

The still small voice

Just before we left for California, our home church pastor gave me a word from Elijah's life about listening to the Lord's still, small voice. It seemed very timely for us, and caused me to spend some time looking at I Kings 19:9-13. In these verses we find Elijah in a cave on Mt. Horeb, discouraged and troubled after confronting Ahab and being threatened by Jezebel.

The Lord told Elijah to "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 broke 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."

God seemed to be giving Elijah an "object lesson" on how to recognize His voice. This great man of God had become weary and disoriented. He needed a tangible reminder of God's character and nature. So God set up a demonstration of wind, earthquake and fire. Though the Lord probably made these things happen, they did not contain His presence. "...but the Lord was not in the wind...etc."

After all this tumult came the sound of a "still, small voice". When Elijah heard it, he came out of the cave and heard the Lord speak to him. The wind and the earthquake and the fire had not drawn him out. Perhaps they had made him retreat even farther into the cave — after all, the wind was strong enough to break rocks! Regardless, what is important was that the Lord was not in these strong and compelling forces. Instead, He came in the still small voice. Other Bible translations say "the sound of a gentle blowing" or "the sound of sheer silence" or "a gentle whisper". My own translation would be "a calm, small sound".

This "still, small voice" represents God's chosen way of communication. His presence produces an atmosphere of inward tranquillity, and He comes as a "whisper in our soul". His voice is calming, stabilizing, and quiet. The One who created the wind and the fire, and who can shake the heavens and the earth, chooses to speak to His children with a calm, small sound.

Life around us can be compelling and noisy. The good as well as the bad that may happen around us can have a strong pull on our soul. We can be tossed and turned in the turbulence of circumstances, our attention drawn away by the loudest voices around us. We may say to ourselves "Look at the powerful anointing on that person! I should be doing the same thing!" Or, "Look at what Satan is doing over there! I should be doing something about it!"

Are you being pulled by external forces rather than being led by the Lord Himself? Do you let the loudest voices guide your life and determine your existence? Or are you being ruled over by the gentle, almost noiseless voice of the

Father? Colossians 3:15 says “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...” The definition of peace is inward calm and tranquillity. Do you have a place of calm in the center of your soul, in which you can frequently find refuge from the pressures of life? Is there an inward tranquillity where you find communion with the Lord?

Life cannot be lived by simply responding to outward stimuli. Life in Christ is lived in the secret place, the abiding place within...the place where He dwells, and where we are to cohabit and coexist with Him. It is a life lived in peace, for Jesus said “in Me you have peace”. Good -- even godly -- things around us may not be the Lord’s voice to us.

In the last few months Jackie and I have been positively and strongly influenced by the refreshing of the Spirit in many settings, under various ministries. We are awestruck by the anointing of the Spirit on many men and women of God who have come to help lead God’s people into revival. But we are finding that we cannot determine God’s will for us from observing their anointing and ministry -- as powerful as it might be. Rather, we must retreat into the secret place with His written Word and listen for the calm gentle sound of His personal presence. That is where we see what He is doing, and hear what He is saying...to us.

We have found it hard this year to leave an atmosphere of revival and go to a distant place to minister to a few souls with whatever anointing the Lord may give us. Yet, if the Spirit beckons us to go -- if the inward calm voice of the Father beckons us -- that is all that matters.

When Elijah heard the still small voice, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out to the entrance of the cave. The Lord said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah rehearsed his own discouragement with God. Then the Lord gave Him new marching orders, and assured him that he was not alone. Through a fresh word, Elijah was renewed and prepared for what was to come. And so it is with us.

The Lord is bringing a season of refreshing, renewing, reviving, refiring, and recommissioning his people for the next phase of history. Only He knows what is coming. He wants to give each of us personal marching orders for the days ahead. Let Him finish his inward work in you, and let Him help you to be firmly anchored to His Word and His Presence -- His still small voice. Determine to let the peace of Christ rule in your heart -- and nothing else. No longer be swayed by influences around you, be they good or bad, be they friend or foe.

Perhaps you are like Elijah in that cave. Life’s experiences may have left you feeling weary or discouraged. The increasing turmoil of the world may seem overwhelming. Even the present signs of God’s power may leave you somewhat disoriented.

Perhaps the Lord is giving you a lesson in guidance. Get alone with Him. Wait a little longer for Him to show Himself to you. (It takes a little extra time.)

Don't let the external pressures guide your life — especially the loud and compelling ones. Listen for the voice of your Shepherd. You are His sheep. You belong to Him, and He is the One who has laid down His life for you. Listen to Him. Jesus said of Himself, "He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. ..the sheep follow Him because they know His voice, and a stranger they simply will not follow..."

....Wait for the sound of the still, small voice.

John Matthews