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What Are You Doing Here, Elijah?

1 Kings 19:1-14

**Prayer:** *Father God, I do, I thank you. I just thank you for your love and your care and your goodness. And Lord, we just thank you for that goodness that's expressed in your word, in the ability that we have to come together, to offer up corporate worship and to sit at your feet and to open up your book and to learn from it. And Father again, we just pray that your Holy Spirit would be here, that you would accompany us as we open up your book and that you would give us the ability to make it of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

This morning, we're looking at 1 Kings 19:1-4. This is part 12 of our study of the life of Elijah, the story of Elijah, and let me just begin at verse one. It says: *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which*

*belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*

I spoke last week about this amazing transformation that took place in Elijah's life right after his triumph over the prophets of Baal. Jezebel makes what is in essence an idle threat, and Elijah's entire world collapses. Elijah underwent a catastrophe. Last week I pointed out that there are many different ways that folks interpret setbacks and bad news and even catastrophes, and many of those interpretations are mistaken. When bad news strikes, there's basically three different responses, mistaken responses that people have. They think at first well, God really just doesn't care; or perhaps God has finally gotten fed up with my sin and now he's lashing out of my bad behavior; or thirdly, somehow God's sovereignty in some way has somehow fallen short. None of those seem to be the cause for Elijah's catastrophe. So I ask the question: What caused one comment made by Jezebel to Elijah to completely unravel everything that Elijah had stood for and reduce him to somebody who's now desiring death? Well, the first and most obvious cause is what the scripture says, it says it was fear. Verse 3 says: *Then he was afraid.* Well, the more obvious question

then is, okay, he was afraid but why? You know, Elijah doesn't think he's being overlooked by God, he doesn't think he's being disciplined for a particular sin, he only knows that things didn't work out like he thought they would and that the vision that he had of this revival kind of coming down from Mount Carmel, it's been dashed. I mean Jezebel obviously hasn't been moved, so he starts to think all is lost and as he's thinking that, terror begins to set in. *1 Kings 19:3* says: *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*

I suggested last week that instead of those three reasons that we looked at that are not correct, there may be a fourth reason why Elijah was undergoing such a catastrophe, and that fourth reason was that God was crushing him. You know, *Psalms 34* says: *The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart*, and sometimes it's God who breaks it. I mean, since we all tend to become what we love the most, God sometimes intervenes in our lives catastrophically. And he does it to reorient our love from something other to the only source that matters eternally, and that is God. I quoted John Parsons who said this, he says: "God (and only God) can

'deconstruct' the self so that life's priorities, focus, and passions are redirected to him alone, the true source of life." You see, when we love God the most, we become exactly what God wants us to be; not for His sake, but for our sake. And not because God so desperately needs our love but because loving him is the healthiest thing we can do.

So I want to focus on the re-focus that God undertook after Elijah literally ran for his life, because he's going to have a life-changing confrontation with God in the wilderness, and this is how God describes it in *1 Kings 19:11-13*. It says: *And he, that is God, 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?"*

That was a monumental question. So I want to focus on that question that God asks Elijah at the end of the wind, the

earthquake and the fire. It says it was a low whisper or some of you have heard the translation "still small voice" that says to him "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" Now there are three different ways you can ask that question simply by putting the emphasis on different words. I mean, I can say, "What are you *here*, Elijah?" Or I can say, "*What* are you doing here, Elijah?" Or I can say, "What are *you doing here*, Elijah?" I mean same words, just different emphasis. But each one of those describes a different aspect of God's intervention in Elijah's life, and it points out that even in the middle of a catastrophe, God is right there.

