

## **11-22-09 1 Kings 18:41-46 “Carmel: The Sound of Rain” by Richard Boatman**

<sup>41</sup> And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." <sup>42</sup> So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. <sup>43</sup> "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." <sup>44</sup> The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.' " <sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. <sup>46</sup> The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

The Holy Spirit within our human spirit knows things that our mind has yet to grasp. 1 Corinthians 2:10 says, "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." Verse 12 continues, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." Romans 8:26-27 witnesses similarly: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Numerous times Jesus appealed to this revelation by saying, "The ones who have ears to hear, let them hear; those with eyes to see, let them see." He is speaking of listening with our spiritual ears and seeing with our spiritual eyes.

The crowd on the plateau of Mount Carmel had witnessed an amazing event. Fire from heaven had consumed Elijah's altar—the God of Israel was indeed the true God. The Lord's covenant people had dramatically confessed to this reality. In addition, the 450 prophets of Baal, once the all-stars of Queen Jezebel's faith, were now slain. And yet...the skies remained blue; the three and a half year drought persisted. The parched earth seemed no better off.

But while others only saw blue sky and felt the gripping heat, Elijah heard **the sound of rain**. I was convicted by something I recently read. Author M. Scott Peck confesses to his mechanical ineptness, something I have all too readily admitted to. But in his book, The Road Less Traveled, he tells of the time he walked past his neighbor who was working on a lawn mower. Peck said, "Boy, I sure admire you. I've never been able to fix those kinds of things or do anything like that." Without hesitation, his neighbor shot back, "That's because you don't take the time." As he

continued his walk, Peck pondered this. And sure enough, the next time something needed minor repairs, he took the time to learn how to fix it. Upon reflection, I realize that much of my confessed inability with building things comes down to simply not taking the time. So you know what I did recently? I bought a tool kit...a red one...with silver accents. Minor repairs, I'll be waiting; you know where I live.

I'm convinced that any Christian can learn to hear the "sound of rain," i.e. learn to be aware of God working behind the scenes. We can all become more sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. But it takes time.

**James 5:16-18** says, "**The effective prayer** of a righteous person can accomplish much. Elijah was a man *just like us*. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."

Spiritual acumen can be attained, but it takes time and perseverance and faith. While others descended the mountain or went out to eat, Elijah climbed up to the peak and prayed. But his prayer was no "whatever will be, will be." God had spoken to him, so now he exerted real energy in prayer. He "bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees." He knew the curse over Israel had been broken, and now he was doing spiritual battle, beseeching God for the rain that had been promised. He would get done with a season of prayer and then send his servant to look out over the Mediterranean. Nothing. Again he would pray and again...nothing.

I hope his servant was a person of faith, because some folks almost get delight out of reporting the negative. "Nope—sky's still bright blue...I think it's even getting warmer out." I used to have a neighbor who was a retired farmer. In five years, I don't think Dale ever knew a perfect day. "Pretty day isn't it, Dale?" "Oh, we need some rain." "Nice rain isn't it, Dale?" "Well, I'm afraid we're gonna get too much." "Nice day isn't it, Dale?" "Oh, we could use some wind to dry out the ground." "Nice drying wind isn't it, Dale?" "Well, afraid it's gonna bring rain; we don't need that." We loved Dale and Maxine, but if I were Elijah, I would not want Dale to be the one reporting about the Mediterranean. Dale was sort of like the lawyer who said to his client, "I've got good news and bad news." The client said, "What's the bad news?" The lawyer said, "The bad news is that they found your DNA at the crime scene." The client asked, "Then what's the good news." The lawyer responded, "Well, the good news is that your cholesterol is only 140."

