

**THE WHISPER OF GOD**  
**I Kings 19:1-13**

**INTRODUCTION:**

I believe it was Thomas Carlyle who said, “speech is silver but silence is golden.” I don’t know about golden but I can tell you it is rare. We wake to clock-radios, dress to television news, drive with the radio on and a cell phone to our ears, work to background music and fall asleep to Jay Leno. Silence is rare.

Do you remember what the lyricist, Paul Simon penned? He wrote:

*And in the naked light I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more.  
People talking without speaking,  
People hearing without listening.*

Isn’t that a pretty apt description of our culture with its talk-radio and 24-hour-news networks and wall-to-wall sports channels? To fill the time, the talking heads keep right on talking even when they’ve exhausted a topic and have repeated themselves repeatedly.

One of the casualties to the loss of silence is the loss of listening. I’m afraid we don’t really pay much attention to what others tell us any more. They jabber and we tune them out lest we become captives in their babble-on.

Because silence is rare and listening is an endangered art, we ought not be too surprised that we have trouble hearing the voice of God.

There is an incident in Scripture where one of the prophets had trouble hearing God’s voice. Would you turn with me to I Kings 19:1-13 to review that account? I Kings 19:1-13. It is on page 351 in the pew Bible in the rack in front of you.

While you are turning to that passage, I want to set the historical context for these verses. The prophet, Elijah, had confronted the wicked king Ahab because of his worship of false gods. Elijah, as a prophet of YHWH, challenged the prophets of the false god, Ba’al, to a kind of a duel. They were both to prepare sacrifices for their god and then pray and ask their god to send down fire from heaven to consume their sacrifice. The agreement was that whoever’s god actually sent fire from heaven, that god would be acknowledged as the one *true* God. The challenge of the prophets took place on Mt. Carmel. In the interest of time, I will resist the temptation to tell you the story. It is a VERY interesting story and you ought to read it. Let me ruin the ending and tell you that YHWH sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrificial offering.

With that, Elijah told the people who were watching to seize the prophets of the false god, Ba'al, and put them to death for being false prophets. The people did just that and 450 false prophets were executed that day.

The problem with all of this was that King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, was a follower of Ba'al and she resented what Elijah had done. She was very angry about the death of 450 prophets of the religion she practiced. So she put out a contract on Elijah's life. That is where we take up the story in I Kings 19:1.

***19**<sup>1</sup> Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."*

*<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.*

*All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.*

*<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." <sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.*

*And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

*<sup>10</sup> He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."*

*<sup>11</sup> The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."*

*Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

It had been a noisy day on Mt. Carmel. The text says that, from morning until evening, the prophets of Ba'al danced and shouted. Elijah taunted them and told them to shout louder in case their god is deep in thought, busy, out of town or sleeping. So the prophets shouted louder. Think of it: probably 10 to 12 hours of 450 people shouting at the tops of their lungs! Elijah's head must have been splitting! And his ears must have been ringing with the reverberation of all of that noise.

Elijah desperately needed a word from the Lord but he had trouble hearing it. So God had to prepare Elijah to hear His voice.

We, too, have to be prepared to hear the voice of God. Let's look at how God prepared Elijah to hear His voice and, perhaps, we'll learn to listen for Him, too.

For Elijah, there was first of all:

I. **Emotional Preparation (19:1-4)**

Elijah had just experienced an astounding victory over the prophets of Ba'al. God had used him powerfully. In fact, I think it may be from this very incident that we get the term "mountain top experience." Elijah was so pumped with the exhilaration of his recent triumph that when he came down from Mt. Carmel, he ran ahead of Ahab's horse-drawn chariots all the way down the mountain.

And then, as often happens after one of those times of victory, there is a time of intense challenge that follows. After you come down from the mountain, you often reach the bottom. And, emotionally, Elijah hit the bottom. He got word that Queen Jezebel was out to get him killed and Elijah ran away, in fear for his life.

The Lord had just delivered him from the hands of one king and 450 false prophets so you have to wonder why he trembled in the face of Jezebel's threats. But he did.

So Elijah ran to Beersheba. Beersheba was the southernmost city in the nation. Elijah left his servant in Beersheba and ran another day's journey away from even him. Elijah was getting as far away from Jezebel and from King Ahab's army as he could get. And there, in a hostile desert, he sat under a broom tree and prayed that God would take his life.

(I've always thought it was a little ironic that he prayed for God to take his life after he ran away from Jezebel who wanted to do that very thing for him.)

Elijah had to realize that success wasn't enough. Even success in ministry is not enough. Elijah needed to hear God's Word for him. And to prepare him to listen for God's Word he had to be emptied of self and humbled in spirit. He had to be emotionally prepared to hear from the Lord.

