* said unto him; almost as if here we have the personal presence of the Lord. And what are the words that are uttered? Almost every one of them has a pregnancy of meaning. “What doest thou here, Elijah?”

What doest? After all, Elijah, you are the servant of God. What are you doing here? What doest thou, of all people – the man whose name is “My God is Jehovah”? And now you have so fled from the area of conflict, that you are forty days and forty

nights out in the wilderness alone in a cave. What doest thou here, of all places? Elijah, you ought to be back in the midst of things, standing up for Jehovah. What doest thou here, Elijah, My-God-is-Jehovah?

Now the prophet, as so often we do, engages in a little bit of excuse. He says, “I’ve been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts. And the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant. They’ve thrown down thine altars and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” You can see these words are dripping in defeat. They are dripping in discouragement. They are dripping with disappointment – “I only.” In fact, there is a tacit reproof of God himself, that this should ever have been allowed to happen. Elijah needed to know that it is God who controls all of our affairs. But now he pleads for himself.

And so the Lord speaks to him. And he says, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.” And I think, apparently, Elijah did not do this immediately. He’s in the cave. “And behold the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains.” He’s going to speak to Elijah. And he’s going to speak to him in works and he’s going to speak to him in words.

And first of all, he’s going to speak to him in these works. And he’s going to be taught by some deeds and signs. Now remember, Elijah had been a man who taught Israel by mighty miracles, and so God is going to teach Elijah by means of signs. And so as he’s standing in the cave, he hears a great and strong wind. And he sees it rend the mountains about. If you’ve ever seen pictures of Mt. Sinai and the land about it, there are some mountains that are fairly high. Mt. Sinai is about 7500 feet high, and there is nothing there but mountains and rocks. And you can just imagine the wind as it rent the mountains, and the rocks, and the destruction that was wrought. And then when this ceased there was a quiet and suddenly there was an earthquake. And those mountains began to shake, and some of the valleys began to move up. And some of the hills fell

down, and the rocks were broken in pieces before the Lord. And Elijah must have been terrified as he saw that.

But the text says that the Lord was not in the wind; the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after that, there was a fire; fire from heaven, fire on the earth. Everything seemed to be aflame. But the Lord wasn’t in the fire. And then we read in the twelfth verse that after the fire there was a still, small voice.

Now in the Hebrew text, this expression, *qowl dmamah daq’al*, really means a voice of thin silence. Or, a voice of crushed silence. In other words, it was a voice, but it was the kind of voice you cannot hear. It’s something that Elijah could hear, but nobody else could hear. What is meant by this? What is God trying to say to Elijah?

At least he said something, because the moment that Elijah heard the still small voice, when he heard it, he wrapped his mantle around his face. Some say this was because Elijah recognized now exactly who he was in the sight of God and veils his face in humility. But at least, when he heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and he went out, and he stood in the entering in of the cave, and God spoke to him again. But what does the still, small voice signify? What’s the point of it?

Well now, Moses had had a theophony here, too. He had come face to face with God. He had come to understand that God was a God of grace and not a God of law, primarily. He often spoke in law, but he spoke in law to drive men to grace. Just as the earthquake occurred, and the Philippian jailer was brought to say, “What must I do to be saved?” It is not the earthquake that saves, but it often the earthquake that brings a man to the place where he might ask how he might be saved. What is Elijah being taught here?

Well if you’ll remember, Elijah has been performing these mighty, outward signs. He has performed this miracle on Carmel. He has performed this miracle of the drought. He’s performed the miracle of the restoration of the widow’s son. Some have even thought that the wind represents the drought and what Elijah did there; the earthquake

representing the restoration of the widow’s son; and the fire, the fires of Mt. Carmel, the fire that came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. But God was not in these things. These were things that were designed to shake up Israel, but not really to bring them to faith. In the final analysis, it is in the still, small, secret place of the heart that God works.

Perhaps this is what God wants to tell Elijah. It is not the sensational, the sensational works that bring men to faith in God. It is not the sensational miracles that are designed by God to bring Israel to faith in him. But it is the voice of God in the heart that brings men to him, that really does the work of God.