Six times Elijah sent his servant. Still nothing. Finally, on the seventh time—God’s perfect number—the servant reported **“a cloud as small as a man’s hand.”** For Elijah, this was enough for the God of Israel is the One who can take a little and turn it into much. God asked through Zechariah the prophet, “Who has despised the day of small things?” The destruction of the Temple had been immense, but they would rebuild, one small stone at a time. Feeding a multitude of 5000 seemed overwhelming to the disciples. But a little—five loaves and two fish—entrusted to the Master’s hand would multiply. The cloud seemed as small a man’s hand, but Elijah’s faith was in a big God who was sending rain—both physical and spiritual—to his people.

God sends us potential miracles in the form of small things throughout our day. It may be a small opening to speak a kind word to someone in need. Perhaps you “coincidentally” cross the path of a potential employer at the grocery store. Maybe what seems like a random thought to go back to college or break off a bad relationship or start a new business is a “small cloud,” the beginning of a miracle God is sending you. Will you see these moments like my neighbor Dale or seize them like Elijah?

So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.' " <sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. <sup>46</sup> The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab...to Jezreel.

After David and Solomon’s reign, the nation was divided into the northern tribes called Israel and the southern called Judah. Samaria was the political capital of the northern kingdom, but Queen Jezebel had made **Jezreel the spiritual capital** of Baal worship. This was the citadel of perversion, and Elijah was headed into its epicenter. Eventually it would be the site of Jezebel’s demise and violent death. It was also at Jezreel that “the heads of Ahab’s 70 sons were piled at the [city] gate” (Henry Gehman). Hosea the prophet would refer to this as “the blood of Jezreel.”

As Elijah headed into this fortress of evil, I’d like us to consider two things. **First**, notice how the great prophet speaks to Ahab. Ahab had been the most evil king in Israel’s history. And Elijah alone had confronted his wickedness. But he **confronts him with civility**. And now even exudes sensitivity to Ahab’s traveling ahead of the coming storm. I think that’s an important lesson for us to learn. In a time when our own political process is often polarized, it is easy to speak with sweeping generalities and savage rhetoric. We call presidents “Bush” or “Obama,” all too often forgetting that we are to treat the office with respect and to diligently pray for

our leaders “and all those in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We can profoundly disagree with someone, and yet still treat this person with civility, with a cordial respect due to the office, or due to the fact that he or she is a human being.

The **second** point is more subtle and is found in Verse 46: “The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab...to Jezreel.” As we chronicle Elijah’s movements, we find a similar pattern: “Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah...” and he was sent to the Brook of Cherith, the “cutting place.” The brook dried up, “Then the word of the Lord came to him...” and he was sent to Zarephath, the “refining place.” After three years “the word of the Lord came to Elijah...” and the great prophet was used to defeat the 450 prophets at Carmel, the “place of conquest.” But after the conquest at Carmel, notice verse 46 again: “The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, *he* ran ahead of Ahab...to Jezreel.” Do you see or hear anything missing? God’s power was upon Elijah, but God never spoke to him to go to Jezreel as had been the pattern all along. And in Jezreel, the bold prophet is suddenly going to run from Queen Jezebel, fearing for his life. It’s so out of character given all that Elijah has gone through—considering all his emboldened predictions—that now he would end up running in fear. Did pride lead Elijah?

James 5 says Elijah was “a man just like us.” So here’s my second point: we sometimes confuse **emotional energy with real spiritual leading**. Consider James and John, two of the three “inner circle” disciples. They were traveling with Jesus through Samaria towards the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Samaritans had a strange belief system that Jewish people despised. A particular village did not welcome Jesus. Luke 9:54-55 says, “When [James and John] saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’ But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.’”

They had been with Jesus three years and had extensive teaching on the Holy Spirit. But when offended by a Samaritan village, they were ready to destroy it. Emotional energy was guiding them, not the leading of the Spirit. In a few days, James and John and the others were going to know real despair. Elijah the prophet has gone from the “cutting place” to the “refining place” to the “conquering place” of Carmel. But his greatest lesson about hearing God’s voice is going to come to him at Mount Sinai, at the “place of despair.” It is here, in the throes of great brokenness, that God will make himself known to Elijah in a new, powerful way. It is in the “place of despair” that Elijah will learn more about what it means to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.