SWM 8-1-21

**A Gentle Whisper**

1 Kings 19:1-18

K.V 12.

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

We saw in last week's passage that Elijah had a great victory against the 450 prophets of Baal. After this great victory, he was supposed to continue to carry on his mission with more confidence. However, in today’s passage, we see a very different picture of Elijah. We see not Elijah, full of power, confidence and vision, but in fear, deep despair, doubt and exhaustion. He wanted to give up his mission as a prophet and was hoping only to die under the broom tree. He was like a roaring lion before, but he became like a dying lion. He really got depressed. Why did he become like this? What was his problem? To different degrees, we can be like Elijah. When everything goes well as we want for our life and mission we are happy. But when things don’t go well with many troubles and hardships we lose our heart and get depressed with frustration, hopelessness, and doubt and feel like giving up everything. In today’s passage, we see that God visits Elijah lying under the tree, restores his strength, and makes him carry out his mission again. May God help us to learn how to restore our strength and live a powerful life and do what God wants us to do with hope and vision in the Lord. My message has three parts. **I**.**Take my Life (1-5a) II. What are you doing here (5b-13a) III. Go back the way you came (13b-18)**

1. **Take my Life (1-5a)**

Look at verse 1,2. **Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 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.”** Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets of Baal. Ahab should have repented for his idolatry after seeing God’s great power and helped his wife Jezebel to repent as well. But he told Jezebel as if Elijah had done all these by himself. When Jezebel heard what had happened, she burned with anger and decided to kill Elijah out of revenge. Satan used her hatred to threaten Elijah and planted fear in his heart.

Look at verse 3-5a. **3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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.” 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep**. When Elijah heard Jezebel’s treath, he became so afraid and ran for his life. He left the land of Israel out of Jezebel's reach, and fled all the way to Beersheba in Judea. Before, he was so brave and bold in fighting without fear of death. But now he was terrified and ran away for his life, like a startled rat in front of a cat. At Beersheba, he left his servant and went alone for a day into the wilderness. And he sat down under the broom tree and prayed to God. **“I have had enough, Lord,” “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”** “I have done enough” means that he had done everything he could do for his mission and had suffered enough, and now he could no longer carry on the work. And he said he was not better than his forefathers who had suffered before, so he could not continue his mission like them suffering more. Basically he wanted to give up his mission as a prophet. And he asked God to take his life. “Take my life” “I am better to die” These words are not easy to come up with. This is what people say when they feel like really there is no more hope and there is nothing they can do and they can live any longer.

Before working as a counselor, I couldn't understand why people commit suicide. However, as I met and listened to patients who attempted suicide, I began to understand why people try to take their life. Elijah laid down under the bush and fell asleep wishing that God may his life while he slept. He didn’t want to wake up the next morning.

Why did he become like this? You can get hints from verses 9 and 10. **And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.**” Elijah had a great zeal for God and fought really hard to help the Israel people to return to God. After the great victory on Mount Carmel, he expected that the whole people in Israel, starting with the king, would repent and turn to God. However, things didn’t go as he expected. Even though people saw such great power of God, there was no sign that they would return to God. And now the evil queen wanted to kill him so decisively. With such a situation he became so hopeless and powerless and no more strength left for him to continue the mission.

If not to the same degree as Elijah, we too can fall into a similar hopelessness and helplessness. Even if we worked hard with certain hope and expectation, especially when we did things with hope in God, when things don't go as we expected, and even things get worse,we can become hopeless and powerless like Elijah and don’t like doing anything more. Then we can live a powerless life without any hope or vision for our life and just manage daily life with the sense of being tired and empty. It is a spiritual depression. Now let's see how God helped Elijah then.

