**Be Still Series**

**“Be Still and Listen”**

**I Kings 19**

**Introduction:**

Today we come to the last sermon in our series “Be Still – Slowing Down in a Busy World.” During this series we have sought to discover the importance on intentional time to “be still” before God.

A few years ago Pastor Kevin DeYoung wrote a book entitled “Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book About a (Really) Big Problem.” In his conclusion Pastor DeYoung suggests, "Making consistent time for the Word of God and prayer is the place to start because being with Jesus is the only thing strong enough to pull us away from busyness." Like Mary, we need to choose "the good portion" and sit at the Lord's feet and listen to his teaching. (Lk.10.38-42). We need to hear Jesus' words to Martha, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary” (Lk.10.41-42).

**Be Still and Listen**

Today we come to the topic “Be Still and Listen.” Our text comes from I Kings chapter nineteen where we find the Prophet Elijah in an extreme state of depression and God’s prescription for relief. The Prophet Elijah is referenced twenty-nine times in the New Testament, which makes him the most celebrated Old Testament prophet. God used Elijah during an important time in Israel’s history to oppose a wicked king, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel. These two had introduced and encouraged the pagan worship of Baal in Israel. Baal was a fertility god who was believed to enable the earth to produce crops and people to produce children. Different regions worshiped Baal in different ways, and Baal proved to be a highly adaptable god. Elijah’s ministry marked the beginning of the end of Baal worship in Israel, which we will learn more about today.

The Prophet Elijah experienced both the manifestations of the power of God and the depths of personal depression. Let’s face it – we like heroes of the faith *who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,**quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* (Heb.11.33-34) It’s difficult for us to imagine one of theses great heroes of the faith battling with discouragement and “faith fatigue.”

Somewhere along the way we begin believe the lie that to be a “real” Christian a person must always be experiencing mountain top experiences – running faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. We seem to forget that even Superman had Kryptonite. The point is that we all have times of great spiritual success and sometimes we suffer bouts of faith fatigue.

To get to the heart of today’s sermon I must give the back-story. As I mentioned,

God used Elijah during an important time in Israel’s history to oppose a wicked king, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel, who had introduced and encouraged the pagan worship of Baal in Israel. A showdown occurred in I Kings chapter eighteen when Elijah confronted the wicked king, Ahab, and 450 prophets of Baal.

*Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it.**Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.”* (IKgs.18.21-24)

Let’s face it – everybody likes a good show! So the prophets of Baal prepared their altar and *called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But there was no voice and no one answered.* (IKgs.18.25-26) So the prophets of Baal began dancing around the altar as they continue to call out to Baal. Nothing happened so they began cutting themselves with swords making deep lacerations with blood gushing out. They did this until evening *but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.* (IKgs.18.27-29)

Then Elijah called the people together and prepared his altar and made a trench around the altar. Then he called for water to be poured on the altar to the point that water flowed around the altar, filling up the trench. (IKgs.18.30-36) Then Elijah prayed, *Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.”**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. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.” Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.* (IKgs.18.37-40)

Elijah did not harm the wicked king, Ahab, but showed him acts of kindness giving him food and drink and advising him to return to his evil wife, Jezebel. Elijah did this with the hope that this event, this demonstration of God’s power, would turn Ahab and Jezebel’s hearts away from these pagan practices and serve the living God. So, how did that work? *Now 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 even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.* (IKgs.19.1-3)

**Faith Fatigue**

Elijah was experiencing faith fatigue. The same guy who God just used to call fire down from heaven is now running for his life with his prophetic tail between his legs because of threats from Jezebel. We have to ask the question, how could this have happened to such a man of God? And the answer is because Elijah allowed his expectations to control his emotions instead of God. Elijah goes from a mountain top experience to the deepest valley of despair over night. This only proves how fragile we really are and how much we need the stabilizing force of God in our lives.

