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3 January 2021

# A Still, Small Voice

1 Kings 19 v 1-18

## Introduction

Happy New Year! 2021! Remember a year ago when we were making jokes about 2020 vision and wondering what was in store for us in the year ahead? Well if we've learned one thing from this year it's not to try and predict the future. Much of the year was dramatic, life-changing and totally unexpected. It's hard to deal with all that.

Agafia Lykova lives 150 miles from the nearest town. Her family set up home on a remote mountain in Russia when they fled from religious persecution by Stalin's regime. The family were discovered in 1978 by a helicopter pilot, and Agafia was taken on a tour of Russia, seeing planes, cars, money and even horses for the first time. However she chose to return to her home. Life among others was too noisy for her.

As we enter 2021 we are surrounded by noise. Not just the audible sort, but messages on our phones, opinions on social media, constant updates of the news. It's hard to get any peace from it all, and last year the constant barrage of major events was exhausting. Wildfires across Australia, a global pandemic, race protests across the world, Siberia on fire, American elections, Brexit, it seems never ending. No wonder so many are finding it hard to cope.

How do we deal with all this? And as Christians, how do we work out what God is saying to us amongst all the noise?

## Elijah's Triumphs

As we enter this chapter, we have just passed the ultimate high point in Elijah's ministry. He had come before the king and predicted 3 and a half years without rain. Sure enough the rain had stopped. Then he took the prophets of Baal up Mount Carmel and challenged them to pray down fire from their God. They failed, but God supplied fire for Elijah's sacrifice. He had the prophets of Baal slain. Elijah then went to the top of the mountain and prayed for rain. Time and again he prayed until God did indeed send rain. Elijah then ran with superhuman speed ahead of Ahab's chariot back to Jezreel.

## From Triumph to Despair

You would think after the literal mountaintop experience, Elijah would be on a high. Nothing would bring him down. He had seen amazing miracles done by God and that God was able to protect and empower Elijah.

And yet when Jezebel utters her decree that she wants Elijah dead, he finds that fear seizes him and he runs. As he finds himself in the wilderness he lies down and in a total depression asks God to take his life.

You see none of us are impervious to hurt. None of us are immune to fear. We are fragile beings and the greatest moments in our lives can be followed by the darkest times. We might even have found that out for ourselves during 2020. How do we deal with that? What do we do about it? Well, first let's look not at what Elijah did, but at what God did.

## **God Sustains**

*But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. [1 Kings 19:4-6]*

As Elijah lies there alone, God is with him. He had left all his helpers behind but he could never leave God behind. And so when Elijah needs comfort, God is there.

As he cares nothing for himself, God nourishes him. Elijah is depressed and has given up. He feels that all his efforts have been worthless and he may as well not even have tried. He wants to just lay down and die. And yet God has other plans. He provides Elijah with a cake and water, nourishment that restores him physically.

*And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. [1 Kings 19:7-8]*

As he feels life is meaningless, God encourages him. Elijah appeared to have no motive for going into the desert, apart from giving up. And yet the Lord feeds him again and shows him that he has a journey to make.

Look back at your life. Can you think of a really difficult time you went through? Ask yourself how you managed to get through it. Often when we see someone else in a hard situation, we wonder if we would be able to cope. We can't answer that until it happens to us. But when it did, was God there? Did God nourish you? Did God encourage you to go on?

## **Message on the Mount**

Elijah did go on. After 40 days he found himself at Mount Horeb. This is the place where Moses encountered the burning bush, and God spoke to him out of the fire. This is the mountain that Moses climbed to receive the 10 commandments. God spoke to the people out of a thundering cloud. How was God going to speak this time?

*And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore 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 the sound of a low whisper. And*

*when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [1 Kings 19:11-13]*

God does speak in the big things, but not always, and not often. In fact this was part of the reason for Elijah's depression. He had seen God do mighty things and yet the people hadn't changed. He had demonstrated the awesome power of God and the same King and Queen were in charge, leading the people astray. It seemed like all of those miracles were in vain.

God wanted Elijah to see that it wasn't in the big things that he speaks to people, but in their hearts.

Elijah presents his complaint to the Lord:

*He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." [1 Kings 19:14]*

He feels spent, used up, and what has been the result of all his effort? Nothing! No one has converted, no one is on God's side, the people continue on their way to destruction. Elijah is the only faithful one left and he's about to be killed, if his enemies have anything to do with it.

But the Lord's lesson is this: it is not by the ways we expect that God works. He brings his plans to fruition by his means, and often they are invisible to us. Here is his response to Elijah:

*And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." [1 Kings 19:15-18]*

Hazael was the enemy, and yet Elijah was to anoint him. Hazael would be God's instrument even though he knew nothing about it. Time and again God uses the enemies of Israel to bring his plans to pass. This shows us that God is not just sovereign over his own people, but over the whole earth and all the peoples.

Jehu would come to be king of Israel some years later, and he would destroy the family of Ahab. Elijah was in despair that Ahab and Jezebel were still on the throne, but God would deal with them in his own time. We need to learn to trust in God's timing as well as his wisdom.

Elisha was going to follow in Elijah's footsteps. Perhaps Elijah pictured himself as completing a great work for the Lord and turning the people around. Instead God was showing him that the work didn't depend on Elijah, and it would continue after he was gone.

And then there were the 7000. Elijah thought he was all alone in being faithful, but the Lord assured him that there were others. They weren't calling down fire and rain and doing mighty

works. They were listening to the still, small voice and quietly but steadfastly following the one who spoke to their hearts.

### **Application**

You see, in all the bustle and noise of modern life, it isn't the big things that generally speak to people. We might think that a great natural disaster will turn many to God. We think that a pandemic will affect many hearts. We imagine a great rally will draw people, that a brilliant argument will convince them. But really what draws people to the Lord is the still, small voice. So quiet that they often aren't even aware of it. And once we are captured by the Lord, it is the same still, small voice that guides us through our lives. We advise Christians new and old that it is important to find a regular time when we put aside distractions and disruptions and spend a time with the Lord, in his word and in prayer. It is no coincidence that we sometimes call this a quiet time.

So what about the year ahead? 2021.

- Don't put your hope in worldly things. The vaccines might improve the health of the world, or worse problems might arise. Your new diet or fitness regime might improve your own health, or you might fail by February. Hope instead in the one who can save souls, not just bodies, and whose plans never fail.
- Don't feel a failure if you feel down. We are all fragile, even the ones who look to be strongest. God is there and he will nourish and strengthen you. He will be your strength in your weakness.
- Don't expect great events to bring people to God. Instead learn to listen for the still, small voice in your daily walk. Learn to hear him and follow him and share him with others. Find a time to put the noise of the world aside especially.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. [Zechariah 4:6]*

Have a great new year.