

## 1 Kings 19:9-18

The opening words of our text for today pose the **question**, “*Why are you here?*” That question can be asked in a number of different ways, depending on where you place the **emphasis**. For example, you could ask the question concentrating on the **person**, “*Why are you here?*” or zeroing in on the **location**, “*Why are you here?*” We could be focusing on the question itself, “**Why are you here?**” And the same words could even be used to express **anger** or **disgust** at someone’s actions by saying, “*Why are you here?*” So with all those **options** being available, when we see those words **printed** on a page, it’s very difficult to tell how they were **meant** to be expressed. This morning, let’s try to find out how **God** meant those words to be expressed as He spoke them to the Prophet **Elijah**.

Let me briefly review for you what had happened in the account which immediately **precedes** our text. Israel was being ruled by the wicked King **Ahab**, and his equally wicked wife, **Jezebel**. Through their influence, they had seen to it that the worship of **Baal** and **Asherah** had become **rampant** in Israel - **so** rampant that the time had come for a **showdown**. So, Elijah issued a challenge to the 450 prophets of Baal, and the 400 prophets of Asherah. These 850 prophets gathered together on **Mt. Carmel** to offer a **sacrifice**, while Elijah would **single-handedly** offer the same sacrifice to the **Lord**. In spite of the seemingly overwhelming odds **against** Elijah, the Lord came through, and in a dramatic display of His power, He completely **consumed** Elijah’s sacrifice.

When the people of Israel **saw** what the LORD had done, they seized all 850 of the false prophets, brought them to Elijah, and Elijah had them put to **death** in the Kishon Valley. Needless to say, **Ahab** and **Jezebel** were not pleased. Immediately the word went out that Queen Jezebel wanted Elijah **killed** within the next 24 hours - and in spite of the seemingly overwhelming **support** of the common people which Elijah had seen on **Mt. Carmel**, nobody was willing to **stand up** for him against Queen Jezebel. So, Elijah **ran** for his life, thinking that the situation was virtually **hopeless**, and his enemies would certainly **overtake** him and **kill** him. It was just a matter of **time**.

But the **Lord** was with Elijah, and enabled him not only to get out of the **country**, but also to reach **Mt. Sinai** - the mountain of the Lord. That’s where our text for today begins. The Lord opens our text today by asking the question, “*Why are you here, Elijah?*” It was a very simple and direct **question** which deserved a simple and direct **answer**. The Lord wanted Elijah to account for his **actions**. So, Elijah should have been **honest** and said, “Lord, I’m here because I **ran away**, and I

ran away because I was **afraid**.” But instead, he **side-stepped** the issue. What Elijah said was, *“I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life.”* Like an immature **child**, Elijah tried to blame his problems on everyone **else**, instead of looking at the faults within **himself**. He thought things had gotten **so bad** in Israel, that he might well be the only **believer** left in the whole world. So with that thought in mind, and having miraculously reached Mt. Sinai, he took the opportunity to try and get some additional **action** from **God**. Elijah asked God for **personal protection**, and also that God would **punish** those who had **forsaken** the LORD.

The Lord’s reply is rather **interesting**. God asked Elijah a **second** time, but perhaps with a slightly different **emphasis**, *“Why are you here, Elijah?”* Again, God was looking for a **simple** answer - perhaps something like, *“Well Lord, now that I’m here, I guess I’ll just die here, because my life isn’t worth living any more. Now that I’m the only believer left on the face of the earth, I surely can’t make much of an impact. So, I guess I’ll just stay here, and feel sorry for myself.”* Now **remember**, Elijah had just participated in one of the greatest **triumphs** over heathenism which has ever been recorded. Elijah had probably figured that after such a huge triumph, he would now be recognized as a national **hero**, and perhaps would even receive a **medal**, or a **promotion**, or at least **something**. Yet, nobody seemed to **notice**, nobody seemed to **care** - except the **bad** guys - and they all wanted to **kill** him.

But Elijah had failed to realize that **God** had noticed. Just as the Lord had been **with** him when he took on those 850 heathen prophets, the Lord was **also** with him **now**. The Lord said, *“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is passing by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains and shattered rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there was a soft, whispering voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak, and he went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.”* What the Lord was trying to do here was to show Elijah that the **reason** he was feeling so sorry for himself, was that he was looking for **evidence** of God’s support and presence in all the **wrong** places. When Elijah left Israel to make this journey to Mt. Sinai, he probably thought that God would take some kind of **powerful** and **dramatic** action - just like the vivid fireworks display on **Mt. Carmel**. But when that didn’t **happen**, Elijah thought the Lord had **pulled out** and left him **stranded** - so, Elijah felt **sorry** for himself.

