

## Can You Hear Me Now?

Good morning. One of the things that we do when we come in early every week is a sound check. The singers check their microphones. The speaker checks his mic. The sound man makes sure that the mic levels are high enough so that you can hear them. One of the phrases you will usually hear is, "Can you hear me?"

If you have spent any time in the United States in the last 10 years you have no doubt seen a TV commercial. This commercial is for a cell phone company and in this commercial there is a man walking around saying, "Can You hear me now?" In one scene he will be in the middle of an open field and he will say, "Can you hear me now?" In the next scene, he will be in a busy city asking the same question, "Can you hear me now?" The whole point of the commercial is to prove to the viewer that this particular cell phone company has the best coverage for your phone. I believe that God is saying that same question to us today. He is asking, "Can you hear me now?" Our text for today is 1 Kings 19:9-13.

There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He 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."

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." 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.

And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.

And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

So as our scene opens up in 1 Kings we see Elijah sitting in a cave. When I read that verse I was wondering, why is Elijah in a cave? What is happening in his life that would cause him to be in a cave? As we read in verse 9, God asks that same question of Elijah. Here is what God said. "What are you doing here Elijah?" What was Elijah doing?

In order to answer that question, we need to back up a chapter to chapter 18. If you are familiar with the story of Elijah then you will remember this story. In chapter 18, Elijah does battle with 450 prophets of Baal. Now the people of Israel had started to worship Baal and Elijah wanted to call the people back to worshipping God. Elijah challenges the prophet of Baal to a test on Mt. Carmel. All the people of Israel gather on Mount Carmel to watch this battle. Elijah and the prophets of Baal each selected a bull that they would offer as a sacrifice to their God. Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to go first. They laid the bull on the altar and called out to Baal to accept their offering. All day they cried out to Baal begging him to come and accept this offering. They became so desperate at one point that they began to cut themselves with knives. Near the end of the day nothing had happened so Elijah says

ok now it is my turn. Before he calls out to God, he orders his servants to get some pitchers of water to cover both the bull and the altar with water. The bible tells us that there was so much water that it filled the trench around the altar with water. Then Elijah cries out to God asking God to accept this offering. God accepts it by sending fire from heaven that consumes the offering. Not only does it consume the meat; it consumes the stones of the alter, the wet wood, and it dries up all the water in the trench. Elijah has just seen God's power at work. This is a great spiritual victory for Elijah. He has stood before the entire nation of Israel and shown how powerful and great God is. But Elijah quickly forgets this. You see after Queen Jezebel hears what has happened to her prophets she is outraged and she sends a message to Elijah that says by this time tomorrow you will be dead. I will have you killed.

How does Elijah respond to this threat? Does he remember how God had JUST shown his great power? Does he rely on God's strength? Let's see what the bible has to say Elijah's response was. In chapter 19:3 we read "Then he was afraid and arose and ran for his life." So instead of remembering the greatness of God, Elijah is afraid of this one woman. He is so afraid that he runs for his life and hides in this cave.

How often does this happen in our lives? We experience the greatness of God in our life. He answers our prayer. The person we are praying for is healed. We come to church and we experience God's presence during the worship time and we feel God's presence very close to us. We leave church on a spiritual high. But the very next day at work our boss isn't happy with us and he tells us our work isn't good enough. We become afraid. We forget what had just happened the day before when we had felt close to God and instead we run away. The great thing is that when we run away God does not stop speaking to us. Let's read verses 11-13 again.

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." 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.

<sup>12</sup> And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.

<sup>13</sup> And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God is asking Elijah "Can you hear me now? Even in this dark time in your life can you hear me?" As we read these verses we read that the voice of God told Elijah to go outside of the cave. He is to go outside of the cave because the Lord is going to pass by. The first thing that happens is that a great strong wind blows. This wind is so powerful that it breaks the rocks on the mountain. But the Lord was not in that wind. Then there is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake. Then after that there is a great fire. But the Lord was not in the fire.

Remember, Elijah had just experienced God's great power on Mt. Carmel. Elijah had experienced God in an amazing way that day so I'm guessing Elijah is scratching his head saying to himself, "Where is God? If he is not in the wind or the earthquake

or the fire? Then where is He?" The Bible tells us that after the fire there was a sound of a whisper. When Elijah heard the whisper then he knew that was the voice of God. God does work in amazing and spectacular ways but here outside the cave the emphasis is not on the spectacular but on God's quiet ways.

Does God really speak to us today? I believe that God does speak to us. John 10:27 says "my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me." You see as Christians we can hear the voice of the shepherd. Now I don't believe it is going to be an audible voice for us every time and most of the time it isn't going to be an audible voice, but God is still speaking. Let me give you an example from my life. This is from a difficult time in our life when we could still hear God speaking to us.

In 2011 we were living in Miyagi-ken and we were working at Japanese church. Both Breanne and I had been praying about our life and ministry in Japan as it was getting close to the time for us to renew our visa and we both felt God speaking to us that we should return to America. At this point in our ministry we were independent missionaries and we felt God telling us that we needed to return to America to join a mission agency. So we made the difficult decision to return to America. Just 5 weeks after we left Japan, the earthquake and Tsunami of 2011 happened. As hard as it was for us to watch the news of what was happening in Japan we knew that God had a plan for us. One month after the disaster happened I was able to return to Miyagi and help with relief work. I spent 2 weeks helping with a local church we had become friends with, digging mud out of buildings and talking with survivors. I was also able to visit the church we had been a part of. In talking with those people at the church they expressed to me how grateful they were that we had left. They were happy for us that our children did not have to go through this experience and that they knew that God was in our decision to leave. You see if we would not have listened to God there is a possibility that our family could have suffered great harm. One of the roads that was washed away that day was one of the roads that we traveled quite often and the day and time that the earthquake happened was a time we would have been traveling. By listening to God that day, we are able to be here in the city of Osaka ministering. I do want to clarify that our being in Osaka has nothing to do with the disaster in Tohoku. God used these events to allow us to return to Osaka where our hearts have always been.

