

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED I KINGS 19:9-19a
QUIET WORK OF THE LORD

And there he [Elijah] went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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.

So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved 7000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

So he departed from there.

Do you ever ask, "Where is God in this crazy world?!"

There is so much going on that is troubling—fires in Colorado, snowstorms in the Dakotas, shootings, riots, the virus, campaign rhetoric, traffic fatalities, house-fires, blatantly ungodly conduct and values, Where is God? Is he sleeping? God doesn't step in, and you for all your best efforts can't change anything. Elijah from nearly 3000 years ago was facing the same thing in our text for today. Martin Luther faced the same thing some 500 years ago in Germany and Europe.

In Elijah's case the political stability and the moral stability of the nation of Israel was a wreck. About 100 years prior to Elijah, Kings David and Solomon had reigned. The problems started with wise and wealthy Solomon's wayward heart. He built idol altars for his many unbelieving wives, and they also turned his heart away from the Lord.

Therefore after Solomon, the Lord split Israel into two political entities—10 tribes and 2 tribes—Israel and Judah respectively. Elijah labored in the nation still called Israel—the 10 tribes. Its kings were ungodly. Jeroboam the first king of the 10 tribes made two calves for the people to worship, two idols, so that they would not go to Jerusalem to worship. The Lord was angry. Jeroboam's son and all Jeroboam's family were assassinated. A new family reigned. The identical thing happened to this next family. The son of the king and all the family were assassinated. The next king reigned seven days and then committed suicide. He was followed by two competing kings. The king that won out was followed by his son Ahab, wicked King Ahab who married Jezebel, a non Jewish idol-worshipping queen. Ahab followed his wife and built a temple to Baal in his own capital. The Bible says Ahab was worse than all who went before him. The prophets of God, the ones who could be found were put to death. This was the time of Elijah. And you think our political and religious climate is getting bad! Where was God? Where is God today?

The Lord told Elijah to pronounce a three-year drought on the land. Then the Lord led Elijah to ask King Ahab for a test at Mt. Carmel—all 450 prophets of Baal vs. Elijah. Baal vs. the Lord. The god who lit the sacrifice of each on fire would be recognized as the true God. Baal and the 450 prophets accomplished nothing. The Lord powerfully ignited Elijah's altar with fire! Elijah executed all 450 prophets of Baal. Now something was getting done to straighten things out!

But wicked Jezebel was not intimidated or impressed. She informed Elijah that the next day he likewise would be dead! Where was God? Elijah gave up and ran away to die.

At Martin Luther's time in Europe things were different, but the same. The political climate was filled with friction. For years the head of the Christian church, the popes in Rome Italy had been seeking to control the political leaders in Europe—the Kings of France, England, Spain, and many princes of Germany where there was no king. These rulers in return sought to control the popes. For a time there were three co-popes in the church each backed by a different source. The papacy itself was morally corrupt. The spiritual teachings being taught to the people revolved around making the entity of the church strong, not pointing souls to Jesus the crucified and risen Savior, in whom there is forgiveness and life before God. People were pointed to themselves and to obeying the pope no matter what. Indulgences were sold to buy freedom from punishment for sins. When Martin Luther from his studies of Scripture begged to differ and to point all to Christ the Savior by faith and by faith alone, he was excommunicated from the church, he was declared an outlaw by the emperor—wanted dead or alive. Where was God? Why didn't He bring a keg of dynamite and straighten things out?

God doesn't work the way we think He should. He does not use physical power and duress. He works in the heart. This is what Elijah learned. At the cave, Elijah felt sorry for himself. He had a complaint against God. All was failure. God taught Elijah that God's success does not work through force, though He has plenty of it. His presence works in the heart, through the proclamation of Christ the crucified and risen Savior from sin and death, the Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep—foolish and weakness to the world, but wisdom and power to the believer. Rescue, peace, and life is yours, sure and certain in Jesus, not by what you do, but by Jesus. Trust Him. Hearts are brought to God not by His power and force, but by His love. “By the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified in His sight.” “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” “We love Him because He first loved us.” “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Martin Luther did not carry the day by force, though at times he surely wanted to. Indeed he made some very strong and rough remarks about stubborn unbelievers, but he had used no army. In fact he was opposed to those in the Peasants Revolt who took up arms to deal with the errors of the leaders. Nor did Martin Luther always feel like a success. He was beset by periods of illness and depression—Anfechtung in German. Was it all for nought? All that he had stirred up, did it really accomplish anything?

Martin Luther kept preaching the Word. The power to lead people to repentance before God and the world is in the Word. It condemns hearts for sin and soothes hearts with righteousness in Jesus. This is what Elijah also learned. God works in the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Elijah was sent back to keep on preaching. There were plenty—7000—who needed the shepherding of a prophet of God, pointing them to the love and mercy of God in the Savior to come. Elijah was not the last one left. Other prophets would follow him. He was told to anoint Elisha as his successor. The quiet work of the Lord goes on.

And this is not just an interesting study in history for us today—whether 3000 year old history or 500 year old history. It's for you.

How often do you get discouraged--whether it's in your work at home, at the ranch, or for someone else? How often do you get depressed in raising the family and tending to the children's never ending needs? How often do you think, if you become laid up or die, the work will all fall apart, the church will close down, the world will come to an end?

Elijah learned it was not about him. Martin Luther? We do not come to celebrate him on Reformation Day. We repeatedly celebrate the grace and mercy of Christ. He rules and controls all. He will deal with the ungodly in His way and His time. He works with His Church through the quiet heart-changing voice of the Word. The proclamation of the Word! Here is your strength, your life, and your success—in Christ!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach --