

“What Are You Doing Here?”

1 Kings 19:9-18

6/5/22 Epicenter/BAC

Rev. Brian T. Smeal; pastorsmeal@gmail.com

All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

The prophet Elijah lived a very interesting and exciting life. One has to wonder if he felt it was as exciting to him, from the inside, as it appears to us, from the outside. He had warned the king, been threatened by the queen, and seemingly had very noteworthy interactions with just about everyone he came in contact with. Elijah had, at the command of God, retreated to the Kerith Ravine, where he drank water from a brook and was delivered food by ~~Grub-Hub~~ . . . er . . . I mean, by ravens. From there, God directed him to Zarephath, where he met a widow who was facing one final meal for her and her son before they surrendered to death. But through the prophet Elijah, God provided enough flour and oil for the three of them to eat for a lengthy period of time. When her son died, Elijah boldly called on the Lord to restore the boy's life, which God graciously did. After that, Elijah went to Mount Carmel, where he stood up to 450 prophets of the false god Baal, and possibly hundreds more prophets of the false goddess Asherah. Elijah called upon God, who sent fire from heaven, demonstrating to all who witnessed it that He is indeed the one true God. Shortly after that, however, Elijah fled for his life from the town of Jezreel and found himself under a broom tree (1 Kings 19:1-8), where he begged God to take away his life. Instead, in His gracious mercy, God sent an angel to bring Elijah sustenance and encouragement. After a brief period of rest, Elijah traversed to Mount Horeb, where we find him today.

Why would Elijah travel by foot all the way to Mount Horeb? This is widely considered to be the same as Mount Sinai, which is where Moses encountered God in the burning bush, and the very same mountain on which God gave the 10 commandments to the Israelite people through the hand of Moses. Perhaps it was Elijah's fear, anger, and loneliness that brought him to a cave on Mount Horeb, or maybe he was trying to recapture whatever it was that he thought Moses had captured. Either way, God has a simple question for him; “What are you doing here?” Elijah was, simply put, the right man in the wrong place. There were things God had for Elijah to do, and they were not going to get done while he was in that cave.

Today, maybe you find yourself in a cave of sorts; you've been hiding from challenges to your faith, running from threats to your peace of mind, or looking for God in all the wrong places. If so, maybe there are some lessons you can learn from the example of Elijah. Examining 1 Kings 19:9-18, we see that the first such lesson is to *live in the moment, not in the memory*. Think back to a time when God showed up in a big way in your life, or in someone else's life. Do you know that God is not limited by those places or those experiences? It is okay and even wise to remember what God has done, and to celebrate those things, but remember that the ways and places that God works today is not limited by the ways or the places that He has worked in the past.

God asks Elijah what he is doing in that cave. Maybe the same question applies to you today; what are you doing? No matter where you are, *your primary business is to obey and glorify God*. It's hard to do that when you're holed up in a cave. The writer of Ecclesiastes is often believed

to be Solomon, the wisest man to ever live. In Ecclesiastes 12:13, he writes, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Whether you’re in a cave or on a mountaintop, under a tree or at a ravine, if you are not obeying and glorifying God, then you are, put simply, not doing there what you should be. Don’t seek to recreate the memory of a moment in which God moved in your life in the past; seek a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit over your life right here, and right now, in THIS moment.

A second thing you can learn from Elijah’s example is to *love the master, not the mountaintop*. In Exodus 19:16-20, we see that Moses experienced the presence of God in the midst of powerful expressions of an earthquake and fire and the sound of a mighty trumpet blast. Does that sound familiar? In 1 Kings 19:11-13, while Elijah is in a cave, God sends a mighty wind, a powerful earthquake, and a fierce fire; but God was not present in those things this time. But then came a low and gentle whisper, and something about it told Elijah that God was there.

“Mountaintop experiences” are those moments where God shows up in mighty and powerful ways. It can be at a concert, in a conference/rally/retreat, during a church meeting, along a wooded trail, or any number of ways. When you’ve had a mountaintop experience, you know it; you remember it; you sometimes long for it again. But it is not those mountaintop experiences that make the Christian life great. You cannot just try to jump from one mountaintop experience to the next, because doing so robs you of a strength that can only be found in the climb and robs you of a stability that can only be found in descending the slopes in between those mountaintop experiences.

