

In Jesus' name. Amen.

People loved by God,

Last week we heard about Elijah's presence at the contest between God and Baal on Mt. Carmel. 2x

As the Lord rained down fire on His altar in spectacular form, the people cried, **The Lord, He is God!**

... Can you imagine a greater high than this for Elijah?

This was a great display of God's existence and power...

and a vindication of Elijah's righteous preaching of the Lord's true Word. (1 vs. 450)

But that spiritual high on Mt. Carmel didn't last long.

The very next day, came a low low in the Valley of Jezreel as Queen Jezebel made death threats.

Elijah, the strong & bold prophet, ran for his life.

At one point he was so depressed, he asked the Lord to end his life, as if he had no purpose anymore.

Instead, the Lord strengthened him to retreat to Mt. Horeb, a refuge and a time of spiritual refreshment.

And the Lord's conversation with him is where we pick up with our text for meditation this morning...

...as follows in Jesus' name:

And behold, the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 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." 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?" 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." 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."(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

God loves to ask people questions. (Adam, where are you? | Cain, Where is your brother?)

It's not that He doesn't know the answers.

It's that He wants us to know the answers... for us to hear our answers out loud
so that we might examine what is truly on/in our hearts.

"What are you doing here, Elijah?" Was His question on this particular day.

So Elijah answered...and it kind of has the sound of a complaint, doesn't it?
"I have done all this work, but the people are still faithless.
I am the only faithful one left, and they want to kill me now. Then who will You have left?"
As if to say, "God, what are you doing? You have all the power and You are losing!" |
There, Elijah said it... now what is God going to answer?

The first part of God's answer came in a great display of power.
First there was a great wind, tearing the mountain and breaking rocks in pieces...
Then an earthquake... then a fire...
but for all the power and might and glory displayed in each of these... the Lord was NOT in them.
Instead, He chose to come in a "low whisper," or in a "still small voice."
Here was a subtle clue for Elijah... and for us... about the Lord's usual way of coming to us.

But it doesn't seem as if Elijah caught on just yet, because when the Lord asked him again,
"**What are you doing here, Elijah?**", his answer was the same as before.
... Or maybe, it was different.

Maybe it sounded to God more like the Pharisee in our Gospel text:
"God of hosts, I thank you that I am not like the people of Israel,
forsakers of Your covenant, destroyers of Your altars, and killers of Your prophets.
I am jealous for You, and I, even I only am left, of Your faithful prophets."
With such a prayer, would **this man go home justified?**

...
Now, if Elijah, God's faithful and bold prophet, could fall into a self-righteous pride like this,
what about the likes of you and me?
How many times have we complained about society (all those "other men"),
the politicians, or lawyers, or fraudsters, or gang members, or drug dealers, or ...
and compared (or more accurately: contrasted) ourselves to them... even with contempt.
Or how many times have we looked at the "good things" that we do for God and our neighbors
and wondered why God isn't using them more effectively to reinvigorate a lively faith in His people,
or to grow a bigger church, or to fill the congregational coffers to meet our annual budget?
Looks like we are doing all the heavy lifting and God is just sitting back and watching us,
even though He could pull off the great displays of wind, earthquake, and fire.
With such thoughts, would you go home justified?

Maybe we need God to ask us the question: "**What are you doing here, My child?**"
... What would your answer be?
Would it be to complain that God doesn't seem to be doing enough with you?
Would it be to express your self-righteousness?
Would it help to hear yourself answer that question out loud?

... "**What are you doing here, My child?**"
Are you here to justify yourself - to try to stand before the God of hosts in your own righteousness and wisdom,
or are you here to be justified by God and given His righteousness and seek His wisdom?

The tax collector, Jesus tells us, **went down to his house justified.**
He did not enter the temple with an eye to any of his works, which he knew were saturated with sin.

He did not enter the temple comparing or contrasting himself to anyone else, either.

Instead he was seeking the Lord's atonement. **"God, be merciful to me, a sinner."**

He brought nothing but his sin before the Lord - and there in the temple, he saw God's answer to it as the daily sacrifices were performed by the priests on his behalf.

They weren't flashy or anything out of the ordinary,

they were the usual sight seen on the temple grounds - God doing His extraordinary work of atoning and forgiving through ordinary things.

Those sacrifices, the sacraments of the OT, were the picture of the coming Messiah, dying for his sins.

Not only did the tax collector go home justified, but he could go home in peace and comfort and joy!

Elijah also **turned on his way** and was to head back.

The Lord had not promised any other greater miracles designed to convert the people,

and yet, after hearing the low whisper and God speak to him, he was greatly encouraged.

Notice that God did not give him kudos and praise him for all his work,

St. Luke 17:10

as if he had gone over and above the call of duty, he was an **unworthy servant only doing his duty.**

Instead, the Lord told him to get back to work, being a prophet – preaching to the people,

and to anoint Hazael and Jehu to be kings and Elisha to be the prophet after him.

In these tasks, Elijah understood that the Lord does not always work in the flashy, eye-catching, demonstrations of power.... He CAN, where and when He pleases,

but He usually uses the common & ordinary, and that He had decided to bring about His justice by the swords of Hazael and Jehu.

But even more encouraging for Elijah was the recognition that the Lord already had a plan for the work of the prophetic ministry to extend beyond him.

He was not the only prophet, nor would he be the last... Elisha would continue this work.

And even without Elijah knowing, the Lord had preserved to Himself 7,000 faithful saints, who had not given into worshiping Baal. ... Elijah wasn't as alone as he had thought.

...

And it is good for us to realize the same truths.

Yes, God can work through great displays of judgment and power without help from man,

but He ordinarily works through those things that are seemingly more common and less spectacular.

He works through government officials and the sword they bear... even when they are corrupt.

But even under a good gov't, realize that society won't suddenly become less evil.

Nor will "other men" be inclined to believe in God by heavenly fire coming down, or great winds, or earthquakes, or fires.

All those things have happened and yet society shakes its fist at God and returns to normal.

Recognize that God's condemnation is NOT how He grows and strengthens His Church.

He grows His Church by justifying self-righteous sinners through the sacrifice of His only Son.

He strengthens His Church by declaring you righteous for Christ's sake.

It's not glamorous or flashy, but that doesn't mean it's not powerful.

He doesn't create a stronger, more faithful Church through outreach programs or campaigns.

God strengthens His Church one cleansed conscience at a time. One absolution... One baptism...

One sermon... One table around His altar... One home visit...

One Bible Class or Sunday School lesson... One family devotion. One bedtime prayer. One hymn.
One godly encouragement. One *conversation and consolation of the brethren* at a time,
where Christ crucified is preached, taught, and confessed
so that *penitent sinners for mercy crying, pardon and peace from Him obtain.* ^{ELH #497:5}

These are God doing His extraordinary work through seemingly ordinary means.
It's not spectacular or eye catching, but it IS effective as the Holy Spirit blesses His Word
in your ears and mouth to give life, comfort, and joy.

Peace be with you.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria