

Hearing the Voice of God

The Quiet Voice Of God - Pastor Roger Ridley
Gretna Baptist Church, Gretna, NE, December 11, 2005

Have you ever felt like you just wanted to escape? Escape from everything: your job, your family, your ministry, your life - everything! Many have. For some, it leads to a new place, a new job, a new ministry. For some, it leads to sin, like adultery. For some, it leads to a better understanding of God. Where it leads usually depends on the voice the person is listening to: the voice of evil, the voice of personal confusion, or the voice of God.

I want to share with you this morning from the example of a godly man. He was overcome with feelings of wanting to escape. In his example we discover **three voices**, and as we consider them we will learn the right way of dealing with our own feelings of wanting to escape.

Please open your Bibles to 1 Kings 19. We have here the example of Elijah. He was a man everyone recognizes for his godliness. And yet, just as it teaches in James 5:17, he was a man subject to like passions as we are. He faced the same kind of temptations. He struggled with the same kind of feelings as you and me.

In 1 Kings 19 we find Elijah on the run. Running from Jezebel, the evil wife of wicked king Ahab. Running from himself. Running from the people of Israel. And running from his ministry. However, he ends up running to God.

I. The Voice Of Jezebel.

As we approach chapter 19, many things had taken place. Ahab had come to the throne. Chapter 17 teaches that he was more wicked than any king before him. He took for himself a foreign wife by the name Jezebel. By foreign it is meant she was from outside the house of Israel. She was not one of God's people. And she did not worship God, instead she worshipped Baal.

The marriage of these two, even though Ahab was a wicked king, illustrates, as much as any two can, why it is wrong to marry outside of our faith. Every time Ahab's conscience would try to function properly, Jezebel would interfere. 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 tells us, *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

When Ahab married Jezebel and brought her back to Israel, because of her influence, he set up a temple to Baal, and placed within it an idol of Baal. Then he, and most of the people of Israel, committed spiritual adultery against God. They tried to maintain a

relationship with God, but at the same time enjoy the worship of Baal. It was a very fleshly oriented religion that allowed people to break the bonds of moral restraint. Sexual freedom was a prominent part of the worship.

Of course, the prophets of God stood against this. They warned against the idolatry and immorality. Apparently they were having some success, because Jezebel had them all killed. Well, not all of them. Elijah was still alive and stood prominently for God.

Ahab called Elijah "*the troublemaker of Israel*" (1 Kings 18:17), because he was spoiling their fun by speaking out on godliness, morality, and God's judgment against sin.

By God's direction, Elijah prayed and it stopped raining. Not just for a few weeks, or a few months, but for years. Toward the end of this drought, Elijah went to Ahab and challenged him to gather all the prophets of Baal to Mt Carmel. There were 450 of them. There he stood against them to show who was greater: Baal or the God of Israel. Of course, Baal proved to be nothing more than a fantasy, a spiritual deception. God showed Himself to be real.

The outcome of this was that the people of Israel, at least outwardly, said "*the Lord, He is God.*" (1 Kings 18:39) Elijah had all 450 prophets of Baal killed. Then, he prayed and brought the drought to an end.

These were dramatic events. One wonders how anybody could have been there, seen and heard these things, and then not give themselves whole-heartedly unto God. But there was one that especially did not: Jezebel.

In Revelation 2:20 she is used as an example of one that infiltrates the people of God, and through the desires of the flesh, turn their hearts from Him.

When Jezebel heard of the things that Elijah had done in God's power, she wasn't humbled, she wasn't brought to her knees before God, but instead, she became enraged. Look at what she said in 19:2...

"Elijah, within the next 24 hours, I'm vowing to see you dead!"

Now, what's the threat of just one woman? What could she do? Elijah had just stood against 450 prophets of Baal - victoriously. But a very strange thing happened. Elijah became frightened and ran.

Have you ever done something for God and had someone oppose you because of it, and felt the touch of fear? I believe that's fairly common among God's people. But we would not have expected it from Elijah. What happened? Simply, he listened to the voice of Jezebel. Now Jezebel was a real person, but we could say that he listened to the voice of evil, or even to the voice of Satan.

Keep in mind, Elijah had experienced an emotional and spiritual high. He had performed

as well as any child of God can. But that's the point where we can also be the most vulnerable. Have you ever noticed that? God uses you in a great way, you feel like it's going to last forever, and then the bottom falls out. You fall into deep depression. Or you fall into sin. Why does that happen?