1. What are you doing here (5b-13a)

Look at verses 5b-9a. **All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.7 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.” 8 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. 9 There he went into a cave and spent the night.** Did God take Elijah's life as he prayed? No. God answered his prayer in another way because God knew what he really needed. Seeing Elijah under the tree, God didn’t say, “Why are you afraid? Get up, go and fight” Instead, he gently touched his weary body and mind. Lord’s touch upon Elijah through the angel was like the gentle touch of mother upon her young son who is in deep despair and exhaustion. And God prepared warm and delicious bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. God understood Elijah deeply and bore his weakness and comforted him. God is full of compassion and grace toward his servants and children. He visits His children when they suffer in frustration and despair. Sometimes we feel as if we are alone in the world in troubles and hardships. Many people think that when they are weak and seem to fail, God abandoned them. But at that time God wants to touch us and express his understanding and love, and to neuter us back strength. When we are weak, God sends his angels to serve us in many ways. When we need rest he gives us a chance to lay down and sleep and provides food and drink and real rest for our souls. Our God is the God of grace and compassion who comes to us in our times of need.

Now, God had a purpose in strengthening him. The angel said, “**Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you”**. It was to make him go to the mountain of God, Mount Horeb. After eating and drinking, Elijah gained strength and traveled for 40 days and nights until he finally reached Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. And he went into the cave and spent the night. To strengthen Elijah, what God did to him was to call him to meet Himself at the mountain of God. For that, God let him make a 40-day long journey. It was because only God could be a true source of strength and he was the only one who could empower him to stand up again. When we have problems, we try to find solutions in many different ways. But the ultimate source of strength and solution for all problems is God himself. So we have problems and become weary, that is the moment for us to come to God and meet him.

How did God let Elijah meet him? Look at verses 9b-10. **And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.”** While Elijah was still in the dark cave, God's voice came to Elijah. **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”** Why was God asking this question? It was not because he didn’t know the answer for the question but he asked with purpose. First, God wanted to let Elijah pour out what he had in his mind, all his despair, frustration, pain, disappointment and helplessness. When our mind and spirit are troubled, God wants us to come to him and pour out all what we have in mind before him. That is the first step for recovery. God also asked the question to let Elijah think about what he was doing deeply before God, asking to himself why he was there and what made him troubled. When we have trouble and despair we think we have good reasons for that and our response is natural and reasonable. And we could think based on our emotions. But we better come to God and think about what we are doing before God checking what we are doing and what we think and how we feel is really right before God. God really wants to talk with us asking, “what are you doing here?”

What was Elijah's answer? **“I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.”** Elijah told why he got so depressed and why he wanted to give up his mission and even want to die. With great zeal for the Lord, he fought to help the Israel people to return to God, but nothing changed. Now he was the only one left and they were trying to kill him. Basically what he was saying was he was not happy at all about what was going on. Things were not going he expected or wanted. Rather things got worse. He got so frustrated and disappointed and felt so sad and hopeless and helpless. Even though he didn’t mention it, his real disappointment was about what God was doing. He couldn’t understand why God didn’t work as he expected. He wanted God to turn over the entire nation to repent their idolatry with his power and kill all evil ones especially queen Jezebel. But it seemed like God was not doing anything even though he was working hard with great zeal for him. We often have the same thoughts. Why does God keep silent even though we are suffering with many troubles and there are so many problems out there.

What is God's response to this? Look at 11-13. **11 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. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave**. God told Elijah to come out of the cave and stand before God's presence on the mountain, as he would pass. How did God reveal Himself? First, a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before God, but God was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but God was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and stood at the mouth of the cave because he realized that God was in a gentle whisper. God appeared to Elijah in a gentle whisper. Why did God appear in such a gentle whisper?

It was to help Elijah to have a better understanding of how God does his work. God wanted him to know the God who works like a gentle whisper, so quiet that people could not notice. God sometimes works through powerful miracles such as strong winds, earthquakes, and fire. But that is not the only way God works. God works invisibly and so quietly like a whisper. What Elijah expected was a powerful work of God like strong winds, earthquakes, and fire. He wanted God to overthrow the entire nation Israel, destroying all enemies and transforming the nation into a God worshipping nation in a day. But he was very disappointed when the thing that he had hoped for did not happen. We also want God to solve our problems at once with a powerful miracle. But it doesn’t happen, we lose our heart. Again God works like strong wind, earthquake and fire. But at same time God works like a quiet voice. God wanted Elijah to meet this God because it was the solution for his depressed spirit and it was the way for him to get strength again to carry on his mission. Elijah thought God was not working because things didn’t go as he wanted. But God was working so powerfully even if it was so quiet and invisible. God wanted to see it and believe it. This quiet work of God is quiet, but more powerful than anything else. Salt dissolves quietly but makes the whole water salty. Yeast is so tiny, but it changes all the dough. This is how God works.