Now the first question puts the emphasis on the word "here." "What are you doing *here*, Elijah?" Well, that's a very fair question. You see, an ecstatic Elijah has run ahead of Ahab to Jezreel. That's when he hears from this messenger all about Jezebel's threat. Again, *1 Kings 19:3* says: *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.* You have to understand something. Beersheba is a hundred miles south of Jezreel. So Elijah and his servant, they're running in terror for a hundred miles. But even that distance is not enough for Elijah. It says after he dropped off his servant in verse 4: *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough;*

now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." This was not just a momentary burst of panic. No, this was a sustained terror, and it's a terror that drove him for days. And every step that he took running away from the battle that God had sent him to affirmed the collapse of his faith, affirmed the collapse of his trust. And what he didn't realize, what is so amazing about God is that God is going to meet him right in the wilderness. So he winds up in the wilderness, a day's journey from Beersheba and God himself fleshes out what the psalmist declared in Psalm 139. There he said: *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utter most parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.* Well, we kind of expect that because God is omnipresent. Clearly there's no place that you could ever go to escape him. But Elijah's not really looking to escape God; he's looking to escape Jezebel. But running blindly from her, he runs smack dab into God. *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* Well, "here" was as far away as Elijah could get from the very place that God had sent him. "Here" was proof positive that Elijah was no longer trusting in the God who he had so powerfully represented just days before.

Now, Elijah had gone into the wilderness once before right after he had announced to Ahab and Jezebel that the drought was going to begin, but he had gone in because God had instructed him to do that. If you remember back to *1 Kings 17*, it says: *Then the word of the LORD came to him -- that's to Elijah -- saying, "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan."* But this time was different. You see, this time Elijah just decided on his own that he's got to take off. And the story sounds vaguely familiar, and perhaps it should because there's another man whose story mirrors Elijah's very closely. You probably know of him. God appointed him to a spiritual battle as well and he wound up talking off in the exact opposite direction. And we know that it took a three-day stay in the belly of a fish to change his mind and his direction. But it's almost uncanny how similar these two men are. You know, Elijah is a prophet, Jonah is a prophet, they're both sent to people who are far, far away from the Lord, they both respond very badly to the people that God sends them to. We have Elijah hiding under a broom tree, we have Jonah hiding under a vine, and they both want to die. Elijah says to God in *1 Kings 19:4*: *"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life."* Jonah says to God in *Jonah 4:8*: *"It is better for me to die than to live."* Both are distraught over the very people that God has sent them to and both of them, quite frankly, are whiny and self-absorbed and self-pitying, but God's response to

them is astounding. God says to Jonah, Jonah, *"Why are you so angry?"* He asks Elijah, *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* I mean not only are the questions incredibly gracious but so are God's actions. He cooks up a meal for Elijah, and he grows up a plant to shade Jonah. And both prophets wind up being tended to by God himself in the very place where they've asked God to end their lives, in the place that stands as a testimony to their own personal rebellion. Jonah summed up God's character as a bitter complaint that he wouldn't destroy Nineveh. This is what he said in *Jonah 4:2*, he says: *"O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster."* Understand, this is not a compliment from Jonah, this is a complaint.

You know, you may have never gotten to the point like Jonah did or Elijah did where you really want to end it all, but I suspect that most of you who have been through some kind of catastrophe have gotten to the point where you have grave doubts about God's graciousness, about his mercy or even about his presence in your life. Well, none of that strikes God here as extraordinary. I mean, we see through a glass darkly; God sees with absolute clarity. And he knows exactly where the pattern of your life is



headed. We only guess. And we guess and frequently we guess wrongly. And patterns that time reveals with crystal clarity are often obscured by the fear and the pain of catastrophe. And like Elijah, often times we just give in to that fear. But like Elijah, we need to see that God is always there ministering to us, whether we see it or not. *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?* The answer is: Nowhere. But often times it takes the passage of time to understand that. I mean, how many times have you seen the hand of God in your life retroactively? I mean, how many times have you had to look backwards and see a pattern develop for something that you never saw when you were in the thick of it? We're looking at Elijah while he's in the thick of his catastrophe, and the interactions by God with him that strike us as astounding strike Elijah as no big deal. I look at God's interaction with Elijah and I see patience and I see gentleness and I see a whole lot of self-control on God's part. What I don't see is Elijah recognizing that interaction at all. So God's answer to the question is -- the question being: *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* is to meet him, is to meet him right there in the wilderness and just start taking care of him. He's doing that in spite of the fact that Elijah doesn't even recognize how blessed and cared for he is.

