

Prophecy 104 (the Voice of God and How It Sounds)

1 Kings 18-19

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/prophecy-104-the-voice-of-god-and-how-it-sounds/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

[Opening song: The Sound of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel]

Prayer

Father, we make so much noise. We speak so many words and say nothing. Yet out of the silence, you speak a Word and literally say everything. So, Lord God, I pray that you would help us to speak that Word...that you would speak that Word to our heart this morning...that you would cause us to preach your Word. So of course, we say that in Jesus's name. Amen.

Message

Video clip: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*
Python (Monty) Pictures, (1975)

Scene opens with Tim the Enchanter standing on a mountain, shooting fire by waving his arms, as knights in armor stand by watching across the mountainside.

The Enchanter throws his arms into the air as fire comes from them, and lands beside the traveling knights, still casting fire. The knights applaud as the Enchanter points his staff at the mountain and splits it with fire.

I apologize for that. That's Tim the Enchanter from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. And whenever I think of Elijah, I think of Tim the Enchanter.

Elijah is one of the most ancient of the prophets, and he prophesied in Israel during a time which I think of as the "Wild West of Prophecy." Read 1st and 2 Kings, and you'll see what I mean—prophets telling people to do weird things, and if they don't, they curse them and kill them. One prophet is teased by some little boys for being bald—and so he curses the boys in the name of the Lord, and two she-bears maul them, all 42 of them.ⁱ

"Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord," through Jeremiah, "and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"ⁱⁱ

The Word is like a weapon, and in 1 and 2 Kings, it seems to me that God let some pretty immature children play with his biggest gun. That's one thing that's always bothered me about prophets—

they can say the most amazing, powerful, God-inspired things, and then just be total turds. I've often complained to God about this, and then he seems to remind me, *"Yes Peter, this is true; I let them speak my word... and I let you preach it... or Him."*

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah says to King Ahab of Israel:

"There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

Next verse—**"And the Word of the Lord came to Elijah**—that's right, a walking, talking word. **"Depart... and hide yourself," says the Word.**

So, for three years, Elijah is miraculously sustained by ravens and a Sidonian Gentile widow.ⁱⁱⁱ And after three years, the Word of the Lord tells him to show himself, once again, to King Ahab.

Ahab was married to Jezebel, the Sidonian Gentile princess who had enticed him into worshipping Baal, the fertility god, and Asherah his consort. That worship involved ritual prostitution to encourage Baal to mate with Asherah and fertilize the land. And it involved child sacrifice. And to advance the worship of Baal, Jezebel had ordered that all the prophets of Yahweh be slaughtered... although Obadiah hid one hundred of them in two caves, where he fed them with bread and water.

Well, in 1 Kings 18, Elijah shows himself to Ahab and challenges him and the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mt. Carmel. They send for all of Israel and the 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah says, "The God who answers by fire, he is God." And everyone agrees.

The prophets of Baal lay their bull on the altar, cry out, and cut themselves, but there is no "voice," no fire.

At noon, Elijah mocks them by literally calling out, "Perhaps your god is taking a dump, or taking a nap and needs to be wakened."

They rave on, cutting themselves, bleeding all over the place, from noon until three (which interestingly enough, was the time during which the sky grew black and the earth shook as Jesus hung on the wood on Mt. Calvary.) But for the prophets of Baal, quote: **"There was no voice." (v. 29)**

Well, Elijah had taken twelve stones, built an altar, and named it Israel. On the altar, on the mountain he had placed the timbers, and on those timbers, he had placed the sacrificial offering.^{iv}

Elijah had the people douse the whole thing with water three times, and then at 3 pm, (the time of the evening sacrifice, the moment Christ died), Elijah called to God saying, "I have done all these things at your word."

v. 37 • "Answer me, O Lord, answer me that your people may know."

And then the Fire fell. And the people fell, crying out, *"Yahweh is God."*

- Elijah and the people then slaughter all the prophets of Baal.
- Ahab eats and drinks the sacrificial meal on the mountain.
- Then Elijah tells Ahab to go, for the rain is coming.
- As the sky opens and a torrent begins to flood the parched earth with the water of life, in the miraculous power of the Lord, Elijah girds his loins and runs ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way back to Jezreel, the King's winter palace 17 miles away... he's pumped!

I'm sure that Elijah was convinced that Israel would now turn back to God, for God had answered by Fire—*"Is not my word like fire,"* says the Lord.

Pretty awesome, huh? I mean, a little politically incorrect at points—slaughtering 850 prophets of a competing faith system, as well as 42 boys that liked to tease bald people. It helps me to remember that these people are not, then, endlessly tortured by their Creator but will be finished in his image like all of us, eventually.