But Elijah had no **reason** to feel sorry for himself, and God clearly **told** him so. All Elijah needed to **do** was to focus on **The Gentle Whisper Of God's Word**, instead of on the **big noise** of Mt. Carmel. Isn't it interesting that when the Lord appeared to Elijah, He was not in the things which we view as **powerful** - the **wind** - the **earthquake** - or the **fire**. God was in the soft, little **voice** - in **The Gentle Whisper Of His Word**. And as soon as Elijah **heard** it, he went out to the mouth of the cave to **listen** to the voice of the Lord.

Have **you** been listening to **The Gentle Whisper Of God's Word**? When the world is **shouting** and **clamoring** all around us, it can be difficult to **hear** God's Word. All around us are the **loud, booming** voices of the **government** and public **health** officials, and the **politicians** on both sides of the aisle, not to mention the unbelievably large number of **protesters** and **rioters**. So, what **we** need to do is find a **quiet** place where we can **shut out** all the noises of the world, and we can concentrate on our **God**. We need to **turn off** our **televisions**, and **radios**, and **computers**, and **cell phones**. We need to stop worrying about what **time** it is, or how **long** it's going to take, and just sit down with our families and **study** God's Word together. When we **do** that, God will show us just how **powerful** His gentle whisper can be in our **lives**.

Worshiping here at **church** can also help to shut out the **distractions** of the outside world. And although we won't be holding in-person **Sunday School** classes this year, **online** Sunday School lessons will be available. Here again, our children have a great opportunity to listen to **The Gentle Whisper Of God's Word**. Classes like these, where we learn more about **God** and His **Word**, really aren't very **popular** in our society today. But, our children will be **wiser** than the great majority of people in our world, if they fight **against** society's way of thinking, and take in the **blessings** which God has to offer them in His Word, each and every week. Those classes won't always be **glitzy** and **glamorous**, but they will provide our young people with the spiritual tools they need to survive as **Christians** in a godless world.

Elijah got what **he** needed from that gentle whisper too. I think it is significant that Elijah immediately recognized that the **Lord** was in that gentle whisper. And once God had his **attention**, He proceeded to give Elijah this somewhat **disturbing** message. *"Go back the way you **came** and go to the Wilderness of **Damascus**. When you get there, you are to anoint **Hazael** as king over Aram. You will also anoint **Jehu** son of Nimshi king over Israel and **Elisha** son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah as prophet **in your place**."* In **other** words, God was telling Elijah, "You're **replaceable** Elijah, and right now you're in the **wrong** place. You **started out** doing well, but you **stopped**. I still have some more things for you to **do**, but they **don't**

involve sitting around **here** and feeling **sorry** for yourself. By the way, I still have **7,000** faithful ones who have not submitted to Baal worship, so you're **not** all alone. Elijah, I haven't pulled out on **you**, so don't **you** pull out on **Me**."

Well, with those words Elijah had some **answers**, even if they **weren't** exactly the answers he had been **seeking**. He knew that God still had **work** for him to do, and that God would provide all the **protection** he would need to **carry out** that work. He also knew that God would **punish** those who had been worshipping **Baal**. In fact, He would **destroy** them through **Hazael** (a foreign king from the northern country of Syria), through **Jehu** (Israel's own future king), and through **Elisha** (the prophet who would follow Elijah). But, all this would require Elijah to **return** to the land of Israel, in order to **anoint** these men for God's service. But because a **death warrant** was still out for him, such a return would be **dangerous** for Elijah. Nevertheless, it **had** to be done.

Sometimes we find **ourselves** in the same boat as Elijah. Things start going rather **badly** for us, and our **initial** reaction is simply to **run away**. We think that if we get far enough away, then we will be **safe**. But God doesn't usually let us get **away** with that. Instead, He tells us that He has **work** for us to do - **difficult** work - and we think, there must be an **easier** way. Or, God tells us that He has **work** for us to do - but it's not **here** - and we would really like to **stay** here. So, what do we **do**? What did **Elijah** do?

Although it's not a part of our text this morning, the verses which immediately **follow** today's text tell us that Elijah **went** back to Israel, and he **did** the things which the Lord had **asked** of him. We're **also** told that the **Lord** held up **His** end of the deal too, and He **protected** Elijah from danger time and time again. The end result will be the same for **us** too - if we also **listen** to the voice of the Lord. Take a look at yourselves - as **individuals**, as **families**, and as a Christian **congregation**. Ask yourself, "What am I **doing** here?" Am I **afraid**? Am I feeling **sorry** for myself? Am I **running away** from problems and difficulties? Or, am I **doing** what **God** wants me to do? Am I following **His** will for my life? Am I making use of **all** the opportunities I have to hear **The Gentle Whisper Of God's Word**. And if I'm **not**, what am I **doing** about it? Have I tried to make **excuses**, and blame my faults and shortcomings on **others** - or have I **admitted** my sinfulness to God, and asked for His **forgiveness**? Dear friends, whatever the case may be, remember that we will always find what we need to know in **The Gentle Whisper Of God's Word**. May we always do whatever it takes to **listen** to it - **faithfully**, **frequently**, and **carefully**. Amen.