

THE STILL SMALL VOICE

NO. 1668

A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“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 do you here, Elijah?”
1 Kings 19:12-13.

ELIJAH no doubt expected that after the wonderful display of God's power on Carmel the nation would give up its idols, and would turn unto the only living and true God. Had they not confessed as with a voice of thunder, “JEHOVAH, he is the God; JEHOVAH, he is the God”? The prophet trusted that the heart of Ahab might perhaps be touched, and possibly through him the heart of Jezebel. If she did not become converted, at least the manifest interposition of JEHOVAH might check her hand from future persecution. The prophet hoped that by an influence thus established over the king and queen, the whole land would speedily glide back to its allegiance to JEHOVAH. Then would his stern heart have been glad before the Lord.

When he found out that it was not so his spirit fainted within him. The message from Jezebel that he would be slain the next morning was probably not so terrible to him as the discovery that came with it that his great demonstration against Baal was doomed to be a failure. The proud Sidonian queen would still rule over vacillating Ahab, and through Ahab she would still keep power over the people, and the idol gods would sit safely on their throne.

The thought was gall and wormwood to the idol-hating prophet. He became so despondent that he was ready to give up the conflict, and to quit the battlefield. He cannot bear to live in the land where the people were so blindly infatuated as to honor Baal, and to dishonor JEHOVAH. He resolved to leave right away. But whither shall he go? He traverses the land in hot haste, he flies into the wilderness, he will not lie down till he reaches a solitude where foot of man has not defiled the sward. But in which direction shall he hasten? He, the great law-vindicator thinks of the spot where once stood the great lawgiver, and he hastens off to Horeb, to the mount of God.

In a cave he lodges, perhaps in the very cleft of the rock where aforetime God had hidden His servant Moses, while He made all His glory to pass before him. But what a retreat before a beaten enemy! Where now is the dauntless courage which faced all Israel, one against thousands? How are the mighty fallen! Is this my lord Elijah, crouching in a cavern? Is this the man who seemed to leap into Israel's history like a lion roaring on his prey? Is this Elijah the Tishbite who brought both fire and water from the skies? Yes, it is even he. He has become faint-hearted and weary, and therefore he has fled his Master's service.

It is well for us who are always weak that we can so clearly see that the strong are only strong because God makes them so. Their occasional weakness proves that they are naturally as weak as we are, it is only by Divine strength that they are made mighty, and this strength is ready to gird us, also, for the conflict. We take comfort from this, though we do not from it excuse our own infirmity. The Lord God of Elijah is our God, and as He sustained a man of like passions with ourselves, He can and will sustain us if we cry unto Him.

Observe very carefully and gladly how God dealt with His downcast servant. He knew that he was faithful at heart, He understood that Elijah was a true man who loved his God and feared Him, and was

very jealous for His honor, therefore He did not put His servant away in anger, but He determined to revive and restore him, and bring him back to His holy warfare. Now must Elijah learn the meaning of David's song, "He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

The Lord began with him in much tenderness by refreshing his physical frame. He permitted him to fall into a sleep, and when he was awakened there was a cake ready for him and a cruse of water. Then the Lord allowed him to sleep again, for this he greatly needed.

We do not lose the time we spend in sleep when we are worn out with fatigue. It is the best economy of life to let the body have a sufficiency of kind nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep. God gave His servant, after a second sleep, a second meal, and thus refreshed Elijah was able to look at things in a more cheery light.

Time was when Christian people thought very little of the corporeal system, they called their physical frame a vile body, as indeed it is in some sense, but not in every sense. If they had any doubts, and fears, and tremblings our good fathers laid them all on the back of the devil, or else ascribed them to their own unbelief, when frequently their depressions arose from want of food, or of fresh air, or from an inactive liver, or a weak stomach. A thousand things can cast us down, and we ought not to despise the body through which they act upon us. Rather should we attend to natural laws and so look to the God of those laws to help us.

God, who made the body, and who gave it such a close affinity to the mind, observes how dependent the soul is upon the body, and often begins His restoring work by healing our diseases. We who dwell in houses of clay are often cribbed, cabined, and confined from loftier things by reason of the dust to which our soul cleaves. The Lord who heals His people began in Elijah's case, by refreshing his languid frame. He restored Elijah by sleep and by food.