Now, the second way to ask the question that God asked of Elijah

is: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" But we know what he was doing. He was fleeing. And we know he was exhausted physically, mentally, and spiritually and he was seeking rest and recuperation, and it's God who provides it. I mean, Elijah's hit rock bottom and God's first response is to take care of his physical needs even though Elijah's presence in the wilderness is a testimony to his failure to trust in God's sovereignty. The only reason that Elijah's there is because Jezebel threatened to kill him. So we need to consider the kindness of God. Look at this from his standpoint. I mean, Elijah has just bought into Jezebel's lie, he's deserted his post, and he's insulted God's sovereignty. You know, when the American Bowe Bergdahl walked away from his post, virtually everybody understood this as desertion. That's what he did. Elijah didn't walk. He ran. He runs over a hundred miles away and he crawls under a broom tree and then he asks God to kill him. I mean, if God had said, "Sure, no problem," I don't think we would have been shocked at all. Listen to what God does. This is *1 Kings 19:5*. It says: *And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to*

*Horeb, the mount of God.*

The scripture says that the angel served Elijah a cake baked on hot stones, and along with that a jar of water. And I just find amazing, I picture this mighty angel of God, he's kind of rooting around and finding a stone and kneading the bread and cooking up these coals to get this whole thing going and he's preparing this food for him, and he's preparing this food for somebody who has flat out rejected God's plan. So I ask, could this ever describe you? You know, have you ever done something exactly the opposite of what you know, you know in your heart God wants you to do? I mean, have you ever been caught up in something you know is displeasing to God and yet your love for that sin made you go for it instead of your relationship with God? And perhaps you're thinking like all we humans like to think, that God is just armed for bear, he's just waiting for that final straw to break the camel's back and then he's going to let you have it. Well, it sure seems to me that Elijah blew things very badly, that he blew things big time. Yet instead of seeing God's anger, what do we see we see? We see nothing but kindness and care and concern. *Romans 2:4* asks us: *Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

And that leads me to our third way of phrasing the question. "What are you *doing* here, Elijah?" This is his response in *1 Kings 19:10*: *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."* Well, you know, there's only three parties involved in Elijah's catastrophe: There's Elijah, there's Israel, and there's God. And judging by Elijah's answer, the problem is primarily Israel and to some lesser degree God's. Now, Elijah himself and his fear and his panic and his desertion, that doesn't even get mentioned.

Now, you have to pay particular attention to the narrative here because the question that God asks Elijah in this text, he's actually is going to ask him twice. Here's how it happens. Let me just give you a time line. Elijah runs from Jezreel all the way into the wilderness. He cries out to God that he wants to die and then he falls asleep under a broom tree. He's awoken by an angel, the angel has baked him a cake and provided him a jar of water, so he eats the cake and he drinks the water, then he promptly falls back asleep. After a while he's awoken by the same angel again. And the angel tells him he's got to eat again because he's got another long journey to go to and he has to go to Horeb. And on

the nourishment provided by this second meal, he journeys 150 to 200 miles to the cave at Horeb. Now some commentators suggest that this may be the actual cave that God hid Moses in when he revealed himself to him, because the angel refers to it not "a" cave but "the" cave. So Elijah undertakes this journey of 150 to 200 miles, and he arrives at the cave some forty days later and it's here at the cave that God asks him the question for the first time, 1 Kings, again, 19:9 says: *There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, 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."*

Now once again I need to put this in some kind of context here because Elijah is bitterly complaining about Israel. But even his complaint is mixed with so much misinformation you might wonder if it's Brian Williams who's doing the reporting here. I know that's a cheap shot, but I couldn't resist. He's answering God's question. God's question very simple: *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* But he answers it not by saying, "I feared, I panicked, I took off," that would have been painful but that would have been honest. Instead he speaks very highly of himself and very poorly

of the nation of Israel and, by implication, of God's sovereignty. He gives God his report of the incident on Mount Carmel, and he apparently saw something very different than what the scriptures reported. I mean, first of all, he said, "*And I, even I only, am left.*" And we know from our study of Elijah that the prophet Obadiah had kept a hundred prophets in a cave, and we knew that Elijah knew that fact as well. And again, his description of the collapse of Israel, it doesn't mirror the description that the scripture gives. This is what *1 Kings 18:38* says, it says -- this is describing the sacrifice that Elijah is complaining to God about. It says: *Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."* Well, there's no question and we understand that the revival that took place may have been very, very short lived, but the response of the people to the miracle that God did through Elijah was unequivocal: *And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."* That's not the answer that Elijah gives God. He says: *"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."* See, it wasn't the crowd who rejected God's miracle, it was Jezebel. And

