

***And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:12)***

When we study the scriptures and look at the lives of those who are chronicled there, it should always be with an eye toward what we can apply to our own lives, learning what is and is not acceptable in the eyes of God to do, to say, how to worship Him, etc. One of the great things about the Bible is that the blemishes of those who are considered God's greatest servants are not hidden from view. Read any biography written by men or any history book and you can pretty quickly tell what angle the author is coming from. The divinely inspired Word of God is left to us as a tool of instruction and doesn't carry those trappings with it. So we are afforded terrific learning opportunities by studying these individuals' lives in their entirety.

Today we will look at one of those servants of God in some detail and examine what we can learn about our own lives and how we might improve upon our service to our King through that study. It is vitally important when we turn to the individuals we find in Scripture that we look at them faithfully and don't turn them in to some sort of hero we are worshiping. Remember, the word hero appears nowhere in Scripture, and we should be careful with our analysis of their lives for two reasons.

First, as I said, we mustn't elevate these souls to some level of importance or a view of them that causes us to worship them. We see how the Catholic church has deceived nearly the whole realm of Christianity with their talk of "sainthood", the ultimate display of which is their literal praying to Mary. As an example, look at your Bible and see how the first four books of the New Testament are titled. In many, though not all, they will be titled "The Gospel According to Saint Matthew" or "Saint Matthew the Divine". This is an artifact of Catholic influence, where they name people to be Saints, as though they have some power to elevate a human's station with God. We mustn't exalt these individuals above the station of fellow laborer and pilgrim either in our words or in our hearts.

*"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:"* (Exodus 34:14).

Second, we must also take care that we do not disparage those who have gone before us and whose sins are there for us to learn from. We cannot look at them and deride them or believe we are somehow better because we have not committed adultery as David or been caught up in drunkenness as Noah, or any other sin of one of those in Scripture who serve as examples for us. Our hearts are just as dark as any other man's, and we do well to always remember that.

So we must find balance when we examine the lives of those recorded in Scripture and seek the Lord for wisdom and search for lessons and meaning in the details.

I talked recently about the absolutely wonderful example Elijah is for us in regard to prayer. His entire life is unquestionably full of lessons and examples for us, and I highly recommend him as a subject of study. His life is fascinating from the way he suddenly bursts onto the scene in an Israel desperately in need of solid preaching, to his utterly remarkable and unique departure from the earth.

Many sermons could be written about the chapters we find him in, but I wish to narrow down the scope of our review today to his journey to Horeb.

We begin our examination at a transition point for Elijah. He goes from this

*“And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”* (1 Kings 18:46)

To this

*“And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth 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 juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.”* (1 Kings 19:3-4)

What has him going from running at top speed before Ahab's chariot to running for his life?

It was of course this

*“Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.”* (1 Kings 19:2)

Wow. What a change of attitude. Elijah takes on the entirety of Baal's false religious system to the tune of slaying 450 false prophets, runs half a marathon or so in front of Ahab's chariot, showing him great honor in so doing, and then flees at a threat from Jezebel. This is an amazing piece of work here.

Before we dig into the running away part, let's look briefly at the running with Ahab part. There is a key lesson here for us. Elijah wasn't just running to run, he was doing a great honor to Ahab. Kings frequently had runners going ahead of their chariots announcing their arrival, like the way criers go before a king when they walk through a city yelling 'make way for the king'. Elijah demonstrated the righteousness of his cause with this behavior toward Ahab. He demonstrated clearly that he bore no personal vendetta, no grudge against Ahab personally. He showed to all Israel in a very public way that he served the anointed king of Israel. His preaching had nothing to do with

any personal animosity against Ahab, and by subjecting himself to this servitude in sight of everyone, he drives home that point. This is a thing we can learn from Elijah. Even when we are preaching against the leaders of this generation it is not and cannot be a personal attack. It is one thing to preach against the sins of a leader, and to use them as an example of how not to live. It is another thing entirely not to subject ourselves to their rule and render to each their due, as Paul tells us

*“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”* (Romans 13:7)

One of the greatest preachers of any generation is engaged in spiritual warfare against one of the most evil rulers of any generation, and he teaches us this lesson in spades. Don't underestimate the importance of what Elijah is doing here. It wasn't a light thing, and the fact that the Lord put His hand onto Elijah to give him the energy and speed to physically do this should be ample evidence of the importance of it.

We know the evil of this generation we are engaged in spiritual warfare against, and it is great. That warfare doesn't give us license to misuse people, even evil leaders.

Elijah has run roughly 17 miles from Mount Carmel to Jezreel with Ahab and his retinue, and already another blessing is bestowed upon him. He has been in Ahab's hands for all this time without Ahab taking advantage of that fact and doing anything to him. The Lord keeps him safe from the man who had declared him an enemy of the state

*“And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”* (1 Kings 18:17)

This is no less a miracle to behold than that of seeing Daniel cast into the lion's den and the mouths of the lions kept shut. By no human standard should Elijah have survived this event. No human king in their right mind would have allowed their self-avowed worst enemy and a declared enemy of the state to come into their grasp and not deal with them. But here we have it. He not only didn't harm Elijah, he allowed him to lead him back home to Jezreel. When we consider this we should clearly see that this is a fulfillment of God's promise that when we do His bidding, He will keep us. When we are engaged in the service of our King, He makes the seemingly impossible and illogical to happen. This of course requires us to operate by faith, which is to the carnal mind completely illogical and makes no sense. Elijah went in the faith that God would keep him as he had at the brook, with the widow, and at Carmel.

Elijah displays repeated and dramatic shows of seemingly unmovable faith. And yet, something happened that shook this man of God's amazing faith. We aren't told precisely what about Jezebel's threat shook him so severely, but shaken he was. And there is another lesson for us. When we think we are abounding in faith and nothing

can stop us, it is simple to let our pride lift us up or for the Lord to use the opportunity to exercise and test our faith further, to help us in growing it.

*“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”* (1 Corinthians 10:12)

I do not share the opinion of many of the expositors that this is a great failing of Elijah as much as it is a testing of his faith. Don't get me wrong, Elijah should not have feared, he should not have waivered in his belief that God would continue to keep him safe. The Lord did not abandon Elijah, but he has withdrawn somewhat, testing him to strengthen his faith even further. The servants of God are tried by fire to strengthen them and cause them to draw closer to God, and we can learn from Elijah's response to this trial.

It is a curious course of events here. Ahab has access and ability to destroy Elijah, but doesn't. I think it's relatively simple to see why. Ahab is fundamentally a coward, like most of those who seek to oppress God's people. He follows the same course of action here as he does with Naboth's vineyard.

*“And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”* (1 Kings 21:7)

*“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.”* (1 Kings 19:1)

What we see here is that Ahab wasn't the one really in charge. Jezebel's threats carried weight, Ahab's were just hot air. That doesn't excuse Elijah, but it does certainly explain the wildly different reactions Elijah had from Ahab's threats to Jezebel's.

Notice the ways of the wicked, too.

Ahab told Jezebel all that *Elijah* had done, not that the God of his fathers had honored the sacrifice made on Mt. Carmel. Not that Elijah had prayed to God for the rain to return and it returned. Not that all Israel had seen a great miracle of God that day and they should humble themselves before His mighty hand. No, he went home and pushed Jezebel's buttons – her precious false religion. He told her about the death of her so-called prophets at the hand of Elijah, which of course enraged her. And the rage turned on Elijah was so fierce that this man of courage who had faced down the King, 450 prophets of Baal, and indeed an entire nation mad upon their idols, was caused to flee by the threats of a single woman.

And there is the lesson for us. Our courage is not of us. Its source is singular, and if it isn't flowing from the throne of God to infuse us, we have none. For whatever reason, whether you want to argue that the Lord left Elijah to test him or to bring low his pride, it is clear that the supernatural infusion of courage dried up the same way the brook Cherith did. Left to himself, he suffers from the same weakness of any Man. Which takes me back to one of my original points – there are no heroes in Scripture. There is nothing spectacular about this man Elijah that does not flow directly from the hand of God Himself. When we think we are doing good work, spreading this warning to the masses and making great parodies or Vines or fliers or web sites or signs or blogs or sermons or whatever we are putting our hands to, remember Elijah here, and remember it well. When you start to see yourself as a great and zealous follower of God in the darkest days of humanity, remember here the zeal of Elijah and how it disappeared in an instant. There is nothing right or good we do except directly by the hand of God. None of this makes Elijah weak, or a terrible backslider or anything other than vanity like the rest of us.

*“Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: **verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.** Selah.” (Psalm 39:5)*

On Jezebel's threat, Elijah flees to Beersheba, leaving his servant there, and continues another day's journey into the wilderness. He left without direction from the Lord, which was a dramatic departure from his other missions.

*“**So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD:** for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.” (1 Kings 17:5)*

*“**And the word of the LORD came unto him,** saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” (1 Kings 17:8-9)*

*“And it came to pass after many days, that **the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year,** saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.” (1 Kings 18:1)*

Here again is a stark lesson for us. When we do not seek the Lord, and we walk in our own way according to our own wisdom, the wilderness is the only place for us to go. The wilderness is a desert place where there is no natural comfort and only the harsh barren emptiness. There is no raven to feed us, no supernaturally supplied barrel of meal. When we begin a journey away from God and out on our own path, we can expect nothing less than to get to a place where we will abandon even that thing that was previously our defining characteristic – our service to our king.

Look at the slough of despond Elijah finds himself mired in

*“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” (1 Kings 19:4)*

Here we have Elijah, who fled from Jezebel when she threatened his life, now seeking to have his life taken. That inconsistency is the result of departing from the plumb line! When we depart from the ways our feet have been placed in by our God we become erratic, inconsistent and desperate. The ways of men are fleeting and vain, and here is the outcome – disobedience. Elijah’s time has not come, his mission is not complete, but he seeks to leave his post without authorization. He declares “it is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life”. He declares the time and the completion of his life and his mission, which is of course, not his call to make. While not as strident a declaration of disobedience as Jonah’s, it is disobedience regardless, and disobedience is a thing we must guard against. If a man as faithful as Elijah can fall into that trap when the Lord removes His merciful hand from keeping him, who are we to think we are better and that we could not fall into that same slough?

Here though, is the greatest comfort of comforts. Even in a self-made slough of despond, God does not abandon His people. Elijah has made demands he has no place or right to make, but He remembers *“us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth forever”* (Psalm 136:23).

Look at the merciful God we serve:

*“And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.” (1 Kings 19:5-7)*

In his despondence and lapse of faith, Elijah is still cared for and fed in his wilderness wanderings. The mercy of the Lord is infinite and endures forever for His children and He does not leave them to their own devices or weaknesses indefinitely. He sends one messenger to revive another. Elijah has placed himself in a position where he cannot provide for himself, there are no resources to be had and no way to acquire them except directly from the Lord Himself. He is truly in a wilderness devoid and destitute of hope and provision, and Elijah arrived there through his own self-willed behavior. Where Elijah is faithless, God is, as always, faithful. He has provided for Elijah a renewal of His grace and a way out of the pit Elijah has dug for himself. While He doesn’t fully free him from the burden he carries, He does provide sustenance and

refreshment through a great miracle and provision. That provision allows Elijah to travel 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb:

*“And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”* (1 Kings 19:8)

Consider the miracle of this experience, especially in its context. This is a man who was fed by ravens and drank from the brook Cherith when drought ravaged the land. He saw a barrel of meal not expire during famine. He saw the dead rise. But here is an even greater miracle, a meal provided directly from the throne of God. A meal delivered to this man by a creature who until that moment had stood directly in the presence of God. What an example to set for us to see and follow, the condescension of this being to serve yet another rebellious human. How amazing and merciful is our God who even when His children are in the throes of rebellion, He deals gently with us and provides for our every need, dispatching even His more perfect and excellent creatures to serve His adoptive children. Who then should **we** not condescend to serve?

Elijah had more to learn, and the Lord is preparing the way for him to learn it by strengthening him here. He tells him “the journey is too great for thee” – a journey upon which he was not sent, but which a merciful God still provides for him to take. Elijah had in his heart and mind a plan to go to Horeb, that place of close communion with God. It was a selfish, thoughtless journey to undertake, full of pride and a dereliction of duty. But behold the mercy of our God, who provisions His servant so he may undertake this journey upon which he was not sent. He allows the journey to be taken as a learning opportunity. Elijah serves here as an example to us that the journey is **always** too great for us. The journey of everyday life is too great if we are not sustained, refreshed and nourished by our God. But even when those journeys are taken in fear, rebellion and disregard for the path we are set upon, he will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. His mercy endureth forever and all He does He does for the good of His people. Even when He seems far away, and we do not know where He is, He finds us in our wilderness and when our journeys are too long and too hard for us.

The Lord brings Elijah to his destination, Mount Horeb, in bodily strength. When we go in our own strength we quickly learn that it is only weakness. When our God strengthens us, we go great distances and accomplish seemingly impossible things, like travelling across the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights on the strength of those two meals. Elijah allowed his zeal to be poisoned by his fear of Jezebel, and so he stopped looking to God for his direction. Without direction he set out for Horeb, thinking that in his zeal he could go to the Mountain of God to be the sole worshipper of the Lord. He believes that in that place where Moses communed with Him he will commune with Him.

He arrives at Horeb without expressing any thanks to God for his deliverance or yet asking what the Lord would have him to do, and still the Lord does not leave him. He arrives at his destination and is provided shelter to lodge within and find rest. But he finds something more important than rest for his body

*“And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9)*

Here in this place, far from home and mission, he comes back into communion with God. The use of the word “behold” here is significant. Behold – even though Elijah has deserted his post, even though he is overtaken with fear, even though he has been thankless for the great deliverance in the wilderness – behold, the word of the LORD comes to him. Even though it comes with a gentle rebuke in it, re-establishing that connection and the communion with God is the greatest mercy Elijah has yet been shown. To be without God is a darkness deeper than any night, and Elijah has been in a wilderness not just of body but of soul. And he has not yet come out of it.

*“What doest thou here, Elijah?”*

Listen to this simple, gentle question to the wayward servant from his master. The mercy contained in it is overwhelming. There is no wrath, no destruction in it, only the chastisement of a father to a son. Why are you here? You weren’t directed to this place. There is no one here at Horeb for you to bring to my cause! How could you possibly follow my commandments here? Ahab, whom I told you to stand before, is strangely absent from this place! Such a reminder to his purpose and mission – “shew thyself unto Ahab”.

And what an answer Elijah gives!

*“And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:10)*

I say an answer, but an answer it absolutely was not! God Almighty asks Elijah a very simple question – **what** are **you** doing **here** and gets a grand justification for not being where he is supposed to be. The Lord didn’t ask “why aren’t you in front of Ahab preaching to him”. He asked what are you doing in this place? Elijah answers a lot of other questions instead, that frankly have no bearing on the question he has been asked. He continues in his weakness of faith though he has been made strong in body by God. He clearly believes he has a righteous cause and is fully justified in being at Horeb rather than in front of Ahab.

There are a few ways to look at this answer, but none of them can get past the fundamental point that Elijah isn't where he's supposed to be.