If any of you here present are depressed, and in mental trouble, I would invite you to look to your health, and not to blame yourselves till first you have seen whether your sadness arises from sickness or from sin, from a feeble body or a rebellious mind. Do not think it unspiritual to remember that you have a body, for you certainly have one, and therefore ought not to ignore its existence.

If your heavenly Father thinks of your physical frame, He therein gives you a hint to do the same. If the Lord in His wisdom began with the high-spirited Elias by feeding and refreshing his mortal body, we ought to count it wisdom to look to our outward parts, it is of heretics that we read that they inculcate neglecting of the body, wise men value it as the temple of the Holy Ghost. With us it is often the case that "the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," it is no small thing to get the flesh put in order, the physician is often as needful as the minister.

When the man of God had been refreshed by the great Physician, he was led of the Lord to Horeb, where he would be quite alone. The Lord knew that he needed quiet as well as sleep and food, and there among the lone crags, where utter desolation reigns undisturbed, Elijah found himself somewhat at home. When the quiet had in a measure calmed his mind, the Lord began to speak with him. He bade him go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord.

No sooner had the prophet come to the mouth of the cave than a tremendous hurricane swept down the rifts of the valleys with such force that it tore the mountains and brought down great masses of granite from their lofty summits. The great and strong wind seemed to shake the mountains to their foundations, and huge columns which long had breasted ordinary storms began to rock and reel and fall about the lone observer with thundering crashes.

The prophet was not at all alarmed. He was the child of the storm, a reprovener born to rule amid tempestuous scenes. It is very possible that his spirit felt exhilarated by the terrors around him. The tumult in which he had lived among the people was now imaged before him in the strife of the elements, I should not wonder if he even felt at home, joyously excited as the terrific blast swept over the mountains' brows.

As he stood at the mouth of the cave, the earth gave way beneath his feet, he leaned against the mountain, and lo it shook and quivered, for now the earthquake was passing by, and it seemed as if

nothing was stable around him. Scarcely had this convulsion ceased than the fire displayed its brightness. The lightning flamed over the whole heaven, attended by peals of thunder such as the man of God had never heard before.

From crag to crag leaped the live lightnings, till the whole firmament blazed with the fire of God. Yet we do not find that the prophet was in the least cowed or dismayed. His was a brave spirit, calm amid the storm. As the eagle mounts in the center of the lightning, and rises on the wings of the storm, so it did seem with Elijah's spirit, he was awakened by the fury of the elements, but he was not afraid. And now the thunder ceased, and the lightning was gone, and the earth was still, and the wind was hushed, and there was a dead calm, and out of the midst of the still air there came what the Hebrew calls "a voice of gentle silence," as if silence had become audible.

There is nothing more terrible than an awful stillness after a dread uproar. Even the noise of the wind and of the storm which could not cow Elijah was not as terrible as the still small voice by which JEHOVAH called His servant near. Then the prophet covered his face, and went to the mouth of the cave and stood to listen, for the still small voice had won the solemn attention of his soul. It had done for him what all the rest could not do, for this reason, that the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but the Lord was in the still small voice, and Elijah knew it, and was awed, and prepared himself to hear what God the Lord would speak.

What is the lesson of this? May God the Holy Spirit help us this morning to learn it, and to teach it.

I. First, I call your attention to THE CHOSEN AGENCY.

Notice, at the outset, *what it was not*. It was not the terrible, it was not the tremendous, it was not the overwhelming, but something the reverse of all these. It was not a grand display of power, for God was in none of those great things which Elias saw and heard. That which conquered Elijah's brave heart was not whirlwind, was not earthquake, was not fire, it was the still small voice.

That which effectually wins human hearts to God and to His Christ is not an extraordinary display of power. Men can be made to tremble when God sends pestilence and famine, and fire, and others of His terrible judgments, but these things end usually in the hardening of men's hearts, and not in the winning of them. See what God did to Pharaoh and his land. Surely those plagues were thick and heavy—the like of which had never been seen before, yet what was the result? "And Pharaoh's heart was hardened."

So it usually is. These things are well enough as preliminaries to the divine Gospel, which gently conquers the heart, but they do not of themselves affect the soul.

***"Law and terrors do but harden
All the while they work alone;
'Tis a sense of blood-bought pardon
That dissolves a heart of stone."***

The still small voice succeeds where "terrible things in righteousness" are of no avail. I do not wonder that Elijah hoped that the terrible judgments would prevail with his countrymen, these terrible things appear to be a rough and ready way for overcoming evil, and indeed they would prevail if men's hearts were not so "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."