she's the one who had the power to collapse Elijah's faith and she alone had that power because Elijah through his great fear gave it to her. And now here's Elijah once again miraculously fed by angels, miraculously spoken to by God himself, now bitterly complaining of how isolated and alone his faith is. I hate to say it but Elijah, you're really full of it. You're full of self-pity, you're full of bitterness, you're full of blame shifting, you're full of false narratives, you're full of yourself. But Elijah's really us. You see, had I been in his shoes, I guarantee, I probably would have made it worse, because this is who we are, and this is how we operate, even the very best of us, like Elijah. But this is who God is, and this is how he operates in dealing with his wayward servants. What does God do? God decides to give Elijah a front row seat on the only type of miracle that Elijah appears to believe in. Elijah gets to see the original earth, wind, and fire in *1 Kings 19:11*. It says: *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.*

You see, God is making a statement here. God is saying it doesn't matter, and in no uncertain terms it matters not how spectacular

the miracle was, if I am not in it, it is of no moment whatsoever. It really ultimately means nothing. I guarantee you, it was spectacular to see a mountain torn to pieces by a mighty wind, and the earthquake and fire were spectacular as well, I'm sure. But each one was accompanied by a statement by God that each of these signs was empty. The LORD was not in the wind, the LORD was not in the earthquake, the LORD was not in the fire. And after this ear-splitting, bone-jarring display, there is the profound sound, if you will, of absolute silence, and in that silence is the voice of God. It said: *And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.* You know, some translations say "a still small voice," some of them say "a gentle, little breeze," some say "a sound of thin silence" or "a light whisper." Considering every one of them, Elijah's response is astounding. He says this: *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."* But God asks Elijah the identical question a second time. What are you doing here? And Elijah basically says, "Hey, this is my story and I'm sticking to it." I mean his actual response is word for word identical to what



he said originally. God's great display of overwhelming power, might, and majesty without his spirit apparently hasn't changed Elijah's mind. Somehow the idea that God would speak in the silence remained lost on Elijah. My hope, my hope is that it's not lost on us. You see, God has much to say to us through this incident and it has much to do with a desire that every single one of us has to feel God, to sense God as real and as present as my wife, as my husband, as my best friend. But you know, Elijah had that. And God spoke to Elijah, God questioned Elijah, God intervened in his life, God miraculously moved in his life, he fed him through the ravens and then through the widow he miraculously empowered him even to raising up of the dead, and it still wasn't enough. When push came to shove, Elijah's faith just collapsed. See, it didn't matter that God had spoken to him or done mighty miracles through him. What mattered and what mattered to him and to us is that God was still there, and it is God who sustained him.

Translators have a very difficult time with this phrase that we understand is a still small voice. After God has taken Elijah through a series of spectacular miracles in which the spirit isn't there, he says -- he speaks to him in what the translators describe as "a still small voice." I'm sure every one of us has heard that phrase. It's become a catch phrase. Well, have you ever wondered what does that really mean? Intervarsity Press's Bible Background

Commentary has this to say about that phrase. It says this: "The "gentle whisper" (or still small voice) in verse 12 is not describing how the Lord speaks. It is descriptive of the resonating silence after all the clamor of destruction. It is with silence hanging in the air that Yahweh's voice of direction may be heard."

See, one of the dangers of thinking that God speaks to us in a still small voice is that it makes us think that God does speak to us in a barely audible way. And that fosters the idea that the key to communicating with God is learning how to hear heavenly whispers. For the vast majority of us, hearing has nothing to do with actually hearing anything audibly because normally God doesn't speak to us through words. I'm not ruling out that possibility and there's no question that God can use whatever means he chooses and whichever way he wants to communicate with us, and in some places in the world this may be the means that God uses all the time, but for the vast majority of us in North America, God will never speak to us audibly. Not even in a whisper. And I want to speak specifically to all those who think somehow or other that they're second class citizens because they've never heard the voice of God. I've mentioned many, many times before being absolutely bewildered as a brand new Christian by a hymn that the older folks in my church in California used to love to sing, and God bless them, and

the song is wonderful, the people loved it. I repeat the song again:

I come to the garden alone,  
while the dew is still on the roses,  
and the voice I hear, falling on my ear,  
the Son of God discloses.  
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
and He tells me I am His own.  
And the joy we share as we tarry there,  
none other has ever known.

