

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

TUC #09-1525

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December 29 , 2015

Quack, Quack!

During 2015, I have been unusually restrained from writing very much. I trust it has been a restraint from the Lord during what has been for me a year of rest. Looking back, I can see that it was truly a year of rest, and it has been very good. My heart is only to write when I sense the Lord giving me something to write about. To be honest, this is not always so easy to discern in a world that has become one huge chatter box of voices of all types from all sources. It is extremely noisy out there.

On the one hand, in order to discern the day, it is most helpful to know what is going on in the world, and to do this, we need to search out information choosing between the near countless sources available to us in this age. On the other hand, there are so many voices, how does one filter them out to get to the truth when most of the voices are only offering opinions or theories, at best? Of course, the worst voices are the knowingly deceptive and coercive voices that attempt to steer the masses into one corral for the benefit of the manipulative voices but to the detriment of the hearers.

As I was thinking about this, I was reminded of the time we visited a very large duck farm in a foreign land. To say the least, it was an experience that challenged one's senses on many levels. I'll leave some of that to your imagination. However, one very noticeable trait of this duck farm was the noise. There were hundreds, if not thousands of ducks, all quacking. It was more than a quack here and a quack there; it was quacks everywhere; everywhere a "quack, quack"! I think I have heard that before someplace in my foggy memory of nursery-school days. This is how I feel about the world today, including the so-called Christian world or community; you know, the countless ministries and all the communications that come forth from them with the latest and greatest emphasis or revelation no one else supposedly has been given. Oh, but let us not forget to pass the plate or fill in your debit/credit card number to keep these great ministries going. I digress.

So here is my conclusion on the matter: In the area of communication of ideas, opinions, theories, and even what people call *truth*, the world has become one huge duck farm and many are competing to be the loudest and most recognized or influential duck on the block. It stinks and it is very noisy!

One of the greatest dangers in listening to these many quacks is that we become confused and fearful. What are we to do? Where are we to go? I think of Elijah who listened to a fearful voice in his heart as he fled Jezebel after the Lord had performed mighty miracles through this great restoration prophet. ***He was afraid and arose and ran for his life*** (1 Kings 19.3). In despair, Elijah said: ***"It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers"*** (1 Kings 19.4). I am encouraged, for ***Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*** (James 5.17). One translation says ***he was a man of like experiences and emotions to us***.

The next part of Elijah's story is well-known, and surely countless messages have been given on it, but, in this day especially, we need to be reminded of the lesson. As the story goes, Elijah journeyed to Mount Horeb (Sinai) and came to a cave. The word of the Lord came to Elijah: ***"What are you doing here,***

Elijah?" Of course, the Lord knew fully-well why Elijah was there. It was a teachable moment for the prophet. The Lord told him to go forth and stand before the Lord on the mountain as the Lord passed by. A similar event occurred with another prophet some 500 years earlier as Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord. Most likely, Elijah stood in the same spot as Moses had stood and, much later, it was a place that Paul the apostle probably hid out as his Judaic theology was brought to the cross. Interestingly, Moses needed to see, Elijah needed to hear, and Paul needed spiritual revelation.

Now, in the case of Elijah, he was all alone in a cave thinking that he was the only one left and it wouldn't be long before his life would be taken by his enemies. Fear, doubt, and loneliness had driven him to that cave. But, the Lord had a lesson to teach him. First, there was a great and strong wind, then an earthquake, and then a fire. The Lord wasn't in these things. Surely, He brought them about. The point is clear that hearing the Lord was not in the loud booming noise of a great wind, an earthquake, or fire, even if the Presence of the Lord had caused them.

The test or lesson for Elijah was in hearing the voice of the Lord that was described in various ways by the translations as **a sound of a gentle blowing, a still small voice, a gentle whisper** or **breeze, a low whisper**, and **a soft breath**. These expressions imply that Elijah heard a voice, but perhaps this is not how the event actually unfolded, for there is one translation that may have caught Elijah's actual experience. The *New Revised Standard* translation words the latter part of verse 12 as: **after the fire a sound of sheer silence**. In other words, after all the commotion had ended, there was only silence; in this case, it was sheer silence or, another way to state it, **utter silence**. Think about the sensory experience of this man – wind howling, earth shaking, and fire torching the rocks all around him, and then as quickly as it came upon his environ, it all ended and he heard nothing, just utter silence. Yet, Elijah discerned that the silence was the Lord, and although not audible, this was the voice of the Lord.

We can only imagine that Elijah wrapped his face and crept to the entrance of the cave wondering what was next. It was at this point that he actually heard the Lord speak to him with a question: **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"** (1 Kings 19:9-13). It should be obvious that there is a clear spiritual level to Elijah's experience that applies to all of us today. The cave could be likened to our soul that is listening to all the voices and clamor and judgments that are going on around us and may even be affecting us. We listen to the voices of the howling wind, the earth shaking, and the fire that are manifesting before our very senses. It seems hardly necessary to give many examples because in our day these things can be seen and felt in all realms of life today, whether it is from terrorism, mass killings, teens shutting down malls, gang fights in malls, upheaval in the political parties with the rise of Trump that one has called seismographic, the EU imploding, deflation, and the list seems endless. Taken together, all these things can create a lot of emotion in people. The title of an article posted from the *Financial Times* reads: **"Battered, bruised and jumpy – the whole world is on edge."** Note that it does not say a part of the world; rather, it says *the whole world*. The article says that *"this kind of globalised anxiety is unusual."*

Now, back to Elijah; on a spiritual level, I wonder if we could rephrase the Lord's question as such: *What are you doing in this place of fear, doubt, confusion, and anxiety?* People of God, have we succumbed to the many quacking voices of the world? Are we living in the back of the cave, in the fear of our souls? If so, it is time to do what Elijah did. He clothed his face with his mantle. For us, it is clothing ourselves with Christ who is our Righteousness. He alone is the answer to us and to the whole world. There is no other answer, for He is Truth, Righteousness, Justice, Peace, and Love. We need to take our stand in the entrance to the cave (our soul) to discern the voice of the Lord. We need to shut out all voices and go into sheer silence, for when all the noisy, tumultuous voices are quieted in our soul, we will hear the mighty voice of our Lord resounding in our hearts: **"Fear not, I give you My Peace. I love you!"**