

## Sermon Draft

**Text: 1 Kings 19:9b–21**

**Sermon: “Jealous For God”**

Has God given you some great experiences? At times, our walk with God makes us marvel. “Wow!”

Elijah surely felt God’s “Wow!” nine hundred years before Jesus. Elijah is the prophet who never died. As God’s fiery horses and chariots swooped down, the whirlwind whooshed Elijah alive up into heaven (2 Kings 2). Wow! God gave Elijah many “Wows!” We’ve all had them too—”Wows” from God.

But not every day. Not for Elijah, and certainly not for us. What then? Do we despair if we no longer see God’s “Wow!”?

Remember some of Elijah’s other “Wows” from God. God introduced Elijah into the biblical story when he sent the prophet to his wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. *“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives . . . there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word”* (1 Kings 17:1). For three years, the Lord protected Elijah. First, in the wastelands, God fed Elijah with ravens delivering to him bread and meat. Wow! Then the Lord sent Elijah to the foreign widow at Zarephath.

About to starve, the poor widow baked her last meal. But as she shared with Elijah, day after day her cooking oil and flour never ran out. Wow! So why did God allow her only son to be struck sick, to die? Three times, Elijah stretched his body over the corpse, crying out, ***“O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again”*** (17:21). Our miraculous God resurrected the boy! Holy wow!

One of my favorite Elijah “Wow”? The trial by fire! All Israel’s people gather at Mount Carmel. Elijah alone challenges the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of Asherah. ***“You call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God”*** (18:24). So, the fakirs slaughter their bull, cry to Baal, and dance all morn till noon. Elijah mocks, ***“Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps asleep and must be awakened”*** (18:27). The fools dance up a frenzy. They cut themselves with swords. Their blood flows. But still, Baal has no answer. Elijah then rebuilds the true Lord’s altar. The slaughtered bull and altar he drenches with water once, twice, three times.

***“O LORD . . . let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back”***

(18:36–37). The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and stones and licked up the water in the trench around. Result? All the people, long confused, now fell on their faces, shouting, ***“The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God”*** (18:39). Wow!

Thank God for those days when he shows us his “Wow!” Days when we can’t help but shout, “You are so awesome, Jesus!” Today’s text, however from the very next chapter of the Bible, 1 Kings 19 tells about a whole different day.

As far as Elijah could see, God’s wondrous work was done. But King Ahab tells Jezebel ***“all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword”*** (v 1), and Jezebel sends word straight back to Elijah, ***“May the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow”*** (v 2).

Now what help are Elijah's new believers? Where is God's protection? Elijah is gravely disappointed in God! "Why did you send me? Why did your fire devour the sacrifice? Why have you roused Jezebel to kill me?"

We believers often wonder "Why?" "After the wow of Easter, after all the wonders of my life, why this? Lord, why is it not all better? Why does this fall on me, this evil?" When trouble bites, we'd rather run. We pray pitiful prayers. We hide.

Elijah ran clear out of Ahab's kingdom, deep into the wastelands. He prayed, "***Take away my life***" (v 4). Finally, Elijah came to Horeb, to the same Mount Sinai where six hundred years before the Lord had met Moses. There Elijah hid in a cave. For Elijah, the thrill was gone. "I'm done. God is done." What if you no longer see God's "Wow!"? See this! Behold! The word of the Lord came. "***What are you doing here, Elijah***" (v 9)? Did God not know? Elijah was the one who didn't know.

Remember when Adam and Eve, guilty, hid behind fig leaves? Walking toward them, the Lord called out, "***Where are you?***" Remember when your conscience asked, "What did you do?" A gentle question. God could flail my sin, flat nail your doubt.

The Holy One has every cause to shout, to damn! Why does he ask such mild questions? Can you hear his mercy? He invites us to turn.

Why do you hide in your dark, damp, cramped cave? Should you bury yourself alive? have a self-pity party? The Lord gently invites Elijah to come to the light, to life. The Lord invites us to his love. And patiently, he listens to Elijah: ***“I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of [angel] 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”*** (v 10).

