

ESF, Lord's day service message

5/29/2016

A Heavy Rain Through a Small Cloud

1 Kings 18:41-45

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

"There is nothing there," he said.

Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea."

So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

There comes a time of drought in every person's life. We all experience drought of some type. It may be a drought of health. Your physical problems have remained so long without showing any sign of getting better. It may be a drought of finance. You have been struggling with financial shortages for a long time. It may be a drought of employment. You have not found a job although you have been looking for a long time. It may be a drought in your marriage. You have tried to make your marriage peaceful and happy, but you have not seen any improvement.

But today's word gives you good news to end the drought. Whatever your drought may be, the drought can end and it can rain. Israel had been without rain for 3 years and now the drought ended and it rained. Let's see how such a blessed turnaround can happen to our lives.

God sharpens our spiritual sense by drought

The land of Israel was under God's judgment for the sin of idolatry. Evil king Ahab and his wife Jezebel, had brought Israel deeper into sin than ever before. God sent Elijah to tell them to repent. But they didn't listen, so the drought came. The drought lasted for three years (1 Kings 17:1, 18:1). The people in the land had suffered a lot from the long drought. Then did everything turn hopeless? No. By sending drought, God built up the believers' faith and sharpened their spiritual sense. One of them was Elijah. During the drought, Elijah was able to hear God's voice and experience the powerful presence of God.

When there was no sign of rain, Elijah said to Ahab, "*Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.*" There was not even a cloud in the sky. Then how could Elijah say to Ahab that there was the sound of a heavy rain? How could he say that he was hearing the sound of a heavy rain when there was not even a single drop of rain nor any sign of rain? Was he telling a lie? Was he out of his mind? No! He was telling what he heard by faith.

When he said that he was hearing the sound of a heavy rain, he did not mean that he was hearing the sound of rain with his physical ears. He was hearing the sound with spiritual ears.

How, then did he get these spiritual ears? By trusting the promise of God who had said that He would send rain to the drought stricken land. With faith, he constantly tuned his spiritual senses to the voice of God. And at the right time, he started hearing the sound of a heavy rain which would come. That is a blessing given to a spiritual man.

In wireless communication systems, there are many different kinds of frequencies. There are AM frequencies, FM frequencies and other frequencies. To hear a particular sound in a wireless system, we have to

tune a dial to the exact frequency of the sound. You cannot hear FM frequency sound if you tune in to AM frequency. To hear FM sound you have to tune in a FM frequency. You cannot hear sound at FM 100 if you do not tune your frequency exactly to FM 100.

Likewise, there is a spiritual frequency by which God sends His voice. To tune in to the spiritual frequency, we need faith in God's word. Isaiah 44:3 says: *For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.*

And, we need constant communication with God of this promise through prayers. Zechariah 10:1 says, *Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who sends the thunderstorms. He gives showers of rain to all people, and plants of the field to everyone.*

We need to be sensitive in listening to the voice of God's Spirit. By communicating with God in prayers, Elijah was "in tune" with God's voice. By doing so, he clearly received the voice of the Spirit who was about to pour a heavy rain upon the drought stricken land. Long before the clouds came, before the winds were visibly blowing and kicking up the sand and dust, and long before the first bolt of lightning or clap of thunder, Elijah sensed what was coming. Elijah was not an extra ordinary superman. James said that Elijah was just an ordinary man like us. But through earnest prayers he could tune into God's frequency and hear what was happening in heaven (James 5:17-18). That's what will happen when you are tuned into the Lord's frequency.

Two shoe salesmen went to Africa to find a shoe sales opportunity. After two days one wired back, "This is miserable, the worst market ever, nobody wears shoes. I'm going home." The other wired back, "This is great, best opportunity of my life, no one here wears shoes - double my

initial order.” One man saw only a problem in the drought. But another man saw a great opportunity in the drought.

Have you ever lived in any kind of drought? How severe was it? Did you hear only the sound of pain and difficulties in the drought? Or, did you hear the positive voice of God who will bring you a heavy rain at the end of the drought?

Trust that God uses every drought to send His miraculous deliverance. Trust that by drought God wants to build up your faith. Stop hearing only negative voices in the drought. Keep trying to hear the voice of God in prayer. And you will hear a sound of heavy rain in the midst of your drought.

God encourages us to draw near Him in drought

After Elijah told Ahab that there was a sound of a heavy rain, he climbed to the top of Mt. Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. What was he doing? He was praying. Elijah believed and knew that God would surely send rain as He promised. He was even hearing the sound of a heavy rain. Then, why should he pray? Why didn't he just sit and wait for the coming rain?