Have you not judged that if God would send a pestilence to our thoughtless city it might, perhaps, impress the thoughtless crowd, and drive to our houses of prayer those who now habitually waste the Sabbath? Might not cholera, or war, or famine alarm the consciences of the careless and drive the ungodly to their knees? Have you not thought that perhaps the screening which God has given us in saving us from the plagues of war, and from innumerable ills, may have tended to breed in men's hearts presumption, and carelessness, and indifference? One could almost say to Christ, when we think of the sin of our fellow men, "Will You that we call fire from heaven upon them as Elias did?"

We frequently imagine that the terrors of the Lord would persuade men, and compel them to seek rest in the bosom of their God. Thanks be to infinite mercy, the Lord does not at this present time choose

the terrible way of action. He leaves the wind, He leaves the earthquake and the fire, and He speaks to men in the silence of their souls by a voice which, though it be as “silence audible,” yet it is the power of God unto salvation. But we are hard to convince that it is so. We still cling to the idea that outward pomp of power tremendous would advance the kingdom of God. We are not so ready to dispense with the twelve legions of angels as our Master was. So far as our own action is concerned, we are poor disciples of Him of whom we read, “He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets.”

In our religious exercises we are too apt to rely upon carnal force and energy. We are hopeful if we can make a noise, and create excitement, stir, and agitation. The heaving of the masses under newly invented excitements we are too apt to identify with the power of God. This age of novelties would seem to have discovered spiritual power in brass bands and tambourines, and it is hoped that souls which could not be saved by a church may be reached by an army, and minds that were insensible to Gospel arguments it is supposed can be charmed by banners. Simple apostolic teaching is at a discount, and we are treated to more sensational methods. The tendency of the time is towards bigness, parade, and show of power, as if these would surely accomplish what more regular agencies have failed to achieve. But it is not so, or else both men and God have greatly changed.

The same tendency appears in the too common saying, “At least, we must have an eloquent preacher, let us have one who can plead with choice, picked words, a master of the art of oratory, surely this we may rely upon, and fall back upon earnest pleading, and intense, arousing speech.” Yet peradventure God will not choose this form of power, for still He will not have our faith to stand in the wisdom of words, but He will have us learn this lesson, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.”

Crash after crash the orator’s passages succeed each other. What a tremendous passage! The hearers must surely be impressed. Wind! And the Lord is not in it. And now everything seems to shake, while, like a second John the Baptist, the minister proclaims woe and terror, and pronounces the curse of God upon a generation of vipers! Will not this break hard hearts? No. Nothing is accomplished. It is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake.

Another form of force remains. Here comes one who pleads with vehemence, all on fire, he flashes and flames! Look at the coruscations of his sensational metaphors and anecdotes. Yes, fire, might we not say fireworks? and yet the Lord does not work by such fire. The Lord is not in the fire. The furious energy of unbridled fanaticism the Lord does not use. He may employ great and terrible things as preliminaries to His soul-saving work, but they are only preliminaries, the work itself is done in the secret silence of the heart.

As they were in Elijah’s case, so are these things in the cases of others, they startle and arouse, but they cannot convince and convert. That which is to quicken, enlighten, sanctify, and really bless is the still small voice of gentle silence, the words sound like a paradox, but the sense is clear to him who knows truth by experience. The voice which is not heard without is omnipotent within.

We have sufficiently shown the negative side of it, God’s work stands not in the power of the creature. What, then, does God use to touch the heart? Our heavenly Father generally *uses that which is soft, tender, gentle, quiet, calm, peaceful*—a still small voice. In the work of real conversion, of bringing the soul to decision and complete obedience to God, the calling voice is often so gentle that it is quite unperceived by others except in its results, ay, frequently so gentle that it is almost unperceived by the man who is the subject of it. He may not even be able to tell exactly when the voice came and when it went. The gentle zephyr refreshes the fevered brow, but the sufferer scarcely knows that it has passed through the sick chamber and is gone, so soft is its heaven-given breath.