Well for one, our bodies are made in such a way that when we experience that kind of an emotional high, there's always a let down. A rebalancing that takes place. If we are not prepared for it, it can get the best of us. Satan knows that and uses it against us.

Second, when you and I are used in a great way, we get a little puffed up. And all it takes is a little pride to bring about a great fall (Proverbs 16:18). Like Peter (Matthew 14:28-31) we take our eyes off the Lord and we're suddenly surprised by the power of the storm, our hearts melt, and we begin sinking fast.

Elijah, caught up with all that had happened, and filled with high hopes and expectations for the nation of Israel, for the moment, stopped listening to the voice of God and was surprised and overwhelmed by the voice of Jezebel. His heart melted with fear, and he ran for his life.

What a warning that is for you and me. If it could happen to Elijah, certainly, it can happen to us. If he could be overtaken with fear and fall so quickly after being used so highly, then how important it is for you and me to take great care in listening to the voice of God, and remaining in His strength. As Jesus said, "*Without (Him) we can do nothing.*" (John 15:5)

II. The Voice Of Elijah.

Having listened to the voice of Jezebel, Elijah ran. The image I have is of a panic-stricken run. Maybe you have experienced that yourself. As a teenager hitchhiking across the country with a friend, someone picked us up, took us out into the desert, pointed a gun at us, and told us to run. We ran like we had never run before. That's how I imagine Elijah running. He ran like that for a full day. Then, exhausted, he sat under a juniper tree. Look at what he said in 19:4...

"God, I can't take it anymore, let me die!"

Have you ever felt like that? Sometimes we feel so depressed about our work, ourselves, or our circumstances that we wish God would just call us home.

If you have ever felt like that, then certainly you are not the only child of God that has done so. In Numbers 11:15, Moses wanted to die. In Job 3:21, Job wanted to die. In Jeremiah 8:3, Jeremiah wanted to die. And in Jonah 4:3, Jonah wanted to die. Many of God's people, when under the burden of ministry, or life, have become weary, discouraged, and cried out, "*It is enough! Now, O Lord, take away my life.*"

Of course, Elijah didn't really want to die. If he did all he would have needed to do was

remain in Jezreel, and Jezebel would have taken care of that for him. Normally, that's not really what we want either. Elijah was just feeling sorry for himself. He had expected things to go differently. He was lonely, and depressed.

Later, on two occasions, God asks Elijah, "*What are you doing here?*" You are not where you're supposed to be, You are not doing what you're supposed to be doing. Why are you here? See 19:10 for Elijah's answer...

This voice of Elijah is one that you and I sometimes listen to. I hate to admit that I have listened to it too often. It is a self-centered voice. "*God, I've been doing everything. I'm the only one that's trying to do what's right.*" When you and I start listening to that self-centered voice, it is going to get us into trouble. Go back and look at the other examples I mentioned of Moses, Job, Jeremiah, and Jonah, and you will find the same thing with each one of them. Their thoughts became focused on what they were doing, and it made each of them very vulnerable. Just like it does us.

When you and I start listening to that voice, it takes our attention away from the voice of God, and we forget that it is only by God's grace, God's strength, and God's will that we stand and accomplish anything. All we can see and think about is what we've tried to do and how nobody appreciates it. Satan knows there is no better time to attack.

At the very least, we get discouraged, or we start complaining, or we get angry at God and everyone else. Or, like I mentioned at the start of this message, some leave the ministry, some leave their family, and some leave life altogether. Listening to that self-centered voice can indeed be very dangerous.

But some very practical things happened, which helped Elijah. You and I will find them helpful too.

Number 1. Under the juniper tree, Elijah got some rest. He was worn out. You and I live in a time of many distractions, and unless we learn to discipline ourselves, to make some priorities, and to take some time for rest, then we won't be of any use to God, ourselves, or anyone else. Even Jesus demonstrated such. Facing the pressure of the crowds He would often get away for rest. (Matthew 14:13, 23: 17: 1, 19; 20:17)

Number 2. An angel of the Lord provided him nourishment. To me, that shows God's tender care. God wasn't kicking Elijah while he was down. He provided him with the basic things he needed to be strengthened again.

Number 3. On the strength of the rest and nourishment Elijah received, verse 8 informs us that he traveled 40 days and nights. His destination is interesting. He headed for Horeb, the Mount of God. No longer was he just running away. He was now running to a place he associated with God. It was the same place where Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33:6, 22), and witnessed the glorious splendor of God.

