

"WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?"

"And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:9).

Because God speaks to men today through the Bible, we shall now consider an event in the life of the great prophet Elijah, and we shall find that the God who spoke to him still speaks to us if we are ready to listen.

The situation in which Elijah found himself when confronted with the pregnant question: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" was a strong one. It was the immediate sequel to the most spectacular event of his glorious ministry in the name of Jehovah. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal, some 450 in number, upon Mount Carmel. There they had erected their altar and on it had placed a bullock for sacrifice. All day long, from morning until evening, they had prayed to Baal to send fire to consume the sacrifice. Despite their dervish dances and wild imprecations, their prayers remained unanswered. There followed the calm prayer of Elijah and the answering fire of the Lord, falling to consume the burnt sacrifice together with the wood and the water that had been added by the prophet to make certainty doubly sure. Jehovah was vindicated and the prophets of Baal were routed. In a manner more dramatic than any that we can imagine, Elijah had proved that one with God is a majority.

When the worship of Baal had been overthrown publicly, Elijah expected King Ahab and Queen Jezebel to turn from their idolatry but he was sadly disappointed. The news of what had taken place at Mount Carmel enraged Jezebel against Elijah. In a very short while, Elijah was confronted by the messenger of Jezebel with the terrible threat to kill him within twenty-four hours. She was determined that she would inflict the same fate on Elijah as that which had befallen her own prophets.

Seized with a fear to which he had hitherto been a stranger, due to the hatred and persecuting zeal of this deceitful, unprincipled and wicked woman, Elijah decided to take his case in his own hands and preserve his life. Jezebel's threat sent him scurrying away to the desert and out of her reach. Upon his arrival at Beersheba Elijah left his servant and went a day's journey into the wilderness. There, in that solitary place, thinking that he was safe at last, Elijah gave way to despondency and prayed, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." That prayer indicated that he was in the depths of disappointment, discouragement and despondency. To him the world was so given over to wrong that it was no longer a desirable place in which to live. It is a dreadful thing for a person to sink to such a depth of wretchedness and despair, but such an experience comes to many of the Lord's people at one time or another. Elijah's discouragement was caused by physical exhaustion, apparent failure, grievous disappointment, enforced inactivity, spiritual loneliness, and diminished faith. With his vision of God obscured, his faith in others and in himself greatly diminished, it is not surprising that Elijah prayed to die. Although he requested death, he did not express the real sentiment of his heart. It was not the real Elijah speaking. He was down in the dumps so far that he was not at himself.

Knowing exactly what Elijah needed to cure his discouragement, God put him to sleep, guarded him while he slept, provided food for him when he awoke, permitted him to express his grief, convinced him that he had sinned, told him some good news, sent him back to work, and supplied him with sufficient strength for his journey and his task. In the strength for his journey and his task. In the strength which God had provided for him, Elijah made his journey for forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God.

On arriving at Horeb Elijah searched for a mountain cave in which to lodge and hide and bemoan the defeat of God. He had committed the blunder of being out of touch with the Lord. At the threat of a woman he had fled from the place of public testimony and active service. He had left the path of service with its opposition, persecution and suffering, and had sought a place of safety in wilderness solitude and in a mountain cave.

Elijah had turned away from the path of duty and God knew it. God knew where Elijah was and why he was there. There He asked him the question: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" God's question implied, "I am your Lord and Master and you do not have any right to be here without consulting Me. Give Me the reason for your conduct." God wanted Elijah to tell him all that was in his heart in order that He might help him.

By means of this same question, "What doest thou here?" has to do with three things:

I. A Person.

In the light of the Scriptures we know who the person was. It was Elijah.

1. Elijah was a servant of God.

He had been on intimate terms with God. He had exercised great faith in God. His faith in God was a grip upon that which was unseen and intangible, yet absolutely real and factual.

2. Elijah had been used of God.

What a man of courage, zeal, patience and faith Elijah was! He was a mighty man; indeed, a key-man; and God had wonderfully used him for the fulfillment of His purposes in those dark days of apostasy. Most of us feel very insignificant in comparison with Elijah, the spiritual giant and this mighty warrior.

3. Elijah was in very great need.

He was in need physically, mentally, and spiritually; but above all, spiritually. Usually our spiritual condition is the key to the release of blessings in our lives. Frequently we are physically ill and mentally upset, but if we would get spiritually adjusted we would be entirely well.

What is your need? Elijah was discouraged, disappointed, out of touch; he was on the run, he wanted to die, he was all mixed up in his thinking, and he was overwhelmed with a sense of failure. Do you fit into that picture at all? Well, thank God, Elijah came to the place of blessing when he came to Horeb.

II. A Place.

"What doest thou here, Elijah?"

1. It was a place of infinite compassion.

Elijah had failed, but God dealt tenderly with him outside the cave on Mount Horeb. What was the tone of God's voice when He asked, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Was there harshness and cruelty in His voice? No: we may be quite sure that there was a note of genuine tenderness in His voice.

Have you come into this place beaten and bruised and broken — discouraged, defeated and despairing? If so, let me tell you, that this is a place of infinite compassion, where God deals very tenderly with His needy children.

2. It was a place of divine revelation.

While Elijah was standing outside the cave, "The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind and earthquake; but

the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." What a revelation that was!

3. It was a place of great humiliation.

"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." The prophet was overwhelmed with the majesty of God's presence. "And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?" What right did Elijah have to hide in a cave when God wanted him to do His work?

III. A Purpose.

Why did God draw near to Elijah and ask him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

1. It was to rebuke him.

Elijah's pathetic reply to this question really amounted to saying: "I am running away; I have had it; don't ask me any more what I am doing; nothing is worth doing any more; let me die." The prophet had come to the cave to avoid facing the question, "What doest thou here?" That question was the last one he wanted to hear. He thought he was escaping responsibility by retiring to the cave.

God addressed this question to the conscience of Elijah for the purpose of rebuking him.

At every point where we, as God's children, are not living in accordance with His will, where we are failing God and bringing dishonor, God will rebuke us. If you have come here condoning some wrong relation, God will rebuke you. If you have come here harboring some ill feeling toward another, or concealing some sin in your life, God will rebuke you. If you have grown careless and undisciplined, God will rebuke you. If you come here neglecting some clear duty, God will rebuke you.

2. It was to restore him.

Very definitely the purpose of this question was to bring back Elijah into happy, harmonious fellowship with God. Oh, this blessed word of restoration, when the Lord gently leads His frail and failing children back into full and joyous and hallowed fellowship with Himself! How sorely some of us need to be restored to intimate fellowship with God!

3. It was to re-commission him.

The Lord said unto Elijah, "Go, return." God had a very special message which He wanted Elijah to deliver for Him. It was one of tremendous importance to the people, but He had to get Elijah out of the cave first, or he could not deliver it.

In his despair Elijah had thought that his life's work was ended, and that he was ready to die. He had done what he could, so he wanted nothing except to be allowed to depart in peace leaving the nation to its self-willed wickedness. God challenged him and told him there was still something that he could do for Him, so, God called Elijah to this last task — possibly his greatest task of all — to anoint two kings and a prophet and set them on the way to the fulfillment of God's purpose. That was Elijah's task, which none but he could perform. That was why God wanted him to go out of the cave, he wanted to re-commission him.

We, too, are in our respective places for a specific purpose, and in the name of our Saviour and Lord let us fulfil the purpose which He has for us.