In reconciliation there are no blows, nor beats of drums, nor bolts of tempests, love is the captain of this bloodless war. There is little display of physical or mental force, and yet there is more real power than if force had been used. We observe that where there was a display of power, as in wind, earthquake, and fire, we read afterwards “God was not in it,” but here, in this still small voice in which there was no

display of power, God was at work. Here, then, we see the weakness of power, but we learn also the power of weakness, and how God often makes that which seems most resistible to be irresistible, and that which we would suppose to be easily waved away weaves about a man fetters from which he never can escape.

Softly and gently works the Holy Spirit, even as the breath of spring which dissolves the iceberg and melts the glacier. When frost has taken every rivulet by its throat, and held it fast, spring sets all free. No noise of hammer or of file is heard at the loosening of the fetters, but the soft south wind blows, and all is life and liberty. So is it with the work of the Spirit of God in the soul when He comes actually to set the sinner free, He works effectually, but no voice is heard.

Now, whatever the soft and gentle instrumentality may be, it is in every case, if it saves the soul, *wrought by the Holy Spirit's presence*, and the Holy Spirit, though He can be "a rushing, mighty wind" when He wills—for He comes according to His own sovereign pleasure—yet usually when He comes to bring to man the peace of God, descends as the dove, or as the dew from heaven—all peace, and gentleness, and quiet. Satan can set the soul on fire with agony, doubts and fears and terrors rend it like an awful earthquake, and the whole man is in trouble and confusion, as the whirlwind of the law sweeps through his soul, but the Spirit comes in tenderest love, revealing Christ the gentle One, setting up the cross of the Savior before the sinner's tearful eye, and speaking peace, pardon, and salvation. Brethren, this is what we need—the work of the Spirit of God in His own manner of living love.

I have said that He works usually to the salvation of the soul by revealing the love of Christ, and it is so, not only at our first conversion, but afterwards. All along His operations are after the same quiet and effectual kind. As we grow in sanctification it is by tender revelations of the Father's love. What has such influence over any of us as the infinite, overflowing grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ? You know how Mr. Monod in His sweet hymn sets forth not only our growth in sanctification, but the gentle instrument of it.

*"Yet He found me: I beheld Him,
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray, 'Forgive them, Father':
And my wistful heart said fondly,
'Some of self and some of Thee.*

*Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full, and free,
Sweet and strong, and oh, so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered,
'Less of self and more of Thee.'"*

Still you perceive it is the operation of love upon the soul which works it all.

*"Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea;
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered,
Grant me now my spirit's longing,
None of self, but all of Thee."*

Thus like the silent morning light grace works upon the man. Its processes are carried on by love, there is not a touch of terror or bondage in the great reconciling deed within. The Gospel with its glad tidings leaps out of the heart of God, and enters into the heart of men, and rest follows, and sacred gratitude. God may devour His enemies with lions, but His friends He wins with love. Those that are obdurate He will break as with a rod of iron, dashing them in pieces like potters' vessels, but for His own, when He comes to save them, He touches them with the silver scepter of mercy. Grace works with the oiled feather. Love is the chariot of omnipotence when it comes into the world of mind.

This, my dear friends (to close this first head), coming quietly home to us, to each one of us individually, without animal excitement—this it is which unites us to Jesus by faith. Elias was calm and quiet when he heard that still small voice of God. He neither fell down in horror, nor danced for joy, yet his whole nature was touched, his inmost heart was convulsed. The silence which God had caused to be heard within him thawed his soul. This is how conversions are wrought.

When the truth comes right home to the heart, when the man perceives that the message of grace belongs to him, when he grips and grapples with that truth and that truth with him, then without help from the outside, he seeks and finds eternal life. The still small voice within the conscience is God's chosen instrumentality effectually to convert and comfort the souls of men, the kingdom of God comes not with observation, but in the secret chamber man is brought near to God.

II. Notice THE CHOICE EFFECTS of this chosen mode of working.

The first effect of it upon Elijah was that *the man was subdued*. I have gone over this before. He who could confront the raging wind, he who was not terrified by the lightning, nor made to tremble at the earthquake, the moment he was in that stillness, and heard that gentle voice, wrapped his face in his sheepskin robe, and went outside the cave, like a child obedient to the call of his heavenly Father. And when the Spirit of God comes in His gentle power upon any of you, then you will resist no longer, you will be subdued and conquered by His soft and tender touch.