You can see this answer as a cry of exasperation – Elijah believes he has done the job given him and he failed – “I, even I only, am left”. It's as if he's arguing “I went where you told me to go, I confronted Ahab about his sins and stood on Mt. Carmel to prove that you are the only God, Lord, and instead of all Israel rising up and dethroning Ahab and Jezebel, they stand by while Jezebel seeks my life!!! They all admitted that you are the God, but not a single one stands with me now. All is lost, so I came here alone since I'm your only worshipper at this point.” Contrast what Elijah has done here to the way Jonah behaved.

*“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”*  
(Jonah 1:3)

Jonah goes the opposite direction of where he's told to go, fleeing “from the presence of the LORD”, openly defying a direct order. Elijah on the other hand, flees for his life and goes to the one remaining place he thinks God might be found. He can't go to Jerusalem because of Jehoshaphat's affinity to Ahab. He figures the assignment is done and if they're going to kill him, he might as well go worship God in His mountain.

You can make the argument that he's disputing with God and throwing back in His face the promises He has made, and in Elijah's mind not kept. It's pretty audacious what he does here, when he says he has been “very jealous for the LORD God of hosts”. He brazenly uses one of the Lord's names to describe himself!

*“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:”* (Exodus 34:14)

Elijah didn't use that word by mistake. He's throwing down his self-righteousness at the feet of God and daring Him to say he wasn't jealous for him.

This is another of the key lessons from this episode. Until we are relieved from duty, we are to remain on duty. Elijah makes an egregious error that is very easy for us to make. He lets his hubris take control. He thinks that he is so critical to the workings of the Lord that he sees the whole picture. He assumes he is the only one standing for the Truth in the earth and lets that assumption drive his anger, his sense of injustice, his feelings of failure, his fear of his enemies, and his loss of faith. We must be careful in our view of the world and our place in it. Let's face it, in a world of 7 billion people, there are a lot of things going on and we don't have visibility to everything. We should learn this lesson and take heed to our attitudes. We don't know where there are others that fear God, and just about the time we start thinking we're all alone and stand as the

exemplar of worshiping God in the earth, we run the risk of letting that hubris ruin us. Do we know there are others? No, obviously not, but we don't know that there aren't, and so we ought not throw it in God's face that we are alone and He ought to be treating us better the way Elijah does here. Be satisfied to do our job and do it well, and let the end of things work themselves out according to God's providence.

Elijah throws down his *bona fides* that he has been jealous for God, and that he's the only one, except for, well, maybe those prophets that got slain. Of course in his bout of self-righteous resume recitation, he forgets entirely about little old Obadiah who was right in the presence of the king every day, and just happened to tuck a few prophets around the country in some caves. Oh, yeah, and presumably his servant. You've got to think if that little guy was willing to truck around with Elijah all over the place he was likely worshiping with him. So yeah, umm, "I'm the only one", err maybe not so much. This attitude is of course very insulting and offensive to those who are also following God. Another reason to be careful what we think and how we speak to God on these matters, both as individuals and as a body.

And here is another lesson to learn from this speech. Just about the time you think you've been doing great and wonderful works, writing wonderful beautiful words of truth, and generally think you're a beacon of Godliness, check yourself. Look at what Elijah is laying claim to here. He has been jealous for God, but what has he done? Oh, he gets credited with a lot. He prayed that it wouldn't rain, he raised the dead, he brought about the miracle of the endless meal barrel, he prayed for the return of the rain, slew 450 prophets of Baal, and ran before Ahab's chariot! What an amazing man!

WRONG!

Not a single thing he did in his tenure could he have done by his own power. All he accomplished God did **through** Elijah, not the other way around. Bear in mind these aren't just some mindless, heat of passion words! He's had plenty of time to cool off from the immediate danger he was in and the fear that struck through his heart. He walked through the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. He is here disputing with God Almighty, and he knows with whom he is talking! He is speaking from the depths of his heart about what he thinks of this situation, and he seriously views himself as justified in this view. He thinks his works are good and his own. He is enamored with the works of his own hands! That, friends and neighbors is an exceedingly dangerous place to be. We must be ever vigilant against this. If you don't view the work we do and the words we speak in any way other than that they come from the throne of God, you are going to get sucked into the vortex of pride. Plain and simple.