It also helps me to remember that the Word of God comes for all of us. In the Revelation, we learned that he's the Reaper, and he's not Grim.

Well, no matter what, the Word of God is awesome! It's firepower. It's no wonder that people want to speak it. I've spoken it... and witnessed its power.

Scripture claims that we all battle against principalities and powers, a spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places... That includes Lucifer, Baal, and Asherah and myriads of demons.

I think we battle them all the time—they constantly whisper their lies. In rare instances, due to some very graphic and intentional events, they can take control of a person's body for a time. If you've ever seen the real thing, it can blow your mind.

But what will really blow your mind is that sometimes you can speak a word that hits a demonic spirit, like a bullet from a gun hits a deer. It can also hit people that way—like Ananias and Saphira, or even the Early Church as it did on Pentecost when Peter preached. It can hit like that, and it can also cut and heal and transform lives.

There've been times I've preached, and it all felt so dead. Other times I've preached, and the power scared me.

You know people want the Word of God...and they don't want the Word of God... at least not living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit...

Well, fifteen years ago, I was pumped, for I was watching the Word of God deliver people from demons, build a church into a few thousand, and I was expecting a Reformation—for what I preached was the Word of God.

So, Elijah ran to Jezreel in the Power of the Lord. Ahab went into his palace and told Queen Jezebel what had happened. But Jezebel didn't repent, Jezebel flew into a rage. She sent a message to Elijah saying that she had bound herself with an oath, and Elijah would be dead within a day.

1 Kings 19: 3 · **"Then, he was afraid."**

Afraid, Elijah ran to save his life. Commentators say this makes no sense... But I think it makes sense, perfect sense.

Ahab followed Jezebel. And Israel would follow Ahab. Elijah expected everyone to repent at the Revelation of the Word... but they did not.

- Remember how Israel sang and danced as the Word of God split the Sea, and then complained forty years in the wilderness?

- Remember how Jesus heard the Word, “This is my beloved son,” and then the Spirit led him into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights?
- Remember how the crowds chanted, “Hosannah!” but when the Word didn’t do what they expected him to do, they chanted “Crucify! Crucify!”
- Remember in the Revelation, no one repents until the end of the sixth seal, sixth trumpet, and sixth bowl... the edge of the Seventh Day?

You see, I think Elijah had plans for the Word, and when the Word failed, it terrified Elijah. But then again, maybe the Word didn’t fail; maybe the Word just had different plans than Elijah—maybe Elijah didn’t really know the Word.

v. 3: “Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a [solitary] broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

Wow, he must’ve thought he was better than his fathers. And now he runs for his life, and yet at the same time he asks God to take his life—that’s what depression, despair, and suicide look like.

You try to save your life, and then you loathe your life and want God to take it. He wants to die... Have you ever been there? ...I have.

Elijah prays that God would kill him.

5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”

This Angel of Yahweh (there is only one of these, looks like a man, talks like God)... This Angel of Yahweh (who feeds Elijah with Bread and Water under this tree)— this God/man says, “The journey is too great for you.”

What journey?

8 And [Elijah] arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him—that walking talking Word—and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

I love that! Elijah spoke the Word, and now the Word is messing with Elijah. “*What are you doing here Elijah?*” What is Elijah doing there?

Mount Horeb is the Mountain of God where Moses received the Ten Commandments; this might even be the cleft in the Rock, where God hid Moses as he passed by proclaiming his name.

It makes some sense that Elijah would go back; when I'm depressed, I drive by the house I grew up in and I think about my dad.

It makes some sense that he'd want more instruction, more law—We all ask, “What do you want me to do, God?” The Law of Moses is the Word of God written on stone; it's knowledge of Good and evil that you can use to make yourself more like God.

It makes some sense that he'd want more “*fire power.*” When God gave the Law to Moses on the Mountain, he came down in fire, the earth trembled and shook, there was the continual blast of a trumpet sound—*Earth, Wind and Fire.* Maybe Elijah wants the Word of God to work for him once again, like it did on Mt. Carmel. Elijah wants the Word to work.

And the Word asks him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Maybe he went there to get more words, more law, more firepower...

Maybe he went there to die...

Maybe the angel sent him to the mountain to die.

Elijah had prayed, “Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

He asked to die, not only to this world but to himself, his own ego. Maybe the cave is a grave, and it's this journey—the journey to his own grave—that is too much for him. So the angel gives him bread and water under the tree, so he could make the forty-day journey to his own death. We're on a forty-day journey to Easter, called Lent.

“What are you doing here Elijah?” asks the Word of God.

Maybe he came for more words, more firepower.

Maybe he came to die.

Maybe he came to live—he only wanted to die, for he had wanted to live. . . . You actually can't die—to your own ego—unless you want to live.