I think an appropriate question to ask is, "*Do you have such a place?*" A place you

associate with God? Where you can get away from everything else, and just meet with Him. It doesn't have to be 40 days and nights away, but there needs to be a place where you can meet with God alone without distraction.

Number 4. Elijah expressed his inner feelings verbally to God. You and I can keep the tape rolling over and over in our minds and all that's going to do is keep us depressed, and get us into trouble. Or, we can share our complaints and discouragements with others. That is usually to no one's benefit. Until we're able to go to God and express freely with Him what is on our heart we'll not find the help we really need.

Hebrews 4:16 tells us, *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*

As you read through the Psalms you discover that David made a regular habit of doing this. That is one of the reasons he was *"a man after God's own heart."* (Acts 13:22) The fact that Elijah was able to do the same is one of the reasons he was later renewed in his spiritual vigor.

If you find yourself lonely, discouraged with life, wanting to run away from it all, make sure you get the proper rest and nourishment you need, get alone with God, and verbally tell Him how you feel.

III. The Voice Of God.

When Elijah did that, seemingly, he gained an understanding of God, and heard the voice of God in a way he had not before. Look at verses 9-18...

What impresses me in these verses is where God was not found and where He was found.

He was not found in the storm, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. What does that mean? Well, Elijah had become accustomed to seeing God work in BIG WAYS. He prayed, and God caused a drought which lasted for years. He prayed, and God sent down fire from heaven. He prayed, and God brought a young boy back to life. The whole history of Israel was filled with great acts of God like the parting of the Red Sea, or the manna that fell from heaven. When Moses met with God on the mountain there was thundering, lightening, fire, and the earth shook. Elijah and the people of Israel had become accustomed to seeing God work in BIG WAYS, and so that was the only place they looked for Him. But God will not always be found in big things.

Later, Jesus, in Luke 11:29, speaking to the crowds who were only looking for another miracle, said, *"This is an evil generation. They seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it."* When people have their eyes focused only on the big stuff, then too often they miss God.

We're the same way. We want God to do this or that. We want God to work in some BIG WAY in our life. If He is not doing something Big for us, then we have a hard time

hearing His voice. But listen, if that's the only way you and I will hear Him, then we may not hear Him at all. God does work in BIG WAYS. He still performs miracles. But if that's all you have your heart set on, then you're going to miss out on Him more often than not.

That's what Elijah was to learn. You see, after the storm, the earthquake, and the fire, there came a still small voice. Elijah covered his face for then he knew he was in the presence of God.

The words *still small* refer to a quiet whisper. God doesn't need thunder to get our attention. Remember Hebrews 4:12? *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

As you study the Scriptures, you learn that it is in the quietness, or in the times of stillness that God speaks with the greatest intimacy and power.

In Psalm 46:10 God admonishes, *"Be still, and know that I am God."*

No matter what we are doing for God. No matter how successfully we are doing it. If we don't take the time to get quiet, to be still, to wait on the Lord, then we're in for trouble. We're going to be shocked into reality by some voice of opposition. We're going to get all messed up by listening to our own inner voice of confusion. But, if we get quiet and still, then God will have His proper place in our life, and we'll be able to hear what He has to say. And we'll be much better equipped to handle the difficulties of life, whatever they might be.

Martha and Mary, two sisters who both loved the Lord, received a visit from Him one day. Martha was running about doing one thing and another, while Mary simply sat at the feet of Jesus. For her business, Martha's heart became anxious and troubled. Mary, on the other hand, heard the soft tender words of her Lord.

When Elijah got in the place he needed to be, and got in the right frame of mind, he heard the still small voice of God. It was a searching voice, verse 13, *"Elijah, what are you doing here?"* It was a voice of re-direction, verse 15, *"Go, return on thy way."* And it was a voice of reassurance, look at verse 18...

"Elijah, you're not alone. There's many that I'm working with, that are standing for Me."

With those words, Elijah was restored.

Maybe you have been through something like that already and have learned your lesson. Maybe right now, you're harboring in you heart feelings like those which Elijah had. Or, maybe your day of turmoil is yet to come. Whichever it is, the message is still the same.

When you become troubled, anxious, or frightened about your family, ministry, or circumstances, and you want to run, the best place to run is to the Lord. Express to Him what's on your heart. Get quiet before Him. And He will speak to you in the stillness.