

IN THE SOUND OF A LOW WHISPER**1 Kings 19:1-18****(Read 1 Kings 19:1-18)**

Intro: This talk could easily have an alternate title of SWEPT FROM UNDER A BROOM TREE. Elijah was swept away by despair – but God confronted him as he sat, dejected and totally spent, under that tree and began his rebooting process as he swept him back into ministry as his faithful servant.

First, some background:

It's easy for me – I practically know this story backwards and frontwards. As a kid the Bible stories were riveting for me and this account, which is introduced in the previous several chapters of 1 Kings, especially chapters 17 and 18, are among my favorite portions of the entire Bible. All the way up through my Sunday School experience in my little home church, my classmates were my two younger brothers (Steve and Kent), my best friend Allen, the foster children of the Landis family (Charlie, Jimmie, and Georgie), Dana and his brother, Mark, and one token girl, Debbie—who always fit in and never seemed out of place. Imagine what it was like for rambunctious boys to hear how Elijah obediently did God's bidding and courageously stood up against the evil king and queen of Israel, Ahab and Jezebel. We loved it when the good guys won!

I also loved it that God had the power to bring drought on the land for as long as he wanted, and then he could turn the spigots back on and water the land.

But what was the best was the way Elijah confronted the priests of the false god Baal and his wife the false goddess Ashtoreth. One man of God against 450 priests of false, and actually nonexistent gods.

It was fascinating for me how these priests were so incredibly misguided to think they would get an answer if they just shouted louder, or danced more wildly, or cut themselves more deeply. But they only exhausted themselves and ended up in total frustration as absolutely nothing happened as they tried to call fire down on their sacrifice. Baal and Ashtoreth weren't home. Elijah had taunted the priests of Baal with the fact that maybe he was sleeping, or maybe he was even on the toilet (1 Kings 19:27) but the truth was, to their horror, Baal and Ashtoreth, were not there at all.

And then my hero stepped up. And to add insult to injury, Elijah had hundreds of gallons of water poured on top of his sacrifice so that it filled the ditch, dug for the very purpose, around the bottom of the altar. And then he prayed a simple prayer:

“O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” 1 Kings 18:36-37

And after that prayer the scripture says,

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.” 1 Kings 18:38-39

After this Elijah dispatched those false prophets—my translation says he slaughtered them. One man against 450 and the evil administration that ruled the kingdom. Hundreds of people of power against Elijah. It was one man, **AND GOD**.

It was a great victory.

Elijah should have been on a high. He had been extremely successful. He was the big winner. God was with him. What could be better than that, right?

But within a matter of a day or two, at the threat of Queen Jezebel, Elijah goes into a severe depression and runs away. Listen to the text again, *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 as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”* 1 Kings 19:2.

Elijah was frightened, yet he was frightened by a threat that was based on gods that didn't even exist. How often is it true that what we're facing is a figment of our own imagination?

But I digress . . . and truthfully, when you have a price on your head, actually, when the threat is that you will lose your head, your blood pressure is guaranteed to go up a bit. Also, Elijah had been burning the candle at both ends. He had been working and working and working and working! He had been relentless in his pursuit of righteousness and standing up against evil. But then he got afraid. Our text says *he was afraid and he arose and ran for his life.* 1 Kings 19:3.

After leaving his servant in Beersheba—which is the southernmost town in Judah—he traveled on for another day into the wilderness and sat down under a broom tree and asked God to let him die.

He was lower than low.

Like a computer – Elijah had crashed. His hard drive was compromised.

He. Was. Done!

But notice how God reboots Elijah:

F. B. Meyer writes, *"Often we lie down on the desert sands and think that death is near. But it is not so. God does not judge us by our moods. He knows the faithful heart that is true to him, and he wants to bestow the crown of Life."*

God begins by patiently nourishing him. Listen,

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. 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 19:5-8

God ministered to his worn out servant and prepared him for a further journey. It was to Mount Sinai, where Moses had met God, and he, too, met God there.

I love how the story goes here on Mount Sinai: Elijah thought that he was the only one left, and he's not unique, because when we get depressed and frustrated that's often the way it is. But God patiently listened to Elijah's plea, and then he told his servant to go out and stand and wait for a message. Let me read those verses to you.

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

The Hebrew that is translated "*still small voice*" is literally "the sound of gentle quietness" or "gentle silence". A key idea here is that the cacophony of the activity on Mount Carmel are not the methods of God. God speaks in the sound of gentle silence.

And he told Elijah to go back and minister because there were still 7,000 faithful worshipers of the living God in Israel and they needed their leader back.

Conclusion: Here's the takeaway from what, for many of us, is a familiar Bible story: This isn't just a story of a road trip to Mount Sinai, It's deeper than that. It's not just a story about a man of God who is physically, psychologically, and spiritually spent. It not just about a man of God who has reached what he thinks is the end and he wants to terminate both his ministry and his life. More than anything this is a picture of God's outrageous compassion and infinite grace as he patiently and lovingly steps in and supplies Elijah with life-giving food and water, and prepares him and then prompts him to take a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage to Mount Sinai, the very symbol of everything the people of God, the Children of Israel, believe, or better, should believe. Dan Epp-Tiessen, writes *"This story calls out to those among God's people who are worn-out, fearful, or in need of renewal. The story suggests a way forward—eat and drink of God's life-giving sustenance, return to the bedrock of faith, listen for God's still small voice. That may be the way to find new energy, new vision, and a new sense of purpose."*

The thunder, the storm, and the earthshaking events of the day are no match for the still small voice of our loving God who promises to come to us under our own broom tree and minister to us and nourish us and restore us to spiritual, emotional and even physical vitality. So, people of God, don't give up – listen for the still small voice because in the sound of God's low whisper, you can be rebooted after a crash. Amen.