If we look through the eyes of faith, we can see that God is doing many works so quietly but powerfully. However, we cannot see because we only want to see what we want to see.We have to let go of the idea that everything should be the way we want it to be. God is much greater than our thoughts. His work should not be locked in our box. We should not be discouraged just because things don't go the way we want right now. Rather we still have to believe that God is quietly doing good works with his great wisdom, love and power in all situations. When we believe in a God who works like a whisper, we aren't discouraged or powerless. Rather we can be truly strong regardless of our visible situation, and we can continue to do what we are supposed to do and serve our mission continually with great hope and vision and eventually we will see the glorious work of God.

Also, God’s work, like a gentle whisper is God’s work through the word of God. Gentle whisper refers to the Word of God. God reveals himself, meets us, and speaks to us through his word and does his great and powerful work through his word. We try to experience God through great miracles. But in most cases, God makes Himself known through His Word. The thing that changes one person to repent and worship is not the great miracle but the word of God that works in one person’s heart through the Holy Spirit. When we are changed through the Word, everything changes. When people change through the word of God, the whole world can be changed. So the true miracle can take place through a gentle whisper, the word of God. When the apostle Paul taught the word of God in a small lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years, the word of God spread in all provinces in Asia and an entire city changed.That is why our 1:1 ministry is so important, and this work that have the power to change the world.

Elijah’s depression was not something that could be resolved by changing circumstances. The true way was to get out of his narrow thinking and believe in God who works like a quiet whisper and see his work by faith and to listen to the voice of God with a humble heart.

1. Go back the way you came

Look at 13-14. **Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”14 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn 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.**”God asked Elijah the same question again. “What are you doing here, Elijah?” By asking this question God urges Elijah to return to his mission. But Elijah gives the same answer. Even though God showed him how he works, he still found it difficult to take on the mission again. It was because fighting against the sin of idolatry in Israel was so hard and he was the only one who was fighting. What was God's answer to this?

 Look at verses 15-18. **15 The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.**”‘Go back the way you came’ This means that he must take on the mission he was about to give up again. God wanted him to carry out his mission to the end. And he tells you what to do in detail. God told Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Aram and anoint Jehu king over Israel and anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet. And God said that anyone who escaped from Hazael would be killed by Jehu, and those who escaped Jehu would be killed by Elisha! This foretells that God would judge the unrepentant Israelites through Hazael, king of Aram, completely destroy the family of King Ahab through Jehu, and judge the rest through Elisha. Years later, everything was fulfilled as you said. Even though Elijah got disappointed with what was going on at that time, God was working with a bigger plan. In this way, God showed that He was the Lord of the work of salvation and accomplished the work with His great sovereignty.

Elijah felt like he was fighting an unbearable battle with all his burdens on him. And he thought that when he died, all of work would end. But it was great self-righteousness and pride. God had done everything by His own power, and Elijah was only used by God.

There are times when we too fall into this misunderstanding and pride. We could think that we are in charge of our lives and in charge of our mission. However, God is the Lord of our lives, and God is in control of our lives. Our mission is also being fulfilled by God, and we are only being used by him. When we think that we are dealing with our life and our mission, we are too tired to bear it. What we need to do is to believe in God and do what we are supposed to do by faith

And God said that Elijah was not alone, that there were seven thousand who did not worship Baal in Israel. Elijah thought he was alone, but he wasn't alone. Through meeting with God, Elijah realized how God works, and heard the word and gained strength. And he took on his mission again.

In conclusion, God is the God who works like a gentle whisper. God is working so powerfully with his great power and wisdom, and love even if things don’t seem to go well now and fulfills his great will in his right time and right way. We should not judge God’s work with our limited thoughts. May God help us to believe in God who is in a gentle whisper and listen to his word, so that we may do what God wants to do with great hope and vision.

One word, “A gentle whisper”