Because he knew a spiritual principle to receive God's promise. The principle is that God's promises are not automatically fulfilled. The principle is that to receive God's fulfilled promises a believer has to claim them by prayer. Prayer is a way for a believer to claim the fulfillment of God's promise. God wants to accomplish His promise through the prayers of believers. Why doesn't God just fulfill the promise without prayers? Of course God can do that. But by fulfilling promises through believers' prayers, God wants to have a personal relationship with believers. By prayer, God lets believers depend upon Him.

God's promises are just general promises until a believer claims the promise with faith. For example, in I John 1:9, there is God's promise of forgiveness of sins. It says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But God does not fulfill this promise for a person until the person believes the promise and claims it personally.

That was the reason Elijah prayed even though he knew that God would accomplish His promise anyway. Elijah heard rain coming, yet he prayed for rain. He could have said, "*well God's going to do it in His own time*" and quit praying, but he prayed on. He could have sat waiting for the coming rain, but he prayed on. He wanted to get connected to God personally when God accomplished His promise. Through his prayer, Elijah wanted to receive God Himself rather than receiving just a heavy rain.

Through your prayers to God, God wants to hear from you, and have a personal relationship with you. So while you are believing that God will accomplish His promises, you have to pray for the accomplishment. You have to get connected to God through prayers. If you don't pray you will not see God's presence when God is accomplishing His promises. But if you pray you will receive both the fulfilled promise and God Himself. God can accomplish all miracles without your prayers. But when you pray for a miracle, the miracle can connect you to God personally.

God sends rain through our persistent prayer

A heavy rain did not come as soon as Elijah prayed for rain. It took some time for the rain to come. While Elijah was praying for the rain to come, he sent his servant up to a high place to get a good view of the sea and whether a cloud of rain was coming toward the land or not. When the servant went up to the hill, he saw nothing but the clear sky over the blue sea. The servant came back to Elijah and said "there is nothing."

The same thing happened again and again for six times. It was a negative report. It was a discouraging report. Imagine the strain on Elijah. While Elijah was praying, six times the servant came back with the same negative answer.

But Elijah kept on praying. Elijah did not give up on praying. He did not give up on believing that God would bring rain as He had promised. So seven times Elijah sent the servant back to the hill to look at the sky over the sea. Seven times!

Even if we cannot see any sign of God answering to our prayers, we should not give up. With trust in God's faithfulness, we have to continue praying even if there is no sign of God's answer. While we are doing so, our faith is tested and strengthened.

So, you have to press on. Because God's answer won't come till you press on with great persistency. A woman had a bleeding disease for 12 years. She had lived for long years in physical drought. But when she kept pressing on and made contact with Jesus, she was able to receive a healing miracle.

What kind of long drought have you been through? How long have you been praying to God to end the drought? How long have you not received an answer to your prayer? Did you give up already? Are you thinking of giving up on receiving an answer? Press on! Press on with your prayer until you see a sign, like a small cloud for a heavy rain. Always remember: Before the abundant rain is poured out, you may be more strained by the drought. So you have to persistently press on.

When Elijah pressed on praying for rain, and sent the servant to see a sign of rain the seventh time, finally the servant brought back different news. The servant reported back to Elijah on the seventh time that there was a cloud, the size of a man's hand rising from the sea. A cloud the

size of a man's hand in the huge sky? That was not a big cloud. The news was both good news and bad news. It was good news because anyway a small cloud could be a sign of rain. It was bad news because that small cloud seemed to have nothing to do with a heavy rain. For a heavy rain, the cloud should be big and dark covering all the sky. What could that small cloud do? Didn't God say that He would send a heavy rain? Yes, He did. Then why was there only a small cloud in the sky? Because that is the way God works. We have to be patient while we are praying and waiting for God's miracle because God may bring a miracle through a different way.

Eventually, the small cloud turned into a cloud that covered the entire sky and soon a heavy rain. Great blessings come from small beginnings. God uses small and little things to bring miracles. God used a little boy's lunch to feed five thousand people. God used the boy David and some small stones to kill the giant warrior Goliath. God used a manger to bring the Savior into this world. God has big hands to turn small and little things into miracles. Elijah believed in God's miracle. He saw that small cloud in the big hands of God. He saw that in God's big hands the small cloud would turn into a very big cloud. So he did not get disappointed at the appearance of the small cloud. He actually told his servant to go to Ahab to prepare for a heavy rain which would come soon.

Sometimes we don't get our rain because we don't see our small things in the hands of our big God. To receive a heavy rain in a drought, put a small cloud into God's big hands. If you have financial drought, put whatever small amount of money you have into the big hands of God. If you have the drought of time, put your little bit of time into the big hands of God. If you have a drought of health, put your health into the big hands of God. If you have a drought in your marriage, put that little portion of your marriage into the big hands of God.