The first thing Elias did, I said, was to wrap his face in his mantle, therein imitating the angels, who cannot stand unveiled in that awful presence. He did his best to hide his face, like one ashamed—ashamed of having doubted his God, ashamed of having played the coward, ashamed of being found away from the place of his service. When the Holy Spirit deals with men and women this is an early effect upon their minds, *shamefacedness* and humiliation cover their faces.

*“Confounded, Lord, I wrap my face,
And hang my guilty head;
Ashamed of all my wicked ways,
The hateful life I’ve led.”*

They cannot speak in the same bold tones as they were wont to do, boasting is excluded. For some time, at any rate, they have to learn how to behave themselves in the divine presence, for walking in the light as God is in the light is not easy for newly-converted sinners, their eyes are weak and tender, and therefore they have to cover them from the blaze of the eternal light. Love is the triumphant power, where mere power and thunder fail it leads the heart in glad captivity. Now, as I have said, nor wind nor tempest could produce this in Elijah, but the still small voice of God did it at once.

*“Lord, Thou hast won, at length I yield;
My heart, by mighty grace compelled,
Surrenders all to Thee;
Against Thy terrors long I strove,
But who can stand against Thy love?
Love conquers even me.*

*If Thou had bid Thy thunders roll,
And lightnings flash, to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been;
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Savior I have view’d,
And now I hate my sin.”*

It appears in reading the chapter as if the prophet did not come out of the cave until he heard that voice. He was called upon by God to come out and stand in the open before the Most High, but as I read

it he had not done this until the still small voice called him, and drew him in the way of the command, so that *obedience* is a second blessed effect. Shamefaced on account of his errors, he is now resolved to follow his Lord's word at once, and he stands at the opening of the cave to hear what God the Lord will speak.

If the Spirit of God shall work effectually upon any of us one of the first marks of it will be that while we are humbled because of sin we shall grow earnest to work righteousness. Grace makes us tender in the matter of obedience. Those who hear the voice of the Lord are sure to cry, "Lord, show me what you would have me to do." When that voice wins the willing ear it creates a ready foot to go where God bids us. Our desire is to know the Lord's will, and promptly to fulfill it, for the heavenly whisper has for its burden—"Follow me."

And now that Elias has come out into the clear air, the next effect upon him is that *he has personal dealings with God*. The voice says to him, "What do you here, Elijah?" It is a home inquiry, made to himself alone. He knows that God is speaking with him, and therefore he feels the force of every word which searches him. Then he pours out the bitterness of his grief, and tells the Lord what ails him.

The Spirit is surely at work with you when your converse is with the Lord alone. When you want nobody to hear what you have to say, but are glad to enter into your closet and shut to the door, and pray to your Father that sees in secret, this is real work, the work of God. When you feel every line of the Word of God as you read it as if it were written for you, and you alone, when you think that nobody else in the world can enter so fully into it in your judgment as you now do, for the sentences seem shaped for you, and there are little words dropped into the threatening and the promise exactly adapted for you, then it is that the still small voice is executing its sacred office.

This is a main point this contact of the soul with God—this breaking down of the barriers of things visible, this closing in with God, the unseen. Oh, it is a sight such as angels delight to behold when a man bows before the Most High and listens to his great Father's voice, and then tells out to Him all his heart, without attempting to hide anything from Him. This is never produced by whirlwind, fire, or earthquake, it is the effect of the voice of gentle silence, for God is in it. Vain are eloquence, argument, music, and sensationalism, the Spirit works all holy things, and He alone, and this He works in the solemn silence of a soul subdued by love.

III. In the third place, let us say a little concerning THE LESSON WHICH ELIJAH LEARNED from this acted parable.

He himself had taught the people by deeds rather than words, and now he is himself similarly instructed. He was taught several things which it was essential for him to know, and among them, first, that *God does not always use the means which we suppose He will use*. We sit down and think how a nation can be blessed, and we form our own idea of the most excellent way, but our thoughts are not the Lord's thoughts, for as the heavens are high above the earth so are His thoughts above our thoughts, and His ways above our ways.

I dare say you, my sanguine brother, have a well-ordered scheme in your own mind which you would like to see worked out, by which the Gospel would be made known to heathen lands very rapidly. So many workers of one kind are to assist a certain number of a higher grade, and by a wise division of labor, and allotment of districts, the work is to be systematically done. Be not too fond of favorite methods, or you may suffer great disappointment, for God, as a rule, does not use our schemes. The great steps of the Infinite are not to be measured by our childish walk. It is not ours to propose to Him what He shall do, nor how or when He shall do it, but we must leave to His sovereign will to choose and to command, and we shall yet see how wondrous He is in His workings.