Well now, if this is true, we certainly find it justified in the New Testament. Because in the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament, we are taught that when God works, he does not work by the sensational, by these things that startle men and astonish men, as he works when he works through his word and through the Spirit of God. I am inclined to think that this is what Elijah is being taught.

He had thought, when he performed these miracles, that these miracles were going to be the means of God’s working in Israel, but he was told, now, that that was not so—that God, in the final analysis, works through his *word* by the Spirit. And that is true today. The way in which God works in your heart is through the word, and through the Spirit of God. It is through the word concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, who has loved us and given himself for us. And it is by the application, by the Holy Spirit, of that message to the hearts of men that he transforms men.

That’s why he doesn’t do miracles today. That’s why we don’t have people speaking in tongues today. That’s why we don’t have people raised from the dead today. We don’t need these types of things. God works, actually, in the other way. And it’s good for us to remember that. It’s very important that we recognize that God works in this way. It’s not the storm, but it’s the voice of Jesus in the storm that says, “It is I” that really produces the change in the human heart. And that’s important and something that Elijah, apparently, had not known.

And possibly, also, we are taught by this that it’s necessary for us, too, to be still in order to hear the voice of God. So often, we are so busy, that we cannot hear the still, small voice of God in the human heart. And consequently, God’s messages go awry and astray, because we are not prepared. In the final analysis, it’s “not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit sayeth the Lord.” It seems strange that a prophet of God should have to learn a lesson like this. But a prophet of God, is, in the final analysis, just a man of like passions, just as we are. And Elijah had to learn some of the same lessons that we do.

Now, finally, in the latter part of this section here, he speaks to Elijah in words. And when Elijah comes out, he asks, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” And Elijah apologizes and finally the Lord gives him a message: Elijah, go, anoint Hazael. Perhaps Hazael is the wind of the vision above, too—for this vision seems to look backward and forward – and Jehu, the earthquake; and Elisha the fire. But in the final analysis, God works through the 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed their knees to Baal.

Well, Elijah has reached the high point of his life, and from now on, he seems to not have the same ministry in Israel as he had before. God continues his work, but he removes his workers. And Elijah, now, is to anoint Elisha, and then, ultimately, he is to be taken to heaven. The man, by the way, who prayed that he should die is the man who doesn’t die in the final analysis.

Well, before we close this morning, I want to suggest just two or three lessons to you. In the first place, the first lesson seems obvious, and that is the weakness of the man who forgets divine guidance. You may be very strong in the Lord. You may be very mature in spiritual things. But if you think you can get along without divine guidance, you’re sure to have a great fall. And Elijah’s great fall ought to be an illustration to us of that fact. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. And if we’re not willing to listen to God’s voice and guidance, we cannot

expect to be anything but a weak Christian; one stumbling, making mistakes, never fruitful for God.

The second lesson is also an obvious one. It’s the tenderness of God toward his own. Amid the cares and the fears which Christians normally have, it’s wonderful to know that God keeps watch over us, his Jacobs, his fleeing Elijahs, and that it is the goodness of God that sustains us, because it is the goodness of God that leads us ultimately to repentance.

And then finally, it is the lesson of the superiority of the still, small voice to physical powers. God speaks in his Spirit, and God speaks in his word. And ultimately, in Christ, the Lord is. As God was not in the earthquake, as he was not in the fire, and he was not in the wind; he is in Christ. In him. And he speaks in him. And he speaks through his word—not through his miracles, through his word.

Have you put your trust in him? Have you believed in him? Do you know his supernatural power? And then, also, as Christians, have you learned what it is to walk by the spirit? Have you learned what it is to ask for divine guidance, moment by moment, day by day? Have you learned what it is to walk by the pillar of cloud, and the pillar of fire? The secret of a fruitful, Christian life, lies in the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as personal savior, and the recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these lessons which come from the life of the Prophet Elijah. We recognize so often, Lord, that the provision which Thou has made for us is neglected, and we pray that we shall listen for the still, small, voice; learn to distinguish it; and in that voice, learn Thy will for us.

And now as we part, may grace, mercy and peace go with us, with all who know Jesus Christ in sincerity. And Father, for those who may not know Thee, we ask that through the preaching of the word, and the ministry of the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, may we come to trust in him.

“Man of Like Passions, God of Tender Care” by S. Lewis Johnson
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For Jesus’ sake. Amen.