I was a brand new Christian when I heard of that song, and it was even a few years down the road that I wondered what is wrong with me? I've never even remotely had that kind of an experience with God. If you've never had the experience of God walking and talking with you audibly and literally, understand something, nothing is wrong. You're no different than the vast majority of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Now can God speak to you audibly? Absolutely. God can do anything. It's just that in 40 years of living the Christian life, I've never met anyone who's ever had that experience, and I would have to say that I speak from experience as well. I mean, I wouldn't hesitate to say that God spoke to me that day in May of 1973 when I gave my life to Christ. I had such a vivid experiential sense of God's presence that night that I've often told people that I thought my head was either going

to explode or I was going to die. That's how powerfully God spoke to me. But there were no words. I mean, for want of a better way to express it, I would have to say that God pressed uniquely the impact and power of words right into my spirit without speaking a word. I tell people all the time at the time of my conversion, God said, "I am God, and I'm speaking to you right now." But all I can tell you is that those words never came through my ears. I simply felt them so powerfully in my spirit that, like I said, I thought I was going to die. And please don't think that I'm trying to get a leg up on everybody else because I can say God spoke to me. I genuinely believe that God saw me as far weaker than most and in far greater need of his intervention than someone who simply surrenders his life to Christ. And I did come away from that prayer meeting remembering that, yes, God did speak to me specifically I remember, and then I went back to recall what those words were, and I was amazed to remember that what I heard as the voice of God was in fact a person. It was in fact a complete stranger who spoke this scripture directly to me. The person simply approached me and said: "God wants you to know this," and then he quoted what I later found out to be Hebrews 13:5 which is: *I will never leave nor forsake you.* Those words were God's own words from scripture. I heard them directly but they weren't disembodied words. They came from another person's mouth.

So can God speak directly to me? Yes, he can. And does he? Yes, he does. He speaks to me through scripture all of the time. I can't tell you how many times I've sat in this very church just twisting in the wind over whether or not I've expressed something correctly or properly in my message or what I'm about to say and only to have Fred or somebody in the worship team or somebody praying use God's word to affirm very specifically something I might be agonizing about. So yes, God speaks very specifically to me. Does he speak audibly to me? Well, my answer would be I've never experienced it, nor do I know anyone who has ever experienced God speaking directly and audibly to them. Why? Well, 2 *Corinthians 5:7* says: *For we walk by faith, not by sight.* So ask yourself the question, if we walk by faith and not by sight, would it also follow that we walk by faith and not by sound? I mean, if I need the constant reassurance of an audible voice to make my faith work, then it hardly seems like faith to me. And another reason why God speaks that way so infrequently is because the enemy is so good pretending that he is that voice. You know, Katy Perry famously announced that she's no longer a Christian. But I don't know if you know it, she also recently announced that God spoke to her specifically and audibly before her Super Bowl performance. I would have thought God might have said something along the lines of "Katy, you are loved, Katy, we want you home, we want you back, I want you to know that there's things far more important than a

Super Bowl." But Katy instead said God told her specifically and audibly: "You got this and I got you." I'm sure Katy felt very encouraged and empowered by the words that she heard and then she went out to sing to a hundred million or so people that she kissed a girl and she liked it. I'm not disputing that Katy heard those words. I am questioning that those words were God's. See, God doesn't want us growing dependent on something that is so easily co-opted by the enemy. God wants a relationship with you that is not based on your ability to walk and talk with him audibly, and that seems to be what he's aiming at also with Elijah.