Elijah's life had been one continued storm. From the first time when he appears as the prophet of fire till he fled from Jezebel, he had always spoken out of the whirlwind, and either threatened or executed the judgments of the Lord, and it may be he relied too much upon this form of ministry. No doubt it was right in him to rebuke a sinful and obstinate people, but still God would let him know that Carmel, with its complete victory over Baal's priests, till its rivulets ran red with their blood, was not the way by

which God would vanquish His enemies. Men would not worship God aright merely because in an excited moment they had slain a band of impostors. The heart is not won to loving reverence by slaughter. It is not by blood that men are baptized into spiritual worship. This same lesson has to be learned over and over by us all, let us repeat it, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD."

It is to be lamented that the most of professors obstinately cling to the fatal error of looking for displays of power of one kind or another. I hear that a certain church is seeking for a very *clever* man, she thinks that God is in the wind. I hear the deacons say, "We must look out for the best man. No matter what we give, nor what church we rob of its minister, we must get a first-class man, and then we shall have a full house, and see many converted." Nothing of the kind, it is not God's way to work by clever men, and men who aim at grandeur of speech.

He may, if so He pleases, permit the house to be thronged with attentive hearers, but converts will be few when people are relying upon cleverness. "Oh, but we must have a first-rate organization; we must work the church up by revival services." Yes, do it, and do it again, if you choose, and the result may be good if you can do the work humbly, but if you trust one iota upon the means employed, away will depart the Spirit, and you will see nothing but your own folly. That still small voice will be hushed and silent, while the boasts of your wisdom resounds like a howling wind or a thunder unaccompanied by rain.

We must know this—that God will work by what means He pleases, and next that *all means are useless apart from Him*. All wind, all fire, all earthquake, all power and grandeur, fail unless the still small voice is there and God be in it. The church has had this dinned into her ears, and doctrinally she believes it, but alas, she practically goes forth and behaves as if the opposite theory were true. She looks for divine results to human causes, and is, therefore, full often deceived. Too much is her dependence fixed upon an arm of flesh, and while this is so we cannot expect to see the bare arm of the Eternal displayed in the midst of our camps.

God would have Elijah know another thing, and He would have us know it, that *our weakness may be our strength*. Elijah did not know anything about those seven thousand converts of his who had been won by the silent voice of his devoted life. Because the success of Carmel melted like the morning mist, he thought that his career had been a failure all along, and that he had brought no one to reverence JEHOVAH, but he was reading with the eyes of unbelief, and his imagination was leading him rather than the facts of the case.

Here are seven thousand people scattered up and down the country to whom, God has blessed Elijah's testimony. If He had not blessed his big things as he had desired, yet his little things had prospered greatly. It was Elijah's daily conduct rather than his miracles which had impressed these seven thousand and led them to hold fast their integrity. The Lord would have us know that He works rather by our weakness than by our strength, and often makes most use of us when in our own judgment we have displayed nothing but our feebleness.

Moreover, the Lord would have us note *the strength of other people in their weakness*. That lesson we do not always catch up so soon as we do the first. We are pleased to learn that when we are weak we are strong, because being generally weak we are glad to learn that we are usually strong, but we speak not thus of others, who may in some respects be our inferiors. If we see a man a little more energetic than usual we inquire petulantly, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" If some holy woman bursts out into pleading testimony, we say, "She had better be quiet. Nothing will come of her talking." A work is doing over yonder, and we do not quite approve of its methods, and therefore we cry, "Foolishness!"

Ah, but brother, you have to learn the strength of other weak people as well as of yourself. You know that there are others as weak as you, you are very glad to find that out, and go and tell it, but there are also others as strong as you whom God makes strong because they are weak, dealing with them in His tender loving-kindness just as He does with you. Oh that you would learn this, and then you will see

that there are not only one or two faithful workers, but thousands, who are true to their Lord and valiant for the truth upon the earth.