Have you griped? “I’ve worked hard for my family, been zealous for the church, tried to be a good citizen, a helpful neighbor. What good has come of it?”

God tells Elijah, ***“Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD”*** (v 11). Did Elijah obey? No, not right away. The prophet, piously licking his wounds, preferred his man cave. He did not want to stand before the Lord God! Certainly not here, not on Moses’ holy mountain, where God’s holy Ten Commandments strip naked our sin and self-righteousness.

Our disobedience and doubt, our fear that we are his last follower, do not restrain our Lord. See this! ***“Behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD”*** Wow! ***”but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake”*** Wow! ***“but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire”*** Wow! ***“but the LORD was not in the fire”*** (vs 11–12).

God drew this picture for the prophet. “Do you think I’ve lost my power? Are you free from my fury? Yes, Elijah, I could squash wicked Ahab and Jezebel.”

As if to tell you and me, “Yes, I could! squash your enemy. I could fix your bank account. I could heal your body and fill your soul with joy. I could make your friends, your family, even your church all that they should be for you!” Oftentimes, God has done exactly that! Wow! Other times, God has a better gift.

After the awesome wind and earthquake and fire came *“the sound of a low whisper”* (v 12). What did it say? The text doesn’t tell. Is it the same that whispers to us? “Come! Leave your prideful pity party. Leave your deadly doubts buried in the cave. Come, rise to me! Come, live new!”

Actually, not “Come.” What the Lord had told Elijah from the first was “Go out.” If God said “Go,” was God there with Elijah in the cave? Is God with us in the pit? Would God himself actually come down to our side and join us in our suffering?

*“Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD”* (v 11). At last, Christ would go out to Mount Calvary. Already on Mount Horeb, Elijah heard the whisper. When Elijah heard that whisper, he wrapped his face in his cloak (v 13).

The Lord calls gently so that we are not hard on ourselves. Gently God lifts us weak ones with his forgiveness. Elijah heard his Lord’s whisper, wrapped his face in his cloak, and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave (v 13). Can you see Elijah coming out of his dark, deadly pit? Like Lazarus, he’s resurrected from the cave. The self-proclaimed “last follower” can now follow Jesus himself. He can live anew!

When we remember that handful of water with which he christened us, the Lord speaks. When we listen to what he says of this bread and wine, we hear the Lord speak. “This is my body, my blood. I, the resurrected, living Lord, give myself to you for your forgiveness.” In the Bible’s promise, the Lord speaks. When in prayer we speak his words back to him, the Lord speaks through us. Sometimes, it’s just a whisper. And God speaks today. As God sends us to some friend, God still speaks through us.

Finally, Elijah came out of his pity pit. The voice a second time gently asked him, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” And God listened so patiently, as the prophet repeated word for word his litany of lament. “*I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of [angel] 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*” (v 14). The Lord replies, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive do this (v 15). God’s clear command: no more moping around. God’s clear commission, new work for Elijah. “*You shall anoint Hazael to be king*



*over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death”* (vs-17).

“Elijah, you want me to put down evil. I will! I am God over Israel’s king. I am God over the king of Israel’s enemy, Syria. Elijah, you want to give up? I will finish my work through a new generation. I am God over all the prophets, and I will replace you!” Elijah should not dream he’s God’s last true believer. Should we?

God promises, *“I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him”* (v 18).

Jesus is raising up new leaders whom we have not yet seen. Strengthened by his Lord, Elijah cast his prophetic mantle on Elisha. He began training up his assistant to succeed him. With whom can you share the responsibilities God has given to you? Who is God showing to us? Who are the new leaders we can be training today?

Jesus, open our eyes anew to your endless wonders. Help us see you leading us. Help us hear your gentle Good News, even when it's a low whisper. Help us grasp your using us to bless the next generation. Our praise, our "Wow!" will rise to you forever!

Amen