And, people, we are no different from Elijah. Our periods of greatest temptation often follow our moments of greatest success. Some of that may be because we begin to believe it was our skill, our ability, our cleverness that led to our success rather than acknowledging that the Lord used us. When you hit the bottom, recognize that this may be a time of preparation when God is getting you ready so you are able to receive His Word.

After emotional preparation, Elijah needed:

## II. **Physical Preparation (19:5-9)**

After Elijah's all-day confrontation with the prophets of Ba'al, after running down the mountain ahead of the chariots, after running to the far end of the country with his servant and after running another full-day's journey into the desert, Elijah was...TIRE!

Of course he was tired. Who wouldn't be?!? So he prayed to die and lay down to sleep. Then an angel of the Lord woke him and told him to get up and eat something. Not only was Elijah running on empty emotionally, he was running on empty physically. It would appear that he had not eaten in days.

When Elijah woke up, the angel showed him freshly baking bread and a jar of fresh water that he had for him. Elijah rose, ate and lay back down for some much-needed rest.

A little while later, the angel woke him again; and again told him to rise and eat because he had a long journey ahead of him. So Elijah got up and ate a second meal. Then, the text says, strengthened by the food, he got up and journeyed forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb where he entered a cave and spent the next night.

Now, there is no way Elijah could have gone where God was leading him if he had not nourished his body with food, drink and rest. And I cannot help but wonder if one of the reasons we have trouble hearing God's Word for our lives is if we are just too tired to listen when He speaks.

- We run our bodies at 80 miles an hour from early in the morning until late at night. If we eat breakfast or lunch at all, we do it on the run. We grab a quick bite of supper in front of the TV, fall into bed exhausted and wonder why we gain weight. And in the helter-skelter of our days, we never make the time to sit quietly in front of our Bibles

to read God's Word and then we wonder why we don't feel like we know what He would have us to do.

- We wear ourselves out all week and neglect to rest on our days off. We stagger into church, collapse into a pew and then don't get much out of the service because we are too physically drained to participate or pay attention.
- After a lifetime of chaotic, frenetic and frenzied living, we come to the end and wonder if we really do "believe that Someone in the great somewhere hears every word." And we wonder why we haven't heard from Him lately.

Elijah had to learn that he must care for his body if he was going to care for his soul. Early in a new year, as we are, it is a good time to remind ourselves that a healthy diet, regular exercise and eight hours of sleep each night might just be one of the best things we can do for our souls as well as for our bodies.

After Elijah had been prepared emotionally and physically to hear God's Word, he still needed:

### III. **Spiritual Preparation (19:9-13)**

Among other things, Elijah had to learn what God's voice was not before he could hear what it was.

God confronted Elijah where he was hiding in his cave and He asked him what he was doing there. Elijah explained his predicament and how Jezebel was trying to kill him. And, in his spiritual depression, Elijah said that he was the only faithful prophet of God left.

God told Elijah to go stand at the mouth of the cave because He, the Lord, was about to pass by.

Standing in the opening of the cave, Elijah watched as a powerful wind tore through the land. The descriptions remind me of a tornado. Even the rocks were split by this wind. But then the Bible says that God was not in the wind.

After the wind blew through, there was a powerful earthquake but the Lord was not in the mighty earthquake.

Then fire swept the countryside but the Lord was not in the raging fire, either.

Then...a gentle whisper...and God spoke...directly to Elijah's heart...and told him to go back to where he'd come from and anoint a new king because God was going to deliver His people from wicked Ahab and his evil queen, Jezebel.

We are so used to the bombastic, the cacophonous, the jangling, the jarring and the loud that we may not be paying enough attention to the soft and gentle whisper of God. So many church services have taken on the look, the feel and the sound of a rock concert that we just assume that God is in the guitars, the drums, the amps and the speakers. Because He is a great, mighty and powerful God, of course He will reveal Himself to us in high decibels. And maybe He will. But that's not the way He spoke to Elijah. Elijah had to stop, listen and hear a gentle whisper if he was going to hear from the Lord. And you may need to turn off the TV preacher, turn down the praise music, pick up your Bible and quietly learn from the Lord.

**CONCLUSION:**

So let me ask you, do you want God to speak to you? Would you like to hear from Him in words you cannot mistake? Really??? Will you humble yourself so you are emotionally prepared? Will you take care of your body so you are physically prepared? Will you be still and listen so you are spiritually prepared?

Do you really want God to speak to you? Let me warn you, when you hear God's Word for you, you will be responsible to act upon what you have heard. Do you want God's Word, the "Bread of Life" to be broken to you? If so, tell the Lord that in this prayer that we will sing.

**INVITATION:** # 413 – *"Break Thou The Bread of Life"*