Elijah believed that the whole dramatic experience with the prophets of Baal would change Ahab and Jezebel’s heart and when that didn’t Elijah felt like a failure. Maybe Elijah felt like God had let him down. Have you ever thought that God has let you down? Elijah had done everything right and his motives were pure. As the Prophet he wanted the whole country to serve God starting with the king and his wife. But when Elijah heard these threats from Jezebel, he allowed his expectations to control his emotions instead of God. Maybe Elijah thought, “If this whole thing didn’t change them – then nothing will change them. Maybe it would be better for me just to give up and get out of the ministry.” This perceived failure of his ministry brought Elijah to a state of despondency and he fled the land.

Spiritual leaders are humans too. They have feelings and emotions. We put on the armor of God but situations can arise that put some real dents in our armor. Criticism, lack of support, and personal attacks are on the top of very list of why pastors leave a church and we see each of these in this narrative. (IKgs.18.17, 22; 19.2) It’s difficult for us to accept that even great men of God like Elijah can get discouraged and feel defeated but it happens.

Elijah’s faith fatigue drove him to make the poor decision to travel by himself a day’s journey into the wilderness. *He went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree.* (IKgs19.4a) What thoughts do you think raced through Elijah’s mind as he traveled into the wilderness alone? Isolation often leads to poor conclusions and after a long journey Elijah sat down under the juniper tree and *requested for himself that he might die, and said, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”* (IKgs.19.4b)

Christians are not immune from being human. Yes, we have the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit resides in human vessels that are frail and fragile. (2Cor.4.7) Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit but sometimes the temple needs some repairs. (ICor.6.19) The Bible tells us that these episodes were written so that we might learn from their experiences so what can we learn from this episode with Elijah? (ICor.10.11)

At this point the story takes a turn and we begin to see God’s provisions for this fatigued Prophet.

**God’s Provisions**

*He lay down and slept under a juniper tree;* (IKgs.19.5a)

Out of exhaustion, Elijah fell asleep. It is a simple verse but it shows us exactly what Elijah needed – sleep. God has ordained sleep and rest for our survival and ability to function, so the Lord allowed a time for Elijah to sleep before He brought the next provision.

After some sleep *behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, “Arise, eat.” Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.* (IKgs.19.5b-6)

*The angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you.” So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.* (IKgs.19.5b-8)

Twice Elijah is told to eat and drink and twice he is allowed to sleep. God knows we are frail. He knows our frame that we are be dust. (Ps.103.14) He is mindful that we possess bodies that must be cared for and often the physical must be cared for before the spiritual can function.

I often tell people when they are experiencing a crisis that they must take care of themselves. “Go for a walk – have something to eat! Don’t think that your sacrifice of exercise and nutrition is going the help in this situation.” God knows we need sleep, food, and drink to give us the energy to fulfill His Will and Word.

So God was patient with Elijah and He will be patient with you. God gave Elijah what was necessary to bring him to a place where he would respond. God doesn’t beat us into submission. God doesn’t coerce our response to force us to honor him. He brings us to the place where we can willingly respond to His grace.

So after God’s gracious provisions Elijah took off for the mountain of God – Mt. Horeb also known as Mt. Sinai. And now we come to the heart of the story! Notice that the text says that Elijah *arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.* (IKgs19.8)

What is interesting is that from where Elijah began his journey from under the juniper tree to Mt. Horeb was no forty-day journey. A straight trip would have required about seven to eight days. It seems like Elijah was seeking some dramatic experience with God to compensate for his emotional breakdown. The name Horeb or Sinai evoke images of a powerful and awesome God who works fantastic miracles for the world to see and Elijah was looking for a “spiritual jolt from the Holy Ghost.”

**On The Mountain of God**

Remember, this was the same territory that God called Moses in a burning bush! That must had been dramatic.

This was the same mountain where Moses beheld the glory of the Lord passing by as he sat in the cleft of the rock. (Ex.33.12-23) That must had been spectacular!

This was the same mountain where Moses had spent forty-days with the Lord without bread and water as he wrote the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone. (Ex.34.28) That must had been quite the experience.

As a matter of fact the skin on Moses’ face radiated with brightness because he had been speaking directly with the Lord. (Ex.34.29-30) And it seems like Elijah was seeking the same type dramatic experience with God to prove that he was the Lord’s Prophet and not a failure. Brothers and Sisters, don’t settle for someone else experience with God seek the Lord for you own!

*Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”* (IKgs.19.9) The Lord inquires about Elijah’s motives for coming to the mountain of God.

*He said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”* (IKgs.19.10) The Lord allows Elijah to vent his frustration. Remember to always express your feelings to the Lord. He already knows your heart so you might as well be honest.

*So He said, “Go forth and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord was passing by!* (IKgs19.11a)

This is exactly what Elijah was hoping for! An experience like Moses had when the Lord passed by showing him the glory of the Lord. (Ex.33.12-23)

*And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind.* (IKgs19.11b)

*And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.* (IKgs19.11c)

*After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire;* (IKgs19.12a)

*and after the fire a sound of a gentle whisper.**When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.* (IKgs.19.12b-13a)

The Lord is not always in the loud and showy events of history. I know we like to be entertained. I know we have been told “the bigger the better.” But that is not necessarily true. Yes, there have been times that the Lord was in the rushing mighty wind like on the Day of Pentecost but not this time. There have been times when the Lord was in the earthquake like when Paul and Silas were in prison stocks in Philippi but not this time. There have been times that the Lord was in the fire like the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but not this time. Yes, God can speak through the mighty wind, earthquake, and fire but not always. Not even usually.

**Be Still and Listen**

Most of us will never experience a miracle, a healing, or a spectacular display of God’s power but everyone can listen to the gentle whisper of God. But to hear the gentle whisper of God you must be still and listen.

Notice that *when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave.* When Elijah heard that gentle whisper he knew it was the Lord. So he wrapped his face in his mantle like the angels in the presence of God cover their face with their wings and he went out to listen to the gentle whisper of God.

This is what my Grandmother called, “The still small voice of God.” “Brian, listen to the still small voice of God and you will always make the right decision.” I was raised in the Pentecostal Church. There nothing I haven’t seen. I’ve seen the dramatic! I’ve seen the spiritual spectacular! But the still small voice of God has been my constant messenger. The gentle whisper of God is my constant companion.

The point of God speaking in the still small voice was to show Elijah that the work of God doesn’t need to be accompanied by dramatic revelation or manifestations. God’s work is “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.” (Zech.4.6) Displays of power do not necessary equate as a work of God. God usually works by gently speaking to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Elijah finally realized that he didn’t need the spectacular. God’s soft reassuring voice will do just fine. Elijah realized he wasn’t a failure. He had just forgotten how remove himself from all the drama, the clamor, and all the threats. He had forgotten how to be still and listen to the gentle voice of God. Like Mary will do centuries later, Elijah finally chose the good portion and decided to be still and listen to the gentle voice of God.

And we should learn from his example.

**Conclusion**

There is so much noise in this world. And we must learn how to remove ourselves from the clamor and be still and listen to the gentle voice of God through His Word, through prayer, and through the peaceful sounds of His creation. In the mornings I like sit and listen to the birds waking up to the new day with the songs of praise. But to hear them I must be still and listen.

Several years ago as a result of becoming deathly ill the doctors had to amputate portions of both of my feet. To aid my recovery from these dramatic surgeries the decision was made for me to start treatment in the hyperbaric chamber. The hyperbaric chamber is about the size of a coffin and the patient must go into the chamber for about 90 minutes. These sessions rapidly speed up the healing process and I have about 60 sessions. The only thing is that you can’t out until the 90 minutes is over. You have to stay – no way out!

I have to admit at first I didn’t like the chamber. I was scared and freaked out but as time went on I started to enjoy the whole experience. Why? The hyperbaric chamber became my personal sanctuary away from all the noise of the hospital, the monitors, and the constant interruptions. The hyperbaric chamber gave me the time to be still and listen to God’s voice. I didn’t know how things were going to work out but as I separated myself from the clamor I was able to be refreshed by God’s presence and listen to His gentle whisper. “Be still My child I will care for you.”

As we conclude this series I want to encourage you to find your sanctuary. I want to encourage you to be still and slow down in this busy world. God knows you are fragile and can suffer faith fatigue. He will provide the provisions you need to regain your strength and He will speak to you as His child in a gentle whisper.

**Call to Prayer**

*“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Mt.11.28)

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,* *to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jude1.24-25)