“What are you doing here?” asked the Word.

Maybe he meant the cave on the mountain...

Maybe he meant “here at all.” That is, “Elijah, why do you exist?”

Have you ever felt like someone is asking you that question? I think I used to hear it all the time... When I had nothing to do as a child, I'd lie in the grass and look to the sky—what the ancients called “the heavens”—and I'd ponder this question: “What am I doing here... in this world?” It's a wonderful, terrifying, thrilling question that I used to ponder all the time, and I think my heart knew the answer.

But if I hear the question now, I might answer: “*What am I doing here?! I'm writing a sermon; I'm looking for words to change people's hearts, heal my own heart, and save us all. I'm looking for ways to shake the earth, make the Spirit move, and get the fire to fall—I'm busy saving my world... I've worked incredibly hard, feel terribly alone, and frankly this journey that I call 'my life' is, well, getting to be just too much for me.*”

“What are you doing here?” asks the Word of God and Angel of Yahweh. It's not that the Word doesn't know but that we don't know... or perhaps, have forgotten.

¹⁰ [Elijah] said, **“I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”** ¹¹ And [the Word of God] said, **“Go out and stand on the mount before [liphnay] the Lord [Yahweh].”**

We so easily miss this, but *liphnay* (*lif-nah-ee*), here translated “before,” is the combination of the Hebrew preposition *li*, translated “to,” and the Hebrew word *paneh*, which is translated, “face,” and sometimes “presence.”

The Word of Yahweh just told Elijah to go out of this cave, or cleft in the Rock, and stand before the face of Yahweh, the Lord God. And it was on this mountain, perhaps even in this very spot, that Moses had asked to see the Lord’s Glory and Yahweh said, “I will make all my goodness pass before [liphnay] you and will proclaim before [liphnay] you my name, ‘Yahweh.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show Mercy.” Then, he said, “You cannot see my face [paneh], for man [Adam] may not see me and live.” (Exodus 33:18-20)

So, God hid Moses in the cleft of the Rock, and Moses only saw his backside—he got the law and a glimpse of God’s behind. Elijah is told to go out and stand before his face.

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke 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. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound [qowl] of a low whisper [“a sound, a thin silence”].

“Thin silence” is the ESV footnote and the most literal translation, but they translate it as “low whisper,” for what the rip is the “sound of silence?” How could that possibly make sense?

“Sound” (qowl) is normally translated “Voice,” so the most literal translation would be “a voice, a thin, small or sheer silence.”

- The NRSV translated this “a sound of sheer silence.”
- The KJV, NKJV and RSV translate this “a still small voice.”

I’ve always wanted to hear the word of God the way my wife sometimes hears the word of God, the way the prophets seemed to hear the word of God. You know, up to this point, Elijah had heard the Word of God, because the Word of God—just spoke words that he heard.

He took no classes, he read no books, there was no technique—he just heard words—sometimes my wife will just hear words...

I’ve always wanted to hear the words, and people told me that it was *a still small voice*, which meant that I’d drive myself crazy, trying to figure out which words were the stillest and the smallest, as if God could do nothing but whisper... As if he tries, but you know, God can only whisper.^v

Well, up to this point, Elijah just heard words—he wasn’t *the God whisperer*. [Peter hums in meditation “hmmmmmm...”]

One day, I walked into a room and found my son Coleman with his fingers jammed in each ear, yelling, “Jesus, I can’t hear you! Jesus I can’t hear you!” Someone must’ve told him that Jesus was in his heart, which he is, and that he could hear him if he listened for a still small voice.

You know, once I did hear words—very crisp, clear, and rather devastating in an absolutely wonderful way. And then later that same day, the Lord literally pinned me to the floor, almost broke my arms, pulled back the curtain in my mind... and I knew the Voice of God was anything but small or still... and yet in a strange way it was *silent*. It was not simply sound waves in the atmosphere of this world.

Jonathan, my first-born son, was born after twenty-four hours of intense labor. He was covered in blood and bruises. His head had been crushed into a cone. He was utterly traumatized and wouldn't stop crying. The nurse wrapped him in a blanket, spoke loving words in a soothing voice, and he still wouldn't stop shrieking. Then she handed him to me and said, *"Talk to him. He knows your voice."*

I said, *"Scooter..."* And immediately, he grew silent, as if he knew he was exactly where he belonged, he entered my rest... and fell asleep.

It shocked me, and it still shakes me to my core...How did he know my voice? He couldn't discern the meaning of individual words, and yet he knew my voice.

