

1 KINGS 19 : 12–15, 18-21
DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF GLORY

¹² And after [the wind and] the earthquake, a fire, but the LORD was not in the [wind, or the earthquake, or] fire. And after the fire, a still small voice. ¹³ 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?”

¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way. . . . ¹⁸ Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

¹⁹ So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. ²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?”²¹ So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

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Many times, night is a welcome break—a time to rest, to sleep, to recharge. However, if the day is really spectacular even into the late hours, it’s tough to say, “I’m going to bed.” Just ask a six-year old, who is at his/her cousin’s house, playing with their toys—“new” to the six-year old. To go to bed is a “downer.” The same is true on the last day of a very enjoyable vacation

On the day of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in His glory on the mountain. They were very awestruck. What a spectacle! Peter wanted to build three shrines there, for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. But it would not happen. They went back down the mountain with Jesus, back to the daily grind of people and their needs. Not nearly as much fun as the glory of the mount—even though it had frightened them.

Our text is similar. It deals with the Old Testament prophet Elijah, Elijah lived about 200 years after King David, and 800 years before Jesus’ life on earth. Elijah was a faithful prophet of God. However, serving among the Israelites of that time was very challenging. Israel was more interested in idols and idol worship. Do you recall the stand-off at Mt. Carmel: Elijah—one prophet of the Lord vs. 450 prophets of Baal? Which god would light the sacrifice on fire? Baal? He was a no god. The Lord? He was the true God. Naturally, the Lord won! The 450 false prophets were put to death. A glorious victory! However, after Elijah had come down the mountain, back to life in Israel, wicked and Baal-worshiping Queen Jezebel told him that she would see him dead! Elijah was “done.” He ran for his life, far south, to Mt Horeb. He was quitting, he wanted God to end his life; he considered himself a failure.

Life in this sinful world is tough. Satan surrounds you with sin, and with sin comes looming failure. Sweat, work, and toil; but for what? You never get to the point where you want to be, you never get to the great goal you want to reach. There are setbacks. Maybe it’s failure in your labors in life, maybe it’s lack of contentment with your station in life, maybe it’s the backsliding relatives or children. Instead of glory, there’s failure. The devil pushes you to say to God, “I quit! God, end my life right now; otherwise, I will.” Just because you seem like a failure to yourself, doesn’t mean you are. God never lets you down. The truth is, before God, you are an arrogant failure. You sin! But God leads you humbly to trust Him for forgiveness, life, and humble service to Him. You may never understand your life; but through Jesus you have great success!

God would teach that truth to Elijah running to Mt. Horeb. There, God caused a violent wind, a rumbling earthquake, and roaring fire to pass by Elijah. Elijah was not afraid; God was not in them. Then God passed by in a still quiet whisper, and Elijah was terrified! God knew all about him and his sin, and with but a whisper He could have destroyed Elijah. “What are you doing here? Go back to Israel where I put you. I have important work for you to do, to help the believers in Israel. You are not the only believer left. There are still 7,000 who have not bowed to Baal.” The Lord showed Elijah the truth. Relief! “I’m not alone. There are still 7,000 I need to help.” He went back.

Elijah found Elisha, as God had instructed him. Elisha would be his student and the prophet to succeed him. God’s work of salvation, proclaiming forgiveness and rescue from Satan, would go on, whether it always looks like success or not. Elijah had returned from Mt. Horeb lifted up and ready to labor—even in Israel where Baal worship was rampant—and even if it wouldn’t look or feel like success. The Lord of mercy in Jesus was with him to forgive him and to control all things.

There were similarities for Peter, James, and John, going with Jesus up the mountain where He would be amazingly transfigured, from His appearance as humble man to glorious God. They had been hearing Jesus’ comforting and refreshing words of mercy for sinners. They had seen His “only-God-can-do” miracles. They watched the crowds gather to Him in love and praise. However, . . . Jesus had also been talking about going to Jerusalem to suffer many things at the hands of the leaders, and be killed! If that would happen to Him what would happen to them? Frightening and discouraging words. Jesus did say that He would rise again, but that went right over their ears. When Peter replied, “Lord, this will never happen to you,” Jesus addressed Peter as “Satan!” Harsh. Jesus told them that following Him meant taking up their cross. Hard news.

On the mountain, Jesus was transfigured, transformed, into His full glory—His face like the sun, His clothes like the light. What a sight! Both Moses and Elijah of old were talking with Him about “His decease (Luke 9:31),” His finishing His life, completing His work, fulfilling His mission, at Jerusalem. The disciples heard firsthand that it was part of God’s plan for saving sinners from their just desserts, all in His compassion and love for them. Amazing! They were frightened when God the Father spoke, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” They needed to listen to their Savior and Good Shepherd. Then Jesus came to them, “Arise. Don’t be afraid.” They went down the mountain, surely pondering what they had witnessed. They went back to work with God’s dearly loved people, sinners that they were, in need of love, forgiveness, and life, theirs in Jesus’ vicarious (substitutionary) death and resurrection. The disciples left the glory behind to work in the Kingdom of God. Their role would be to go out, through thick and thin, to make disciples of all nations. They had seen His glory. They knew what they were doing and why!

Life has lots of ups and downs for us too. Like Elijah, sometimes a person thinks, or says, “I’ve had it, I’m done. Lord, I may as well die.” But you have seen in The Word the glory of the risen Jesus, and you know His resurrection guarantees your salvation. Go about your life, day by day, laboring in your calling, taking your responsibilities, enduring the hardships and disappointments, relishing the Lord’s forgiveness for all your sins! Treasure your new life in Christ and the eternal life in heaven after the Great Day of Judgment and Rescue. Certainly, you do not stand at Mt. Horeb with Elijah, or at the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, but you do climb this little hill to St. Luke’s each Sunday! to be encouraged on your life. Here God’s Word is spoken to you. He shows His glory, and your glory through His Son, the best Shepherd, Friend, and Savior. Leaving St. Luke’s, going back to your life is not a downer, but a privilege to serve our Lord in whatever role He gives you. Do not be sad like the six-year old who has to go to bed. Go down this hill with Jesus’ transfiguration, comfort, and joy, serving in His Kingdom. The highest joy will be the eternal day of full glory in the “Transfiguration” of heaven!

Amen! So be it!

---Pastor Kanzenbach