So you see many of us ask, "why don't I hear God speaking? Why am I not hearing from God?" I think the problem is that we look for God to be speaking in the big and amazing events. Like Elijah, we look for God in the earthquake and the fire. I'm not saying that God doesn't speak that way because God does work that way. If we look at the conversion of Saul God spoke in a very big way. There was a bright light that blinded Saul and he heard from God that day and he went from being a persecutor of Christians to becoming a leader in the church. Another example was Moses. Moses was out walking in the dessert and he sees this burning bush. The flames don't consume the bush and the bush speaks to him. God was both in that light and in that bush. But I believe that in most cases God uses a whisper to speak to us.

What happens when somebody whispers? If I ask Travis to turn off my mic and I start to speak in a whisper some of you in the front might be able to still hear me but those of you in the back aren't going to hear me at all. So what are you going to have to do? You are going to have to move closer to where I am speaking. When God speaks to us in a whisper, He is asking us to move closer to Him. Notice that God asked Elijah to come out of the cave so that he could hear from God. Elijah moved from where he was to where God was. I believe that God is asking us today to move closer to Him. When things in your life seem difficult take a look and see where you are standing. Are you close to God? Or have you moved away from Him? You see God never moves. He stays right there waiting for us and when he speaks he wants us to come close to Him.

Is God speaking to me? (not part of message, but the question for the slide)

Maybe you are sitting there today wondering if what you are hearing is really from God or if it is your own selfish desires talking. I have 4 things for you to use to see if it is God speaking.

Number 1. If God is speaking to you it will never violate scripture. I don't know how many times on the news in America I have seen a crime committed. You know somebody kills all their children and says God told me to do it. Well, if you think God is telling you to kill someone I can guarantee that is not God because the bible tells us not to murder. If you feel that God is telling you to go and rob the bank tomorrow that is not from God, because the bible tells us not to steal. Or if you feel that God is telling you to lie to your boss. You know that cannot be from God as God tells us not to lie. If you believe God is telling you to spread the rumor you heard or tell that piece of gossip, you can know that it is not from God, because these things violate scripture.

Number 2. Is it wise? See God will never tell us to do something that is unwise. So let's say that I think God is telling me to quit my job and play videogames all day. Is that really wise? I have a family to support and I want to play video games? No, that is not from God. But if you feel that God is telling you to become a missionary there is wisdom in that. If God is telling you to love your neighbor there is wisdom in that.

Number 3. Does it fit with your talents and gifts? I can believe with all my heart that God is telling me that I am going to be a famous singer and that I should go out and start singing but the fact is I cannot sing on key at all so I know that is not from God. Maybe I just want to be famous. You know the bible says to make a joyful noise unto the Lord but that doesn't mean everyone else is going to enjoy hearing it. Maybe you feel God is telling you to teach Sunday School. That is a good thing, but the problem is that you do not like children. Does that fit with your gifts and talents? No, God would not tell you to work with children if you do not like them.

Number 4. Do spiritually mature believers confirm this word in your life? When we hear something that we believe is from God, go and ask a mature believer what they think. They can help you tell if it violates scripture, if it is a wise decision, and see if it fits with your talents and gifts. When we made the decision to come to OIC we

talked with many spiritually mature believers both here in Japan and in America. We wanted to confirm what we were hearing from God. We wanted to make sure our decision wasn't from selfish or impure motives. So when you are faced with knowing if you are hearing from God talk to someone you can trust. In fact it would probably be good for you to talk to 2 or 3 people. Tell them what you are feeling you are hearing from God and ask them if they think this is a good thing for you. Spend time in prayer together.

In conclusion I want to tell you a story. I've heard this story told in a number of different ways but the point of the story is always the same. Two men are walking through New York City. There is all kinds of noise. The taxi cabs are honking their horns. There is the sound of many people talking. If you have ever walked through Tennoji at rush hour you know what I am talking about. The one man, he is just a regular NY city native and the other man is a man from the country who has studied bugs his entire life. As they are walking along the man who has studied bugs his entire life stops his friend. He says, "Do you hear that?" The friend looks at him and says, "Hear what?" The man from the country says, "Don't you hear the sound of that cricket?" The man from the city looks at him strange and says, "How in the world can you hear a cricket amongst all this noise?" Instead of answering him, the man reaches into his pocket and pulls out a handful of change and he throws it on the ground. The next thing you know 10 people are stopping to see if they had dropped the change. The man from the country looks at his friend and says, "We hear what we want to hear."

Are you tuned into the voice of Jesus? Are you listening for his voice? Or do you listen to all the outside noise that this world produces? Are you distracted by the noise in your life? Are you distracted by the things that you have to do every day? Or are you stopping and listening for God? I want to encourage you to stop everything that you are doing and shut the distractions out and listen. Listen for that whisper from God. My last question for you today is....what are you listening for?

Let's pray.