

Lord, Teach Us Your Ways

✘ Mount Horeb, where first Moses and later the prophet Elijah sought refuge during times of persecution in their lives, was not what it appeared to be. Though forbidding and barren, as the name “Horeb” (“desolation”) implies, it actually came to symbolize that season in a person’s life during which a desolate soul could find the presence of God.

Both Elijah and Moses before him found fresh encounters with God on Horeb. Surrounded by the bleak and barren environment, the Lord reduced His servants to one focus: God alone.

The Horeb experience tells us that God accommodates our times of desolation and uses them to prepare us for greater glory. Out of our barrenness comes a renewed dependency upon God, from which new assignments and increased power emerge.

It was in the cleft of a rock near Horeb that Moses prayed, “If I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You” (Ex. 33:13, NKJV).

And it was here that the Lord, in turn, promised, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (v. 14).

We cannot say we truly know God if we remain ignorant of His ways. To know the ways of a person is to know his heart’s motivations as well as how he would respond to the blessings and

challenges of life. Moses knew the Lord in the deepest intimacy possible; he knew God's ways.

The Bible tells us that the Lord revealed His *acts* to the sons of Israel, but He made known His *ways* to Moses (Ps. 103:7). To know the ways of God is to know the motives of His heart and the secrets of His passions. It is to be amazed at the resolve of His love and compelled to humility by His attraction to the lowly.

The Lord had promised Moses, "My presence will go with you." When God's presence accompanies our actions, all the energy we once spent worrying and planning is reclaimed and offered back to God in praise and effective service.

The outcome of being companioned through life with Christ is in His next promise, "I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:14). To enter God's rest does not imply that we have become *inactive* but that *God* has become *active*. Thus, Jesus calls, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

How the church today, weary and desperate, needs to return to Jesus and re-enter God's rest! When we are yoked to Christ, our burdens are transferred to the vastness of His strength and abilities. He becomes to us an untiring resource for our weakness; He is unfailing wisdom for our ignorance.

At the place of rest, Christ becomes a continual life-spring of grace and virtue. We can cease from our anxious labors and, unfettered from our ideas and traditions, serve Him in the unlimited strength of His might.

God has always been more concerned with the condition of our hearts than with the activity of our hands. What we become to Him is far more consequential than all we shall ever do *for* Him. He wants our love and companionship.

Indeed, the Scriptures tell us that He “jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us” (James 4:5, NASB). Thus, if our devotion to our task exceeds our devotion to Him, He will personally hinder our success. It is out of love that God delivers us from the unanointed momentum of our zeal. He intentionally dries up our vigor.

The Lord insists that our success originate not from our strength but from our union with Him. Our time of desolation, brokenness and disappointment becomes a tool in His hand by which He works within us a deeper dependency upon His strength.

Alone with God on Horeb, Moses prayed, “Show me Your glory” (Ex. 33:18, NKJV). The Lord responded, “I will make all My goodness pass before you” (v. 19). At the center of Christ’s resplendent glory is His incomparable goodness. Indeed, our Horeb experience becomes the very site where, in spite of our sense of failure, God reveals to us His goodness.

To be personally restored to the knowledge of God's goodness is what Elijah desperately needed. So it is for us.

The Cave of Withdrawal

It can be a crushing experience to give your very best and still fall short. Elijah had been discouraged with his inability to effect revival in God's people. He fled Jezebel and traveled south nearly 200 miles to Horeb, where he lodged in a cave on the mountainside.

Scripture tells us that "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). Elijah had lost hope that revival would come to Israel. When we lose hope we simultaneously lose faith, for faith is the substance of the thing hoped for. Without hope or faith, all we have is empty religion.

When we become heartsick with disappointment and discouragement, we also lose perspective. We feel that we are responsible for the results. We must remember that, apart from the cooperating work of the Holy Spirit, no man can change another person's heart, much less the heart of a city or nation.

Much of Elijah's discouragement came from the false expectations he had placed upon himself. Often when we receive an assignment from the Lord, we, like Elijah, begin immediately to imagine the results. We project ourselves prematurely into a place of success and fulfillment.

Yet we do not know what the result will be—only that we should obey the Lord. We must leave the fulfillment in the hands of Him who does “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

Elijah withdrew into a cave on Horeb. For us, self-pity can become a spiritual cave. It can trap us in a dark hole of loneliness and pain. In this place of isolation we fail to hear the encouragement of God; all we hear is the echo of our own voices magnifying and distorting our problems.