How did he know my voice? He'd never seen my face, felt my touch... and yet he knew my voice.^{vi}

He knew my voice, for as I've told you, I drew a face on Susan's belly with an indelible black magic marker. And every night, I'd put my face right next to that face, and I'd say stuff like, *"Scooter (we called him scooter, for we didn't know if he was a boy or a girl and we wanted both). I'd say, "Scooter, I'm your dad, hope you're doing OK in there. I'm getting so excited to meet you! I love you."*

Just imagine. He'd never seen my face or felt my touch—to see my face and feel my touch, he had to die to his womb world, and be born into my world... That's traumatic... Yet now, *he rested in my arms for he already knew my voice.*

He knew my voice, for when I spoke, everything in that womb-world would vibrate to the sound of my voice. He knew my voice, but my voice was not a particular "thing" in his world; it was bigger than his entire world. It was not a "thing" in his world, nor could it be explained by anything in his world... yet he knew it.

Are you aware of "things" in this world, but not of this world, that cannot be in this world, that cannot be explained by this world?

How about "the Good," Goodness, Beauty—what is Beauty? Scientists can't isolate this in a lab and explain what it is, but we all know that it is. How about Truth—how do you know truth is true?

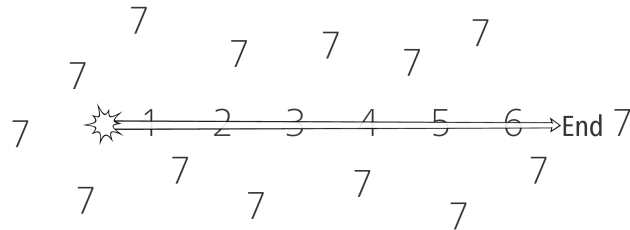
No one can prove truth to be true, yet everyone has faith in truth. To even say, *"There is not truth,"* you have to assume your statement is true.

How about Love? Love is the opposite of this world—true love is not the *survival of the fittest*, but *the sacrifice of the fittest*.

And when all members love, they form a body of Life, what is Life? What is life but a lot of things freely choosing to love?

See, maybe there's a face just outside your world, the other side of the Big Bang. And every day, the face says, "I'm your dad. Hope you're doing OK in there. I'm so excited to meet you."

And when the face talks, everything moves, and yet you cannot pinpoint the Voice in the atmosphere of space and time, for your dad is bigger than all of space and all of time.



Last week I showed you this picture and said: *The Kingdom of Heaven is not simply on this timeline. In the same way, your Father is not simply on this timeline; he's even bigger than the Seventh Day.*

You see space and time themselves are like a womb. But Goodness, Beauty, Truth, and Love are the sound of something from beyond this womb of a world. And the fact that you know what they are testifies to the fact that you are being made for another world.

Martin Luther wrote, "If a baby could reason, surely it would wonder: *What are these hands for, this mouth for, these eyes for?*" They have no value in the womb world.

Have you ever wondered what faith is for, what hope is for? —If you hope for Love, maybe you're hoping for another world, being prepared for that world... and so you already recognize the voice of your father.

You know Jonathan heard basically the same words from the nurse, but he knew they didn't come from me—for they weren't my voice. Just because you hear words, don't assume it's the voice of your Father.^{vii}

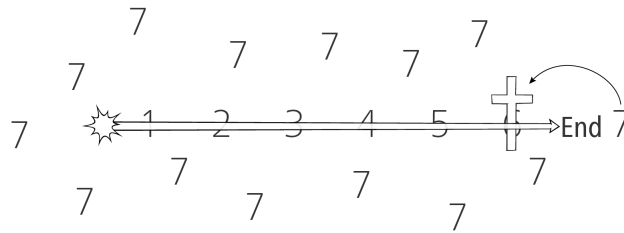
But now... what if you heard words, understood the words, and recognized the voice speaking those words? What if the voice said, "Tell King Ahab to repent," or "Susan, tell Peter to stay on the path," or "Have no fear because I am with you."

If you heard words, would it mean that the voice had gotten bigger or smaller, stronger or weaker? I used to get so stressed about hearing words, and all the while my entire world was vibrating to the sound of my father's voice saying, "I love you."

That's what the Lord showed me years ago when he pinned me to the floor after I told him that he never spoke to me, and I asked him to just break my arms if I wasn't listening... I learned that God's Voice is not small or weak; it creates and sustains everything that's anything, so when he speaks everything moves...^{viii}

But when you hear words, it's not because his voice got bigger, but because his voice got smaller—he limited himself to the little prisons that are the human words with which we each try to capture meaning—“*logos*” in Greek.

He limits himself every time he allows us to speak of him using human words. Just like he limited himself to a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger... and then humbled himself to the point of death on a tree.



The Voice became a Word in Human Flesh. We took the Life of the Word by nailing him to a tree in the garden—we turned the living Word into a dead word. That's what we do with our words, our laws, and our religions. ^{ix}

It's one thing to say the word "Susan." I can control that word. I know the word. But it's quite another thing to look Susan in the face and be known by Susan.