Trying to stay at the mountaintop emphasizes feeling over foundation. The deeper life with Christ is not an emotional experience, though emotions can be a significant part of it. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to draw closer and go deeper in your relationship with Him. God can certainly meet you at the mountaintop, but He can also walk with you through the valleys (Psalm 23:4.) Seek out the spiritual joy of God’s presence and the strengthening of your relationship with and commitment to Him rather than the emotional “high” of a previous experience you’ve had with Him.

It’s nearly time for us to leave the cave, but before we do, there is still time for another lesson; namely, *look to the mission, not the miracle*. Elijah was in a cave. Twice, God asked him what he was doing there and twice, Elijah said the same thing; essentially, that he had done everything right, everyone else was doing everything wrong, and that he felt all alone and that everyone was after him. But between those two conversations, God provided a powerful demonstration of His power through wind, earthquake and fire, and then revealed His presence in the low whisper; the still, small voice. Think back to the broom tree, where God did not criticize Elijah for being there. Instead, God gave Elijah rest and the opportunity to recharge. Now at Horeb, God gives a demonstration of power and asks Elijah why is there. Was he running? Hiding? Trying to recreate a miracle or manufacture a “God-moment?” God says of all the mighty things He’s done in the past, He can do them again in the present. But He is up to something different right now. God has a plan, and Elijah was going to be part of it. So instead of patronizing or justifying Elijah’s presence in the cave, God sets him back on mission. The same is true today. God understands your pain, your anger, your confusion, your fears. But *God’s got a plan, and you’ve got a part in it*. God is always working behind the scenes; He never loses

track of His children (cf. Jeremiah 29:11, Exodus 33:14, Psalm 139:7-10.) God remains faithful, despite the fears and failures of His people, and as such, the gates of hell will never prevail against the church – the world-wide assembly of Christ followers.

Are you in a cave today? What are you doing there? Your cave might have walls made up of work, family, commitments, hobbies, recreation, busyness. Or maybe you're in a cave whose walls are less obvious; walls made up of fears, insecurities, indecision, self-pity, doubt, grief, or guilt. If so, the question that God asked Elijah is applicable to you today; what are you doing here? Not, 'how did you get here?' or, 'whose fault is it?' But rather, 'What are you doing here?' Are you obeying and glorifying God where you are? Are you sure you're in the right place at all? If you feel like God is out of reach, maybe you just need to take time to be still and listen. God is still speaking, still moving, still working, and He invites you to join in His great work today.

Elijah didn't stay in the cave for long. He quickly learned that God was not a prisoner of His own past, and Elijah wasn't either. Likewise, for you today, you are not a prisoner of who you've been or what you've done. God calls out to you today, deep in whatever cave you've chosen, inviting you to come and experience His presence anew. Live in the moment, love the master, and look to the mission and soon you will find that the cave is nothing but a distant memory.

Takeaways from this message.

What to do when you're in a cave

Live in the MOMENT, not in the MEMORY

- ✓ **Your primary business is to OBEY and GLORIFY God.**

Love the MASTER, not the MOUNTAINTOP

- ✓ **Trying to stay at the mountaintop emphasizes FEELING over FOUNDATION.**

Look to the MISSION, not the MIRACLE

- ✓ **God has got a PLAN, and you've got a PART in it.**

“Sometimes the Lord calms the storm around us. Sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child.”

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?
2. *God asks the same question twice, and Elijah gives the same answer twice. What do you suppose was different the second time? Does the passage make that clear?*
3. *What pants does a spelunker wear?*
4. *Who do you know who may be battling through a season of discouragement or despair? List 4 things you could do to help them in practical ways.*
5. *Now, which of those 4 practical helps will you do for that person this week?*
6. *Why do you suppose the Lord was not in the wind, earthquake or fire, but was in the low whisper instead? What does this teach you?*
7. *Is cereal soup? Explain.*
8. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**