

What Doest Thou Here?"

~Other Speakers G-L: Vance Havner:

Elijah had come out of a big day on Carmel. He had prayed down fire and water and had become the outstanding man of his generation. It was a red-letter day for the prophet. But the next day after a big day may be a very bad day. From His baptism our Lord moved into His temptation. In the same chapter that tells us of Paul's third heaven experience we read of his thorn in the flesh. So we move rapidly from height to depth and must needs watch the next day after our Carmels.

Jezebel had threatened Elijah, his nerves had gone into a tailspin, and under the juniper he imagined himself to be the surviving saint, the last good man. There are three great chapters in the life of this prophet and they might well be titled, Cherith, Carmel, and the Cave. In the cave the Lord asks him, "What doest thou here?"

Not a few of the saints are in a cave today and we would inquire of them, "What doest thou here?" For one thing, ELIJAH WAS TIRED, and so are many of God's people. God did not reprove Elijah. He fed him, rested him, and said, "The journey is too great for thee." It is too much for most of us these days. Never have I preached to so many tired people as now. The human race lives in a nervous breakdown. It is a day of stress, strain and tension, and our very speech is the speech of weariness, the language of languor. We are weary and faint in our minds. Fatigue is filling hospitals, asylums, graves. Men cannot drink it away with whiskey nor play it away at card tables nor laugh it off in a theatre nor sleep it away with sedatives. Our remedies treat only the symptoms and not the disease.

A lady who was asked why she didn't sue for damages after being hurt in an auto wreck replied, "I have enough damages, what I need is repairs." She was stating our case today. What we need is repairs. The journey is too great even for us Christians. Sometimes I have thought I would like to start a Bible conference for Bible conference speakers. The theme verse would be, "First here, then there Â— you flit from one ally to another asking for help." (Jeremiah 2:36).

The prophet speaks to edification, exhortation, and comfort. He strengthens, stirs, soothes, and the saints need all three. We are to grow in grace, and growth involves food, rest, and exercise. Some feed all the time and need to exercise and work off some of the sermons with which they have stuffed themselves. But others exercise too much and need rest. The Christian life is not a glorified St. Vitus's dance. We are to be willing disciples, not whirling dervishes. Elijah ate and slept. When we cannot do that we are not worth much to God or man.

The Bible has as much to say about resting as about working. We need to come apart and rest awhile, and if we don't come apart, we will come apart, we'll go to pieces! It is true that the devil never takes a vacation, but we are not to follow the devil but the Lord. Jesus was never in a hurry, and we need to learn the gait of the Man of Galilee. John Wesley said, "I do not have time to be in a hurry." Some of the saints tear around until you would think the world would go to pieces if they stopped. But soon they end in a hospital, they blow out a fuse. They go up like rockets and down like rocks. They would do more if they did less. Quantity production is an American standard, not a Bible standard.

Our Lord asked, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" There is always time enough to do what God wants done. What takes so much time is doing what we want to do. "He that believes shall not make haste." The slow hand on the watch is the most important hand. Too many, like Ahimaaz, want to run before they have any tidings ready, and when they arrive they can report only a tumult. About all the average go-getter ever gets is high blood pressure and a heart attack. Idleness is the devil's workshop, but so is busy-ness if one tries too much.

Elijah was tired and so are we and we shall honor God by resting. We are not to say there are four months until harvest for now is God's time, but there are twelve hours in the day, there is time enough in God's time to do His will. And part of His will is to rest. "He who waits on God loses no time."

Elijah was also DISCOURAGED and PESSIMISTIC. He thought he was the last good man, and needed to learn that God had seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. When we are too tired we easily grow despondent and imagine that everybody is out of step except ourselves. It is true that few there be who find the way of life, but they are not so few as we sometimes think. We sometimes undertake to sift out the saints ourselves and consign to perdition all who do not cross their "t's" and dot their "i's" as we do. These seven thousand were probably silent believers, who shouldn't have been so hidden that nobody knew they were in existence. They should have stood with Elijah in such an evil day. But, still, they were known to God, if not to Elijah, and we

need to remember that the Lord knows those who are His. He will deal with them for being cowards and not letting their light shine, but we do not need to get down in the dumps and put a bushel over our own testimony on their account.

There are more good people than we sometimes think. It was two rather indefinite disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who buried Jesus after some more positive believers had forsaken Him and fled. After all, it is not for us to number the Lord's people.