There was a time when Adam could look the Good in his face. And then he took knowledge of the Good from a tree in a garden, and everything died... Love in flesh became the law in stone, and "the life" was just some words.

When a prophet speaks some words but hasn't listened to the voice of Love, perhaps he crucifies the Word.

When a preacher preaches some words but hasn't listened to the voice of God, perhaps the words are accurate but dead... and deadly.

When a "Christian" tells someone about Jesus, but hasn't listened to the voice of the Father, perhaps it would be better if they just didn't speak.

"If I speak in the tongue of men and of angels," wrote Paul, "if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge (knowledge of the Good), if I have all faith so as to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing."

Love is the Voice, and Jesus is his Word. ^x

So, when the Word became flesh and took the form of a servant, of course, we took his life on a tree—and we put his body in a cave... on a mountain. But on the third day, he rose from the dead and revealed the Glory of God— *We see the glory of God shining in the face of Christ*, wrote Paul. ^{xi}

He's the firstborn from the dead, firstborn of all creation, firstborn of many brethren and "sister-en"... That's us.

On Good Friday, we watched our older Brother leave this womb of a world... to us it looked like death—but in fact, he was being born. We were watching a birth from inside the womb. And on Easter, he returned, testifying that God is love, and his commandment is life—eternal life; and so he gave his life to us.

So anyway, the Word of God said to Elijah in the cave on the mountain, after they both had been to the tree, "*Go stand before the face of Yahweh.*"

And Yahweh passed by, but he was not in Earth, Wind, or Fire, and yet all the Earth, Wind, and Fire was in Him... and Elijah was in Him. The Lord was not in Earth, Wind, and Fire, *but from beyond* the Earth, the Wind, and the Fire, Elijah *heard* something, *sensed* something that he could only describe as "the Sound of Silence."^{xii}

13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

He must've gone back in the cave when the earth shook, the wind blew, and the fire fell, but he repented—he came out of the cave at the Voice of silence.

When Susan was in labor, I'd speak to Susan's belly between contractions, saying, "*I love you, Scooter... Come on out of there.*"

Six days you shall labor and on the Seventh, rest.^{xiii}

You know, I've always wanted to hear the voice of God and have been so afraid that I don't hear the voice of God that I just labor and labor and labor. ...But maybe all I need to do is stop talking...

You know why I labor? You know why I look for words to move earth, wind, and fire? You know why I so often find myself talking?

I think I'm trying to *save you, save my world, and save myself*, for I've listened to another voice that's told me that *God won't do it...* and in fact, *it's Him that I need to save us all from.*

So, what is it that happens when we come out of the cave in which we each hide... and then stand in silence before the face of I Am that I am?^{xiv}

I don't think there are any words—human words—for all of our words are the cave in which we hide, the fig leaves with which we cover our shame. So, it's something you do, and yet it's purposely doing nothing, until you realize that all has been done... It's entering God's Rest.^{xv}

Sometimes I set a timer; I'd suggest twenty minutes. Then, do your best to stop the incessant string of words you formulate in your brain—you can do this by focusing on a word or a picture that reminds you of God... you could picture yourself standing at the entrance of Elijah's cave. Then simply be aware of his presence—he's always present ("In Him we live and move and have our being.") He is I am.

Be conscious of the Consciousness that is always conscious of you.^{xvi} Breathe and remember you are the breath of I Am.

I am the breath of I Am who is Love.

Unprotected by words, in the presence of Love, I realize I can't justify myself, and my ego begins to die... and yet I do not die; I begin to live.

- When I stop *justifying myself*; I realize that I am justified.
- When I stop *trying to save the world*; I realize God is the savior, and that with my anxiety and fear, I've been trying to save the world from him.
- When I stop *trying to create myself*; I realize that I am his creation, and *it is finished*, and lo and behold, *heaven is at hand*.
- When I stop *thinking about what I have done and need to do*, I can just *be*, which is exactly where "I am" is: *now*.

"Now is the day of Salvation;"^{xvii} "Now is the judgment of this world;" "Now will the ruler of this world be cast out (Satan doesn't do well with "now.")"^{xviii}

I am... the breath of I am, Now.

When I stop speaking words; I can become the Word I am... The walking, talking Word of God... I am his body.

v. 12) "... after the fire the sound, [qowl: a voice], a thin silence ¹³ And when Elijah heard it [the voice of thin silence], he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold ["Check this out!"], there came a voice [qowl: a sound, same word] to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

Now this is the mind bender that we modern people don't get, and ancient storytellers would have gotten right away. Everything in this little dialogue in verses 13 and 14 is exactly the same as the little dialogue in verses 9 and 10, *except* that...

