

Discouraged Party of One! - Travis Huseby



How many of us have experienced times of discouragement in youth ministry? I can almost hear the resounding snickers across the land. Of course, we have all had times of discouragement. I'm not writing this article because that is where my heart is today, but rather to look at a text that has come alive to me recently. I hope this will be an encouragement to those struggling right now and perhaps a good reminder for those of us headed into discouragement in the future.

I enjoy reading through some of the more familiar texts of Scripture to see why they are so loved. The text I have in mind is often quoted when referring to God's voice, what it "sounds" like. You have heard many times that God's speaks in a "still small voice" right? As I looked at this passage again, recently, I was impacted by how very different the actual theme or "point" of the passage really is.

In I Kings 18 we read how Elijah conquered the false prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. The main point of that account is that God is the Lord of all creation. We see God in control of the fire that consumed the sacrifice, and we see Him in control of the rain that hadn't fallen for years. The only person who didn't recognize this truth was Jezebel. God is Sovereign over all creation; He is not to be worshipped as creation but as above it. The mistake of the false prophets was to see God in the fire and the wood and the other created things and the events of nature, like the wind and rain and the like.

Chapter 19 is not too different in focus. The roles are switched and Elijah is now the running pouting prophet and Jezebel, though vanishing from the cast after verse 2, is the confident one. This is often our focus in this passage along with the following depression of Elijah. There are great principles to learn from his depression and the gracious provision God. We see Elijah making conscious choices to remain in his depression though. No matter how much God provided for Elijah in His great mercy, Elijah couldn't and wouldn't see past his own pity party. He left his servant and went away to hide by himself, almost as if he were saying "discouraged party of one!"

The last part of this account (19:9-16) is the sad ending that no one expects unless they know the ending already. God speaks to Elijah and asks him what he is doing in the cave all by himself? Elijah's answer is a mournful complaint of how he is all alone in the service of the Lord. God in His grace doesn't rebuke Elijah but rather graciously seeks to restore him. He tells him to go out of the cave, for a demonstration that he needed a reminder of.

The problem is that Elijah disobeyed and stayed in the cave while God accomplished His display designed to encourage the heart of the pouting prophet. God proceeded to, I believe, remind Elijah of the truth behind the victory on Mount Carmel; that Jehovah God is not in the created elements, but in control of them. God was not in the wind, earthquake or the fire. After the demonstration was over, God spoke in a still small voice to Elijah. The God of the universe, who is Sovereign over all created things asked the same question of Elijah; "What are you doing here?" Elijah chose not to leave his pity party and answered in the same way he had 4 verses earlier. The failure of Elijah was to ignore that God was Sovereign over all creation (even Jezebel.) His failure to recognize the theme of the victory of Mount Carmel and the theme of God's display that day on the mountain side was very costly. God's mercy met His justice and Elijah was given the task of anointing Elisha in his place.

Too often we focus on God's still small voice and forget that He had been communicating with Elijah all through this account. God spoke through His angel in the wilderness and directly to Elijah (without the still small voice) in verses 9 and 11. It's probably best if we pull back from defining God's voice from this passage and begin to look at the main theme behind it all. God is above all creation and is able to handle all of our problems. God wants to use us and He gives us what we need to do so but He will not force us.

Maybe you are discouraged today and feeling all alone. Remember that our God is above all things and He wants to restore you. Focus on God and His majesty today instead of wallowing in your pity and you can see new passion and life restored where discouragement now resides.