Furthermore, ELIJAH WAS SUFFERING A REACTION FROM A BIG AND NOISY DAY ON CARMEL. Here we run into a very important issue these days. The prophet's nerves had let down, and the threat of Jezebel finished the blow. From Carmel to a cave was quite a change, but he needed to hear the still, small voice. We Americans need to hear it. We are sold on noise and size, even in our churches, and this voice turns the tables on both standards, for it is STILL and SMALL.

We are sold on NOISE but this is a STILL voice. "He shall not cry nor lift up nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." His Spirit is compared with a dove. The greatest things make the least noise. The sun draws millions of gallons of water with less noise than we make getting a bucketful out of a well. Did you ever hear the planets go round or the sun rise or the dew fall? We do not hear God's whisper because we are listening for wind, fire, and earthquake. We should "study to be quiet." We cannot endure solitude because we are in such poor company when we are alone! We cannot contemplate. Watch the average tourist galloping through an art gallery! It is the quiet pool and not the rushing stream that reflects the stars. "He leads me beside the STILL waters."

Said Newton D. Baker:

"The effect of modern inventions has been to immeasurably increase the difficulty of deliberation and contemplation on large and important issues. I doubt whether there could have been a Constitution of the United States of America if the deliberations of the Constitutional Conventions had been currently reported by radio, telegraph and newspapers over the whole extent of the thirteen colonies."

This noise standard shows up in our churches. Some of us think we are not having a good meeting unless there is a lot of hullabaloo. Oh, I know that what some call worship is just the device by which some resters at ease in Zion catch up with their sleep. And what some call reverence and dignity is just spiritual rigor mortis, the Sunday coma of religious dopesters getting their eleven o'clock dose of pulpit cocaine. But the counterfeit implies the true, and most of us are so feverish and nervous that we cannot hear God's whisper. "Be still and know that I am God." The Lord commanded the multitude to sit down before He fed them.

Then we are sold on size, and this voice of God is SMALL. Some think we must have a thousand people to have a revival. We worship the great god Ballyhoo and borrow our methods from the business and amusement and social worlds, trying to put over God's work by might and power instead of by His Spirit.

We need to study afresh David's unhappy experience in bringing the ark back to Jerusalem. He proposed the move to his captains and leaders, and "the thing was right in the eyes of the people," but we do not read that God was consulted. They put on a show, they had a crowd and a brass band and quite a demonstration, but it was a Philistine expedient and not God's way, and He brought it to nought. Today we make shows of some of our church conventions. We hire the biggest hall and get the governor to speak and try to impress the world by borrowing its tactics, but we only cheapen our cause and make ourselves ridiculous. God is not fooled by barnstorming claptrap. David would have got the Ark to Jerusalem sooner if he hadn't been in such a hurry that he couldn't use God's method. We delay God's purposes by our expedients.

The Spirit blows where He will, and God is not bound to grand ideas. The great Welsh revival was accomplished without preaching, without choirs, without hymn books, without organs, without publicity, and without offerings. These things are not evil, but God can do wonders without what we think He must have.

God does indeed speak in wind and fire and earthquake, through great movements and famed leaders. But they are more or less occasional, and He probably does His greatest work in quiet places and through humble lives. Many an Elijah who has learned the lesson of Cherith and Carmel still needs to learn the lesson of the Cave. God does appear in the extraordinary. He does feed by ravens and send down fire from heaven. But sometimes He must shut up His servants in a cave to make them hear the still small voice.

We think of revival today in terms of great crowds and famous preachers. We would like to see the fire fall in a

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thundering demonstration of the power of God to vindicate His cause and put the hosts of sin to flight. But let us not be blind to the quiet movement of the Spirit in thousands whose work of faith and labor of love God will not forget. Blessed is the man who does not measure by noise and size. "In returning and rest shall you be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Not only was Elijah tired and pessimistic and over-affected by noise and size. He was derelict in his duty. He had no business under the juniper. He needed to get back on the job. In God's permissive will He took mercy on the prophet and taught him a lesson, but Elijah should not have run from the threat of Jezebel. A man is first a runaway before he is a castaway.

"What doest thou here?" Are you under a juniper? Is the journey too great for you, and are you exhausted, tired on the way, though not tired of the way? Have you grown pessimistic until you imagine yourself the surviving saint? Have you been living on excitement, big days, and big demonstrations, fire and wind and earthquake, until you cannot hear God whisper? Has the threat of Jezebel driven you to the wilderness? Wait on the Lord and renew your strength! As important as it is to be saved and sure and sound and strong, don't forget how much it means to be still!