It's no longer *the walking, talking Word of God* with Elijah under the tree and in the cave that asks the question, "*What are you doing here?*" It's "*The Voice*," which clearly implies that the walking, talking Word of God, who is the Angel of Yahweh, is also the Sound of Sheer Silence... And now *this Voice of the Creator* from beyond space and time is not only with Elijah in the cave—He's *the presence of Yahweh* in Elijah, as he walks out of that cave and into a new life.

I'm saying, the cave is a grave, and the grave is a womb, and the word is seed, from the Voice beyond space and time. So, Elijah was just born from above.

Now Elijah will not only *speak the word of God*; he will *be* who he is—the *Word of God that is Spoken*.

"*What are you doing here?*" asks the sound of silence.

Do you know what I think we're doing here? I think we're observing our own birth, our own creation, so we will end-fully enjoy ourselves—the image and likeness of I am that I am. So, we will forever enjoy the face of our Father and rest in his arms, for we will know that we do not create ourselves, but we are constantly created by Grace—the Love that creates all things.

And so, it's through Faith that we rest in the arms of Grace and become who we truly are... and Faith cometh by hearing the Voice of thin Silence.

Now I don't know if I said that just right—don't know if I can? But fourteen years ago, I had spoken the Word, and the Word was fire. I watched it bind Satan, reveal Glory, and grow a church into thousands. In my mind, everything was set for a reformation, and all was going according to plan—I was pumped!—until someone complained to someone else, and folks in my denomination said, *“Hey, God can't make all things new... You can hope he can, but you must publicly confess it's impossible... or lose your ordination.”*

Leaders at my church didn't know what to say to our people. They couldn't really argue that the Word was wrong, for that's why people had come, and that's what they read in their Bibles. And so, they started to say, *“Peter's wrong—we can't say what it is, but just know that something is wrong with Peter.”*

At my last board meeting, I begged them to tell me what they thought was wrong with me—and at last they did. Some of you may have been there watching. They went around the room, one after another for about an hour.

One would say my leadership was weak, the next would say that I was too strong or demanding... and I'm sure I've been both. One would say I criticized President Bush, the next would say I didn't criticize President Bush enough...

Some of the things they said must have been true, and I'm sure some were false. But in the end, I had no words. I went down to my office, the lowest room in the church. I turned off the lights and curled up under my desk in the fetal position. I don't know how long I laid there, but it was a long time.

I thought I was dying; but now I think I was being born.

That's a picture of *my* cave, but I know that you have one also.

Sometimes when I feel far from God, that's the thing I picture in silence—I picture myself in the dark, curled up in the fetal position under my desk... *and* I picture Jesus, the walking, talking Word of God with me, holding me in the dark, alone... together. Then after a time, I get up, leave the cave, and go to work.

¹⁵ And the Lord said to [Elijah], “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazeal to be king over Syria.

¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.

See, Elijah will still speak words, but he'll begin to speak them in a new way. He's no longer *telling the story*, using the words that God gives him. *He is the story* that God is telling... the incarnation of the Word.^{xix}

If you know the rest of his story, you know that this is not Elijah's plan.

Elijah is told to anoint Hazael King of Syria, and Hazael will, quote: "rip open" the pregnant women of Israel and "dash their babies to pieces."^{xx}

Bad will go to worse. Israel will fall. Then Judah will be taken captive to Babylon. Even with the words of God written in stone, no man is able to justify himself in the sight of God.

Bad will go to worse, and worse to absolute worst—but when we do our absolute worst, God reveals his very best—His Glory, His Face.

For the next 880 years, Israel continued to build an altar on Mt. Zion, until the walking, talking Word of God carried his wood, his timber, up that Mountain.

And there, Israel took the Life of the Word of God on a tree in a garden... But the Word of God had already given his Life to all of us the night before.

Communion

At the table, He broke the bread and he broke it, saying, "*This is my body, my story, given to you; take and eat.*" And in the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying, "*This is the eternal covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins—the Life is in the blood—drink of it all of you.*"

He gave this to 12 guys—living stones—a new Israel upon which he would build his New Jerusalem, his Temple, his Body, the Body of the Word. On Pentecost, the Fire fell, and they began to preach the Word... it's the same Word, but they were beginning to preach it in a new way.

And so now, to you, the Angel of Yahweh, says, "*The Journey is too great, too much for you... But it's not too much for me.*"

He gave bread and water to Elijah; but look, he's turned the water to wine.

We invite you to come, take the bread and wine, take the body and blood back to your seat, *be still* and *know* that I am is God... Then place his Word in your cave. [Peter eats the bread.]