You know, God's answer to the first way of phrasing the question "What are you doing *here*, Elijah?" Elijah was running away. Fear had overwhelmed him and he was in fact deserting his post and yet God still ministered to his physical needs. And God's answer to the second way of phrasing his question, "*What* are you doing here, Elijah?" was that Elijah was now making excuses, blame shifting, and hinting that God's plan was a failure. And yet again, God ministered to his physical needs. And when God asked him the third way of asking, "What are you *doing* here, Elijah?" When he asked him that not once but twice, it seems to me like he was actively trying to wean him from a relationship far too dependent on miraculous intervention. You know, once before the earth, wind, and fire, and once again afterwards, God asked him the same

question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And twice Elijah gave the exact same response: *"I've been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown 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."* Judging by Elijah's response, he wasn't buying God's approach. Now, it may seem awfully discomfoting to leave Elijah in a place where God appears to be bending over backwards to teach him a lesson he doesn't want to learn, but it's a lesson he's trying to teach us as well. See, Elijah had more miraculous interaction with God than most of the saints in scripture, yet when catastrophe struck, that interaction meant nothing. And what I see God doing here is he's weaning Elijah off this dependency on miracles because spectacular miracles are attract to people who are attracted to spectacular miracles. You know, Moses knew all about that and so did Jesus. Moses did ten spectacular miracles in Egypt, and then he left for a forty-year stint in the desert where miracles were so commonplace as the breakfast that you had raining down from the sky. Those miracles saved nobody. I mean, out of the millions of Jews who undertook that journey, only two, Joshua and Caleb, had hearts that listened not to the spectacular signs but to the still small voice of God. Jesus experienced the exact same thing. The more spectacular the miracle, the more people came who were attracted to miracles and what they could do for them. In

*John 6:26* it says this, it says: *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."* Then they said to him, *"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"* Jesus answered them, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* See, the work of God is not to believe in miracles. Anybody can believe in a miracle. It's a belief that is a mile wide and a half inch deep. But the real miracle, the real work that only God can do is found not in miracles but in the still small voice. That voice is God, and hearing it is a gift. *Ephesians 2:8* says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* You know, Jesus, Jesus even sought to dialogue with these huge crowds that followed him around because of the miracles, but all they wanted was more and bigger miracles. Then Jesus offered himself, he offered himself as the most spectacular miracle there ever could be. You know, God himself would leave heaven itself and come to earth as a perfect man, he would live out the perfect life and then offer that life as payment for our sins. You don't get a bigger miracle than that. But by and large folks weren't interested. Again *John 6:30-37*: *So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What*



work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." See, what Jesus is saying is that the ability to hear that still small voice is the ultimate gift that God gives. It's the ultimate miracle, and he doesn't give it to everyone. Verse 37: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

So if you love the Lord Jesus Christ and you haven't yet audibly heard him, if you haven't been the recipient of one of those spectacular miracles, take heart, the still small voice of God is God, and the desire to know him and not just the miracle is God's greatest gift to you. God takes Elijah to the cave at Mount Horeb remember and he produces three spectacular miracles that were no doubt incredibly impressive, but the Lord wasn't in them, and it's

followed by the voice of God which silently asserted itself as the anti miracle in which God really dwells. And in the midst of his collapse, God is speaking to Elijah about what really matters, and this is God's ultimate ministry to Elijah's catastrophe. At this point in the story Elijah still doesn't quite seem to get it. In time he'll understand that in fact God was crushing Elijah. Again, back to our quote: "Because God (and only God) can 'deconstruct' the self so that life's priorities, focus, and passions are redirected to him alone, the true source of life." Paul put it this way in *Philippians 1:6*, he said: *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* So take heart until next week. God's still at work in us. Let's pray.

*Father God, we do thank you and praise you for Elijah, with all of his failures, with all of his shortcomings, Lord, he represents us. I thank you, Lord, how I see myself in Elijah. I see the blame shifting, I see the braggadocio, I see all of that, Lord, and yet what is amazing in all of this is how intent you are on serving Elijah, how intent you are in demonstrating your kindness and goodness to him. Lord, give us the ability to see in that kindness and goodness of God who speaks to us not through spectacular earth, wind, and fire miracles, but through the still small voice that may be no voice at all but simply his presence. And I pray this in*

*Jesus' name. Amen.*