I don't blame Elijah or look badly upon him for this outbreak of hubris. It is simple to see how he got to this place, and to see the danger of it. Look at his life. He's largely been alone with his own prayers and occasional interaction with the Lord. He's wandered largely alone and without joyful communion with any of God's people for

years now. Though he has been in communion directly with God, it has been infrequent. He has developed an over-inflated sense of self-worth and not kept under his flesh. We all have the same risk as individuals, and as a body. Our zeal can easily turn into pride and destroy us. We must be constantly vigilant over this matter.

Elijah makes a mistake it is easy for us to make as well. He legitimately believes that he is the last of God's worshipers in the earth, and therefore his job is finished. That's the mistake. God's servants don't get to determine when their mission is complete. Friends, we could be at this business for a long number of years more. We don't get to declare when our mission is complete and when we can leave our post. We have a responsibility to continue at our post until relieved from duty by our commander, not by our assessment of the situation. We don't know if our mission will be completed in a day or a month or a hundred years. We have a responsibility not to grow weary in well doing and to stand firm at our watch tower until such time as the mission is declared complete by our King. This is where Elijah failed. He thought he had the right to declare 'mission over'. He clearly didn't think it was a successful mission, but he is arguing that it is complete.

*"So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me."* (Ezekiel 33:7)

Elijah was no less a watchman than Ezekiel, but here he has erred and in his selfishness has determined that there is no one left to watch for.

Here again is the mercy of the Lord toward His servant:

*"And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake 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 a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?"* (1 Kings 19:11-13)

The Lord shows Himself to teach Elijah a thing and remind him that he is a vessel, nothing more. He sends the wind and earthquake, and the fire, His great destructive forces to remind Elijah that He could deal in wrath with the people of Israel at any time. He doesn't need Elijah to accomplish that or for anything else. He can come at any time and use any facet of His creation to address sinners in wrath or in mercy as He sees fit. This is His battle, His creation, and His will that will be done. No amount of jealousy for Him can make up for rebelling against His wishes and will. We are vessels in the same way, and must seek out His will and not walk in our own ways. The Lord was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire in His message to Elijah, not that He

didn't send them. They did not serve His purpose to speak to Elijah at this time, because He did not come to Elijah in wrath and for destruction, and so His message was not in those things. He comes to Elijah in a still small voice.

And again we see the patience and mercy of the Lord toward His own. The Lord did not appear to Elijah here at Horeb in terror, as He did when He delivered the Law to Moses. Under the Law, God appeared in thunder and lightning, and prohibited even the beasts from touching the mountain, but here God appears to Elijah in Grace to deliver instruction, not punishment. He comes in the still small voice to correct and restore Elijah back into his faith.

Look at the boorish nature of man, even the servants of God. Here God has displayed great destructive power to Elijah, and just as quickly as it started, it stops, so that Elijah can hear the still small voice ask him the question he still hasn't answered "What doest thou here, Elijah?" In an amazing bit of blindness, Elijah answers precisely the same way!

*"And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."* (1 Kings 19:14)

Here is a man who genuinely believes in his cause. But that doesn't make his cause right or mean that he is on the right path. Even in our most zealous of moments if we are not led by God, we are led by our own wisdom and therefore our own weakness. Note that while Elijah still delivers the same answer, he has a different demeanor to him. He is still impassioned and delivers a self-justifying answer, but he delivers it this time with a bit more humility – *"And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle"*. He covers his face not to protect it from the wind or fire as those things had passed. He covers himself in humility, realizing the spot he is in and in reverence to the God that shows him such mercy. We see similar behavior from Moses

*"Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."* (Exodus 3:6)

And what man wouldn't fear to look on the face of God if the angels who inhabit heaven won't?