The Lord still has a remnant who is as faithfully serving Him as you are, they have not bowed the knee to Baal nor kissed the calves, but still stand erect in their testimony to God. Believe this and be happy, for God wants you to believe it. He is not always with our powerful preachers, our learned canons, our reverend bishops, our great generals, and all that, but He may be with that poor young brother who stands at the corner of the streets, and speaks such broken sentences, and with that dear sister who takes a dozen or two girls and teaches them the Savior's love. You wonder what these can possibly have to teach, and yet the Lord is quietly and effectually speaking by their gentle voices.

We are wonderful critics, handy and keen at pulling the Lord's servants to pieces, but the mercy is, the Lord takes a sweet vengeance on us for them by giving them all the greater blessing, that our judgment may be set on one side, and that we may understand that still He speaks by whom He wills and uses whom He chooses, and that evermore this truth is sure, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts." The still small voice of the humble, retired Christian may have more power in it under God than all the thunder and the lightning of the greatest orator that ever pleaded for Christ.

IV. Lastly, LET US LISTEN this morning, let the listening be practiced at once, most reverently.

If we are too many to do it here, let us get home to our own rooms and listen there. Especially I do address myself to you who do not know the Lord, you cannot cause the still small voice to be heard, but often, by making silence and sitting still in it, you may hear that call of tender love. What does it say to you unconverted people? Does it not speak to your consciences, and say, "How is it that you have lived so long in the light and yet have never seen it? How is it you have dwelt so long in the atmosphere of love and yet have never felt it? How is it that Jesus Christ has been preached to you, and you know He is the only Savior, and yet you have rejected Him?"

Years are coming upon you, your hair is turning grey, you have always hoped and half resolved that there should be a time of change to you, and yet you are just the same. I will not speak *for* your conscience, but I do ask your conscience to inquire of you, why do you use your best friend so ill? why do you slight His bleeding love? why you postpone Him for any trifle, and are always saying, "Go Your way for this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for You"?

When conscience has done speaking, then let Jesus speak. And what will He say? "I have loved you, and given Myself for you, wherefore do you despise Me? I have come to you and spoken in accents of love, and I have bidden you trust Me, and I have said I will not cast you out if you will come to Me, why do you not come and trust?" Let His soft voice be heard, the voice of the Babe of Bethlehem, the voice of the dying Lamb on Calvary, let Him plead with you, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Do you hear His voice, let other sounds be hushed that you may hear it. Get quiet at home and bend your ear, hearkening diligently to the voice of mercy from the bleeding Son of God.

Then let the great Father speak and say, "Come to Me, My child, you have wandered, but I am ready to receive you still. If you will come to Me in truth, confessing your transgression, I am faithful and just to forgive you your sin, and to save you from all unrighteousness. Come unto Me, and you shall live in My household, and enjoy all the privileges of My children."

Equally hearken diligently to the teachings of the Holy Ghost. Sit down and say, "Speak, blessed Spirit, speak to me." You cannot do better this afternoon than set aside a silent time that you may incline your ear unto the Spirit of grace. Give yourself an hour of quite alone, and sit still, and say, "Now, Lord, You blessed Spirit, speak to the breaking of my heart with shame for my transgressions, speak, then, to the healing of my heart as I believe in Jesus, speak to me while I wait for You." Oh, how many would get a blessing if they did this!

Finally, let me with tenderest accents ask each unconverted one the question JEHOVAH asked of Elijah. "What do you here, Elijah?" What brought you here this morning? Did you come to worship God, or to gratify curiosity, or merely because it is a proper thing to go to a place of worship on a

Sunday? “What do you here, Elijah?” What have you been doing all morning? When the hymn was lifted up, did you praise or did you mock? And when prayer was offered did you join in it, or have you been sitting here insulting the Most High by offering Him the outside of devotion while your heart has been far from Him? “What do you here, Elijah?”

Oh, that you would reply, “I do repent of what I have done, and of what I have not done, and I lay myself down at the Father’s feet, and beseech Him for Jesus’ sake to have pity upon me and forgive me my transgressions.” You are forgiven already if you believe in Christ Jesus. If you trust your soul with Jesus, go your way, there is no sin in God’s book against you now, He has blotted out your transgressions, and will no more remember your sins. It shall be a happy day, for the voice shall speak to you this morning, and never leave off speaking till the King shall come in His glory, and take you to His right hand. The Lord bless you, dear friends, by His own Spirit, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 KINGS 19

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—241, 590, 570

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.