



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I wonder if you've ever asked yourself this question:

"What am I doing?"

It might be you've gone from one room to another, and completely forgotten what you went in there for (I think they call it the 'doorway effect'). Or you've tried to fix something and gone about it in a cack-handed way (a pretty good description of Steve's DIY skills). Or you've responded to a person or situation in a way you never would have imagined, and woken up to yourself.

Today we're going to look at a passage where a certain individual is asked the self-same question. And so are we.

1 Kings 19:1-18

OK, a bit of background: it's 850 BC, and the nation of Israel has been divided into 2 – the Kingdom of Israel in the north, and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. And the northern kingdom is being ruled by an evil king called Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, who force Israel to worship the gods and goddesses of the Phoenicians. But the God of Israel raises up a prophet named Elijah, to challenge Ahab and encourage God's people to keep trusting in Him.

Now in the chapter just before, Elijah has a showdown with 450 prophets of Baal – challenges them to miraculously burn up a sacrifice – and when they fail to do it, Elijah prays and God delivers. *Kaboom!*

All of which lands him on Jezebel's most wanted list.

So, Elijah does what any sensible person might do in this situation. He runs away. Why?

Because he's gripped by fear.

He's isolated (largely because he's chosen to be).

He's despondent.

And he's struggling with his faith.

(Interestingly, in James 5:17, Elijah is described as "a man just like us." In this instance, we might just agree!)

Anyway, Elijah heads south, into the Sinai desert, until he gets to Horeb, the mountain where God gave the Torah to Moses 500 years before. And God speaks to him – though not in the typical earthquake, wind and fire. In a silent, tiny voice.

And God asks a question - twice:

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Now why does God ask this question? And why twice? Well, when we ask questions, it's usually to gain information. But when God asks questions, He already knows the answers. So why ask? Simply this: because we need to hear them. God asks the questions we need to be asking, of ourselves.

But why twice? There are 3 possibilities:

- One possibility is for emphasis. I.e. 'This is a really important question, Elijah, and to make that point, I'm going to repeat it.'
- Another possibility is that Elijah wasn't quite ready to get what God was asking - and what Elijah needed to say in reply!
- The other possibility is that God means something different the second time around. As in 'What are you *here* for, Elijah?'

Maybe it's a bit of all 3. But today we're going to focus on that third possibility – that God is asking a different question when He repeats it. And we're going to take this question apart and allow God to ask it, of us.

Bit by bit.

1) What? What is always a question, and God wants Elijah, and us, to frame our feelings, situations, and experiences, into just that. Some people like to vent, others like to wallow, but rarely are people willing to interrogate themselves, to ask themselves what needs to be asked. Questions like what? How? And where to from here?

2) Are? Not were; are. Most people tend to live either in the past, or in the future. Now don't get me wrong: there's a sense in which we're to be mindful of both – it's important to learn lessons and consider consequences, after all. But don't live there. Live in the here-and-now, and find out what Jesus wants you to do – with *this* moment.

3) You? Not others; you. When God presents you with an opportunity, it can be easy to think, "Someone else will cover it", or "so-and-so is so much better at this than me", or "God can't use me, I'm too ..." (I'll leave you to finish it). God is asking this question of each of us, because each of us has a job to do, a part to play, in His Kingdom.

4) Doing? Now I'm not preaching 'salvation by works' or legalism here: we are saved by faith, and even that is a gift from God, as Ephesians 2 says. But biblical faith is an active thing: it needs to show itself in what we do, in our actions as well as our words. According to Jesus, He is always at work: what work might Jesus want to do, through us?

5) Here? I.e. "What are you doing in this place, at this time, amongst the people I have chosen you to share this bit of the world with?" What does God want you to do with your life here on earth? With the skills and the abilities that God has given you? How does God want you to "number your days", as Psalm 90:12 puts it?

Bringing It Home

So, God asks this question. Asks it twice. And Elijah gives the same answer both times, suggesting he doesn't really get what God is saying. So then God spells it out.

In a nutshell: "Go. I still have a job for you to do. And you are not alone."

Like Elijah, some of us are not quite where we should be at this moment. Most of us spent 2020 in hiding, isolated, in a kind of wilderness. And by that, I do not mean following the guidelines re Covid-19. I mean allowing it to become bigger than God is, and bigger than what God has called us to do – as individuals, as church. And some of us are still there. And you'll know you're still there, because that silent, tiny voice will be speaking to you at this moment. 1 Kings 19 is a reminder that God has a plan for you that is bigger than this time, this situation, this limitation, this fear. Bigger than your past. Bigger than your present. Bigger than your (imagined) future. God is still on the throne, still in control, still sovereign. And He is going to finish what He has begun.

God's double-question to Elijah is His double-question to us all. So, let's put our own names in there instead.

"What are you doing here, Steve?"

"What are you doing here ...?"