

Not by Might nor by Power — The Quiet Work of the Spirit

Ministry · April 2, 2023

The Soft, Gentle Voice — What the Lord Was Not In

First Kings 19 finds Elijah at the lowest point of his ministry. He had prayed earnestly against rain and been vindicated before all Israel at Carmel. And now, threatened by Jezebel, he had fled and collapsed under a juniper tree asking to die. He ate and drank what the angel provided and went in the strength of that food forty days to Horeb — the mount of God — where he took shelter in a cave.

There the Lord met him with a question: What doest thou here, Elijah? And then something remarkable happened. A great strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces. An earthquake. Fire. Three events that in any other setting would have seemed unmistakably like the Lord's arrival. But Jehovah was not in the wind. Jehovah was not in the earthquake. Jehovah was not in the fire.

After the fire came a soft, gentle voice. And it was the same question as before: What doest thou here, Elijah? Not a proclamation to the nation, not a dramatic reversal, not an earth-shaking display of power. A quiet word for the prophet's conscience. That was where the Lord was.

We tend to look for the earthquake and the fire. We note remarkable events — storms, upheavals, the dramatic turn of circumstances — and say, surely the Lord is speaking in this. He may be. But the pattern here is that God's real dealings with His servant came not in the wind and the fire but in the still small voice. The occasion of prophecy is failure, and the word God speaks into that failure is not loud and spectacular — it is quiet, personal, and directed at the conscience.

Zechariah's Lampstand — A Day of Small Things

Zechariah chapter 4 carries the same lesson into a different key. The prophet sees a golden lampstand with seven lamps, all connected, with a bowl at the top feeding oil through pipes to each of the seven. On either side of the bowl is an olive tree supplying the oil. The angel interprets the vision with a word directly for Zerubbabel, the man tasked with rebuilding the temple: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts.

The context is a day of small things. Israel has returned from Babylon, reduced, chastened, with no political power and no great resources. The temple they are rebuilding is nothing compared to Solomon's. Surrounding nations mock them. The great mountain of opposition before Zerubbabel is to become a plain — not by force of arms or political cunning, but by the Spirit of God.

The application to the church in this day, while not the primary meaning of the passage, is clear in outline. When we look at all Christians in the world today, we see what looks like seven separate candlesticks — each denomination, each tradition, each independent group standing alone. But when God looks, He sees one golden lampstand with seven lamps, all connected, all supplied by the one Spirit. The oil flowing to each lamp is not generated by the lamp itself. It comes from above.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts. —
Zechariah 4:6*

This is a day of small things. There will not be a great worldwide revival of the church that restores it to Acts chapter two. The Scripture does not promise that and history does not move that way. But the Holy Spirit continues to supply oil to the testimony, and the testimony continues to shine — not by might, not by the power of impressive organisations or large buildings or famous names, but by the Spirit. The light does not go out. The lamps are not self-sustaining; they are supplied.

The True Light — Coming Without Power

John 1 brings us to the heart of the matter. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. That was the true light which lighteth every man coming into the world.

He was in the world. The world was made by Him. And the world knew Him not. He came among His own, and His own received Him not. When He came as the light and love of God into this world, He came without outward power, without political authority, without the earthquake and the fire. This was the problem the Jewish nation could not get past. They were waiting for someone to come in power and deliver them from Rome. He came as the light, and light speaks to the conscience. It exposes what is hidden. It speaks of righteousness and holiness. And men who do not want their conscience spoken to do not want the light.

He came fully in the power of the Spirit. John 3:34 says that God gives not the Spirit by measure unto Him. Everything the Lord did, every word He spoke, every act of power He performed was in the fulness of the Spirit of God. And yet it was not seen and recognised as such. He manifested forth His glory, John says, when He turned the water to wine — and His disciples believed on Him. Not a national awakening, not a general recognition; His disciples believed. The testimony was carried on quietly, powerfully, by the Spirit.

The Man Born Blind — Eyes Opened to the Light

John 9 provides one of the most vivid illustrations of how the Lord works as light in the world. His disciples asked about the blind man: who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? The Lord's answer reoriented everything: neither, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day.

And then He made clay with spittle and anointed the man's eyes and sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. It was a deliberately unnatural method. No one would think that mud on the eyes was a remedy for blindness. The point was precisely that it was not natural — it was the power of God, the power of the Spirit, working through a means that had nothing to recommend it except the word of the Lord. The man washed and came back seeing.

What is striking in the rest of the chapter is the man's spiritual growth. He began not knowing who this Jesus was. When the Pharisees pressed him, he said: whether He be a sinner I know not — one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. As the interrogation continued, he grew bolder. He rebuked them for their pretended ignorance. He made the logical argument that since the world began no one had opened the eyes of one born blind, and therefore this man must be of God. And when the Lord found him and asked, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? — he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped.

This is the pattern of the light's working. Not a sudden overwhelming display that forces universal acknowledgment, but a quiet, steady opening of understanding — physical sight restored as the outward sign of spiritual sight being given — until the soul arrives at worship. That is how the Lord still works through His Spirit. Not by might, not by power, but by His Spirit. The darkness does not comprehend it. But those whom the Spirit opens to see it, worship.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. — John 9:5

The Blood of Christ Through the Eternal Spirit

Hebrews 9:14 ties these threads together in a single verse: how much rather shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to worship the living God? Everything in the life of the Lord Jesus from beginning to end was in the power of the Spirit of God. He was conceived by the Spirit, led by the Spirit into the

wilderness, returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and offered Himself on the cross through the eternal Spirit.

The result is a purged conscience. And the purpose of a purged conscience is worship — to worship the living God. As the blind man's opened eyes led him to worship, so the work of Christ applied by the Spirit to the conscience leads every redeemed soul to worship. This is what God is looking for from us. Not impressive religious activity, not the noise of a great wind, but the quiet fruit of the Spirit's work in a soul that has been brought to see the light and love of God in Christ, and bows in worship before Him.

God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. David could worship as he went up the mountain weeping and barefoot, fleeing his usurping son. The man born blind could worship as a person cast out of the synagogue, rejected by the religious authorities. The testimony goes on — small, quiet, Spirit-supplied, unimpressive to the world — but the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.