The cave is a grave, but the grave is a womb, for the one that's with you in that cave is the promised seed, and you are now the Word that I am is speaking.

BENEDICTION:

There's one more fascinating little tidbit of information about Elijah: Elijah didn't die...

In 2 Kings 1, Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan, and chariots of fire and horses of fire descend from Heaven, separate Elijah from Elisha, and take him to heaven. It freaks everybody out—they even send search parties, thinking his body might be found on some mountain.

And 880 years later, Elijah does show up on a mountain in the Promised Land with Moses and the transfigured, walking, talking Word of God, who is now shining like the sun, for he is the face of Yahweh.

You see Elijah didn't die, for he had already died at the entrance to that cave on Mt. Horeb where he stood before the face of God.

But Moses did die; he died and went to his fathers in *Sheol*, which is sometimes translated "Hell."

Moses also saw God on Mount Horeb, but not his face, only his backside... So, Moses still needed to die the second death, the death of death, in order to live his eternal life.

If you believe in Jesus, you're like Elijah—Your body will die, but you (your soul, your psyche) won't die, for you've already lost it and found it in Jesus.

That's why he said, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

That's Good News! And if you believe it, you'll preach it with every breath and without even trying.

If someone is depressed, lonely, and ashamed and they say to you, "I want to die," you will say something like this to them,

Well let's do it together now! Let's stand before the face of Yahweh. Let's lose our lives and find them. For I have Good News: God is salvation, in a Word, Jesus.

In Jesus's name: Preach the Word. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ 2 Kings 2:23-24

ⁱⁱ Jeremiah 23:29

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Kgs 17:8-24; Luke 4:26

^{iv} It was a bull that Israel would sacrifice (Exodus 29, Leviticus 4) as a sin offering to consecrate the priests. Jesus is our sin offering and High Priest. Bulls were also offered as burnt offerings on high holy days, like the day of atonement.

^v Sometimes people say, "Well I think what God is trying to say...."
That's such an absurd statement, God doesn't try...

^{vi} Until that moment he had never felt my touch... and yet he was my touch—if you've taken biology or know about the birds and the bees, you know what I mean. He was and is actually my seed. The Word is also "the Promised Seed." "Let the Word of God Dwell in you richly," writes Paul.

^{vii} Check out 1 Kings 22:13-23

^{viii} The story is told of a very pious Jewish couple. They had married with great love, and the love never died. Their greatest hope was to have a child so their love could walk the earth with joy.

Yet there were difficulties. . . lo and behold, the wife conceived. . .

They named him Mordecai. . . He grew in age and wisdom and grace, until it was time to go to the synagogue and learn the Word of God.

Yet the next day he never arrived at the synagogue. Instead he found himself in the woods, swimming in the lake and climbing the trees.

So they called in the behavior modificationists to modify Mordecai's behavior. . .

they called in the psychoanalysts. . .

"Ah! Perhaps the Rabbi." . . "Leave the boy with me, and I will have a talking with him."

"Boy, come here." Trembling, Mordecai came forward.

And then the Great Rabbi picked him up and held him silently against his heart.

The next day he went to the synagogue to learn the Word of God. And when he was done, he went to the woods. And the word of God became one with the words of the woods, which became one with the words of Mordecai. And he swam in the lake. . . . And he climbed the trees.

And Mordecai himself grew up to become a great man. People who were seized with panic came to him and found peace. And when they came to him he said, "I first learned the Word of God when the Great Rabbi held me silently against his heart."

--Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*, pp. 121-123.

^{ix} Peter, I saw a picture of you with your mouth wide open, almost like you were screaming, and out of your mouth stuck your tongue but it was very long and on the end was a very ugly, hideous, grimacing face.

This did not make any sense until I asked what it meant, and the answer was that this is a picture of your greatest fear... that what you speak would either be wrong when it comes out or be twisted and used for evil.

But Jesus says to you, "Look at how I see you, as a faceless being full of light and nothing comes out of your mouth, it all proceeds out of your heart, that is My Heart that I have placed in you. When you are confronted with fear or failing, remember that I AM holding you up and you will not fall as long as you look at my face." –prophetic word, given to me by a friend

As you were preaching, God walked up to you, gently put His finger on your lips to quiet you and then placed you against the cross and as He slowly took your arms and unfolded them and began to nail your hands. He said this, "Close your mouth and **my** voice will come out. Shut your eyes, look at **my** face and all else will become mist. Open your hands, let go your life and watch **my** blood pour out. When you feel like a failure, **my** love changes lives." (Just a note, all this happened as if the entire world had slowed down and was moving in slow motion.) – a second prophetic word, given to me by the same friend

^x With "words" men try to capture the meaning (the logos) and use it/him for our own selfish purposes, when in fact, the meaning of all words is the revelation of Love.