Elijah was alone and despairing, yet the Lord knew his heart. “What are you doing here?” the Lord asked him (1 Kin. 19:9). And Elijah said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life” (v. 10).

Elijah wanted desperately to see the nation awakened, but he did not understand the role God would have him play. Perhaps Elijah’s main mistake was that he was personally shouldering the burden of Israel’s revival. Not knowing his own place, he assumed the place of God.

Calling Elijah out of the cave, the Lord told him, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord” (v. 11). As

Elijah

stepped out of the cave's darkness, an awesome event occurred.

"And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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" (vv. 11-12).

A New Revelation of God

There are times when, to lead us on into new authority and blessings, God must liberate us from the container of our previous

experiences. The Lord was passing by, but He was not in the wind, the

earthquake or the fire, all of which were familiar symbols to Elijah.

The Lord who caused these mighty manifestations was not in them.

For Elijah, mighty manifestations had been signs of God's approval. But something new was at hand that required a fresh submission to the living God. A double portion of power was coming! The

distinguishing characteristic of this new anointing would be seen not

only in supernatural manifestations but also in greater wisdom and

compassion.

Earthquakes, fires and storms—the signs that accompanied Elijah—are the signs of our times as well. But to enter the double

portion, we must learn to recognize God's nearness when there are no "earthquakes" or "storms" to capture our attention. He demands we enter a more refined relationship with Him, one that is based on His love and the whisper of His word, not merely upon spiritual phenomena or the issues of our times.

After the last sign, there came "a still small voice" (1 Kin. 19:12). Elijah recognized it: The presence of God was returning.

Elijah "wrapped his face in his mantle" lest he look upon God (v. 13).

Perhaps it was near this very site that Moses, 500 years earlier, hid when the Lord passed by. Now it was Elijah's turn.

Entering this eternal stillness was the person of God.

We too must learn to hear the voice of Him who rarely speaks audibly and observe the actions of Him who is otherwise invisible. Elijah would gain the courage to endure Jezebel's wrath the

same way Moses faced the rage of Pharaoh: "He endured, as seeing Him

who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). We must learn to detect, without great signs, the still, small voice of God.

He will not fight for our attention; He must be sought.

He will not startle us; He must be perceived. It took no special skill

to "discern" the earthquake, the fire or the great storm. But to sense

the holy quiet of God, our other activities must cease.

In our world of great pressures and continual distractions, the attention of our hearts must rise to the invisible world of God's Spirit. We must learn to see Him who is unseen.

A New Beginning

In the quieting of Elijah's heart, the Lord in His goodness drew near, reassuring Elijah that he was not alone in his battle: There were still 7,000 Israelites who had not bowed to Baal. Next, a new commission came.

The Lord told Elijah to anoint Hazael as king over Syria and Jehu as king over Israel. He also was to train Elisha, who would be his successor (1 Kin. 19:15-16).

At Horeb, God released a "double portion" of spiritual power. Although the Lord gave the new anointing to Elijah, it would be Elisha who would walk in it (2 Kin. 2:9-14). Elisha would do twice as many miracles. More than any other Old Testament prophet, Elisha's works would most resemble those of Christ Himself.

Elijah did not personally bring national restoration, but he prepared the way for Elisha, who brought the closest thing to revival the northern tribes ever experienced. Out of his Horeb encounter with God, Elijah received a greater understanding of his place in God. His call was not to establish, but to "go before" and prepare the way for greater things to come.

In fact, Elijah was so successful at "preparing the way"

that his spiritual anointing was apportioned to John the Baptist as a herald to Christ's first coming. Elijah is destined to prepare the way for Christ's second coming as well (see Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 17:11).

As this age ends, God's promise to us is that we too shall receive a "double portion" (Is. 61:7; John 14:12). What can this mean but that the Lord is going to reveal Himself to us in glories we have never known before?

Do not despair if you find yourself in a time of desolation. In truth, with God, our desolation is but preparation for a new beginning of power and service—an opportunity for God to "show us His ways."

Our task is to be still and know that Christ is God. He shall triumph over all His foes. He will be exalted in all the earth, and in Him is the stronghold of God.

O Master, how easily I fall into dead religious habits and spiritual dullness! Lord, I long to know Your ways, to have eyes that really see and ears that clearly hear. Teach me, Lord Jesus, the intimacies of God. Remove the mystery surrounding Yourself that I might truly know You. Forgive me for looking for signs instead of listening for Your voice. O God, how I long to truly know You as Moses did, to abide in Your glory.

Restore to Your church the double portion You have promised, and guide us into the fullness of Your power. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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