*"Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."* (Isaiah 6:2)

Elijah makes his case but again gets no response to his argument. There is no requirement that the Lord respond to our debate with Him over our own righteousness, and He does not answer Elijah. Nor should we expect answer when we find ourselves in such a place of discontentment and distemper as Elijah, we have no right to expect God to reply point to counterpoint. It is we who are in error and who rebel against Him, and therefore the only reasonable expectation we should have is the answer of wrath. I've said it several times today and I say it again, marvel here at the mercy God shows Elijah, and think to the times when He has shown you similar undeserved, unexpected and unending kindness. Again, the Lord does not debate with, punish or chastise, He corrects with a simple command

*“And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.”* (1 Kings 19:15)

Go, return on thy way. Ultimately a declaration to Elijah that what he was doing on Horeb was of no consequence. His arguments are of no consequence, his rebellion not held to his charge. There is work to do, and that work must be attended to until you are relieved of the task. And now, there are additional tasks to be done.

*“And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.”* (1 Kings 19:16-17)

Not only does the Lord gently redirect Elijah to his task, He shows him things to come, because

*“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”* (Amos 3:7)

He reveals here to Elijah the “results”, if you will, of the preaching and standing for God he has done. Elijah had in his mind a different set of results, but here God shows him that his preaching was a piece of a larger picture. Elijah has focused his thoughts so narrowly on the results he sought, thinking he understood God’s purpose, when he did not, and this lack of understanding led to this episode. We should be careful here as well. We are not responsible for or important to the outcome, we are but the messengers. God will bring Hazael, Jehu and Elisha onto the scene to carry out and bring to fruition the work that Elijah has begun in hardening the hearts of Israel with his preaching and opposition to Ahab.

To further aid his servant, He provides Elijah a friend that becomes a great and loyal companion to keep him from again coming into the slough he has fallen into while on his own. A friend to keep communion with and walk the remainder of his journey with. This is no small blessing Elijah is afforded here, and again one that we can look to and

should be mightily thankful that we have one another, a host of friends to journey with on this pilgrimage to watch for one another and bear each other's burdens.

And then finally the Lord gives Elijah one last bit of information.

*"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."* (1 Kings 19:18)

Whether this is an indication that there are currently 7,000 in Israel that worship God or an indication that there will be in the future is not clear. Some expositors believe this to be a telling of what is to come during the hardship Israel will face at the hands of Hazael and the eventual diaspora. Given Elijah's angst over the issue of being alone in worshiping God, plus the presences of Obadiah and Elisha, I believe this to be a statement of comfort to Elijah about the present day. Elijah needed to have assurance that he was not alone to spur him to energy and renew his faith, and the Lord provides it here. At times we need similar encouragements to our service to reward and increase our faith, and we receive them as needed. The lesson for us is to remember he will feed us with food convenient for us (Proverbs 30:8), just as he does here for Elijah. God doesn't give Elijah details of those who serve him, just that there are others, and they are not few in number compared to one.

All this information of course has its desired effect. It rejuvenates Elijah and fills him with energy so that he departs immediately.

*"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him."* (1 Kings 19:19)

Elijah snaps to and falls back to work as quickly as he fell away. That is the way of a faithful servant. He does not mope about in a "woe is me, I'm a terrible person" fashion, he picks himself up and gets back to work. No questions, no arguments, dropping his pride with full obedience. God's mercy is thankfully answered by the wayward servant returning to immediate service.

Elijah serves as a great example to us of God's testing His servants and their recovery from it. He is a standing example of the bountiful mercy God showers His people with, and a dark, foreboding example to those who will not heed the message of God's servants. He stands as a man we should in many ways seek to emulate and in many others seek learning from his missteps.

Do not idolize him (or any other human) but learn from him by studying his life, his words, his deeds, his faith and his service to God.