So, whenever we speak the word, but not in love, perhaps we crucify the Christ. Whenever we take meaning—take logos—from the tree of knowledge to formulate words to justify ourselves, we sin the original sin. And isn't that what "sin" is: taking the Word of God from the tree of knowledge and using it, using him, to

make ourselves in the image of God? He was crucified once and for all—all of space and time, all sin. But we sin whenever we speak a word to justify ourselves... and he bore that sin from the foundation of the world, the edge of time and eternity.

^{xi} 2 Corinthians 4:6

^{xii} We are most deeply asleep at the switch when we fancy we control any switches at all. We sleep to time's hurdy-gurdy; we wake, if we ever wake, to the silence of God.

-Annie Dillard quoted In Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, p. 209.

^{xiii} The process of labor and rest is a rhythm that we are to live in this life, until we're born from this world and all our work is rest and our rest is work.

^{xiv} There is an absolute need for the solitary, bare, dark, beyond-thought, beyond-feeling type of prayer. . . . Unless that dimension is there in the Church somewhere, the whole caboodle lacks life and light and intelligence. It is a kind of hidden, secret, unknown stabilizer and compass too. About this I have no hesitation or doubts. -Thomas Merton

^{xv} This little thing that is made . . . God showed it to me as small as if it had been a hazel-nut. It was so small I thought it might have disappeared. In this blessed revelation God showed me three nothings. Of these nothings this was the first I was shown, and all men and women who wish to lead the contemplative life need to have knowledge of it: they should choose to set at nothing everything that is made so as to have the love of God who is unmade. This is why those who choose to occupy themselves with earthly business and are always pursuing worldly success have nothing here of God in their hearts and souls: because they love and seek their rest in this little thing where there is no rest, and know nothing of God, who is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is true rest. God wishes to be known and is pleased that we should rest in him; for all that is below him does nothing to satisfy us. And this is why, until all that is made seems as nothing, no soul can be at rest. When a soul sets all at nothing for love, to have him who is everything that is good, then it is able to receive spiritual rest. . . . And after this I saw God in an instant, that is in my understanding, and in seeing this I saw that he is in everything. I looked attentively, knowing and recognizing in this vision that he does all that is done.

-Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

^{xvi} But it would be very disturbing, indeed, it would be impossible, for me to look at a painting or a piece of cloth if I discovered while looking at it that it was the painting or the cloth that was looking at me. And this is the case with the Christian truth; it is Christian truth that is observing me, whether I am doing what it says I should do. See, this is why Christian truth cannot be presented for observation or discoursed upon as observations. It has, if I may say so, its own ears with which to hear; indeed, it seems to be all ears. It listens as the speaker speaks; one cannot speak about it as about an absentee or a merely objective presence, because, since it is from God and God is in it, it is present in a totally unique sense as it is being spoken about, and not as an object. Instead, the speaker becomes its object; the speaker evokes a spirit who examines him as he is speaking.

--*The Essential Kierkegaard*, edited by Howard and Edna Hong, p. 379

^{xvii} 2nd Corinthians 6:2

^{xviii} John 12:31

^{xix} Hearts that are "fit to break" with love for the Godhead are those who have been in the Presence and have looked with open eye upon the majesty of Deity. Men of the breaking hearts had (have) a quality about them not known or understood by common men. They habitually spoke (speak) with spiritual authority. They had (have) been in the presence of God and they reported (report) what they saw there.

They were (are) prophets, not scribes, for the scribe tells us what he has read, and the prophet tells us what he has seen.

The distinction is not an imaginary one. Between the scribe who has read and the prophet who has seen there is a difference as wide as the sea.

--A. W. Tozer

Out of the silence let the only real news come, which is sad news before it is glad news and that is fairy tale last of all. The preacher is not brave enough to be literally silent for long, and since it is his calling to speak the truth with love, even if he were brave enough, he would not be silent for long because we are none of us very good at silence. It says too much. So let him use words, but, in addition to using them to explain, expound, exhort, let him use them to evoke, to set us dreaming as well as thinking, to use words as at their most prophetic and truthful, the prophets used them to stir in us memories and longings and intuitions that we starve for without knowing that we starve. Let him use words which do not only try to give answers to the questions that we ask or ought to ask but which help us to hear the questions that we do not have words for asking and to hear the silence that those questions rise out of and the silence that is the answer to those questions. Drawing on nothing fancier than the poetry of his own life, let him use words and images that help make the

surface of our lives transparent to the truth that lies deep within them, which is the wordless truth of who we are and who God is and the Gospel of our meeting.

--Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy & Fairy Tale*, pp. 23-24

xx 2 Kings 8:12