**A Second Wind: Unveiling God’s Goodness**

**1 Kings 19:1-21 (ESV)**

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***1*** *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.* ***2*** *Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So 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.”* ***3*** *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.*

***4*** *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”* ***5*** *And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.”* ***6*** *And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.* ***7*** *And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”* ***8*** *And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.*

***9*** *There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”* ***10*** *He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of 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.”* ***11*** *And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.* ***12*** *And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.* ***13*** *And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”* ***14*** *He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of 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.”* ***15*** *And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.* ***16*** *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.* ***17*** *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.* ***18*** *Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”*

It was the worst moment of his life. 32 hours before, on a normal Sunday morning, twenty-three-year-old Matthew Bryce decided to go surfing. He drove to the car park, waxed his board, and around 11:00 am, hit the waves. But from there, everything went wrong. He was swept up by the tide. The current ripped him out to sea. The tumult was relentless. In sheer panic, he paddled and swam for shore. But stroke after stroke, the crisis became clear. It was far out of reach. Despite every effort, he’d drifted beyond any rescue search area. He was off the coast, 13 miles.

Night fell. He paddled toward passing ships and called out, but all his cries went unheard.

By the time the sun rose, his energy was beginning to fade. The threat of fatigue was real. He was blacking out and falling off his board. He lasted the next day, but knew he couldn’t make it another night. As the sun began to set, he made peace with it all and resigned himself to death.

On land, his parents tried not to give up hope. His mother prayed her son would be discovered alive, but his father was preparing to identify the body. As the last moments of his strength was fading, Matthew heard the sound of an approaching helicopter—a final glimmer of hope. He slid off his board and forced his failing muscles to hoist the plank as high as he could. But the helicopter flew right on past. It was utter disappointment. His final hope had turned into despair.

It’s hard to capture the level of disappointment Elijah is facing at this moment. This is a man in anguish and without hope. He’s been swimming against the tide for years, a lonely prophet of Yahweh in a nation gone rogue. King Ahab, who was supposed to lead people in the worship of Yahweh, had done exactly the opposite. Not only did he do more evil in the sight of Yahweh than those who ruled before him (16:30-31), he wrongly married a Sidonian princess named Jezebel. She was a woman unrivaled in evil, who also served as the priestess to her pagan god, Baal. What a royal couple they were. They were referred to by one as “the vile human toad who squatted on the throne of the nation…[with his] beautiful adder; coiled beside.” They led God’s people into the deepest season of apostasy yet, testing His covenant promises to the limits. These were dark days in the land.

But in chapter 18, Yahweh and Baal have a showdown in one of the most exciting chapters in all of literature combined. I wish we had time for a review, but there is gold. And an issue that is important is this. In the end, Yahweh enjoys a decisive victory and ends a three year drought with what appears to be the waters of revival. The religious rumble succeeds. Healing has come. Hope is restored. Or so Elijah thought. In chapter 19, he learns this victory is not what it seemed. The last glimmer of hope, has actually passed them by. This won’t be the turning point. The king and queen are too far gone. Israel is lost. And as his final hope disappears, Elijah is driven to despair.

What are your greatest disappointments? When do you feel the pangs of despair? What makes you feel tired? Wearied? Exhausted? Overwhelmed? What makes you feel fatigued? Maybe generously investing in the church, only to see ministries that you love suffer and dwindle.

Or maybe swimming against the tide, witnessing in your workplace, only to watch your job be lost suddenly. Spending decade after decade praying for your children, only to watch them walk away. What shattered dreams have left you feeling fatigued? When do you feel the appeal of self-pity?

Self-pity is the kind of despair driven by disappointment, brokenness, and anguish. It makes us want to give up. How do we escape that pit, the pit of self-pity? We need a better view of God. The way we hold fast to hope is by beholding God’s goodness. That’s the point for today. God is still good. We know that God is holy and that He alone is God. Today we remember that God is good. Would you say that with me? God is good! In 1 Kings 19, we see His goodness threatened, and it is overlooked. But in the end, it shines fully unveiled. It is a vision that can set us free from self-pity. What does that look like, to behold God’s goodness? How do we do it? Here are three ways.

**I. Hold On (Perseverance)—The Obscurity of God’s Goodness (19:1-4)**

The 18th and 19th centuries are forever stained by the horrors of the African slave trade. Over the course of those gruesome years, it is estimated that the number of lives transported into slavery came near 10 million. Almost a million and a half died during the voyage. It was the abolition of this slave trade that one English politician adopted as his mission. William Wilberforce and his friends endured decades of opposition and jumped through hoop after hoop of debate tactics made by wealthy aristocrats. He brought bills in 1791, 1792, 1793, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1804, 1805. Every time, he was defeated. Fatigue took its toll on his career, his family, and his health. And only in 1833, more than thirty years after he began, just days before his final breath, did Wilberforce finally receive news that a bill was about to pass. Because even when hope seemed utterly obscured by wickedness he held on. You see, sometimes God’s goodness seems to have all but disappeared.

In chapter 19:1-4, Elijah faces a total disappointment and is overcome by fatigue. These are the verses of shattered dreams. If Chapter 18 is about a new hope, chapter 19 is “Jezebel Strikes Back.” Where does self-pity come from? What disappointments drive us to this kind of despair? Here are three.

**Disappointment # 1 Apathy: The Compromise of Yahweh’s Agents (19:1)**

Few things are more disappointing than the compromise of Yahweh’s agents; when people in positions of power, who are supposed to be doing the right things, don’t care. In verse 1, we see Ahab’s rejection of this deliverance. And while the evidence is subtle, his apathy is still on display. There are a few evidences to note.

Evidence # 1: Moral Compromise (19:1a)

***1*** *Ahab told Jezebel…*

Jezebel. The very name of his wife reminds us of his apathy. There was no concern or regard for the honor of Yahweh. He married this pagan priestess who slaughtered Yahweh’s prophets, and he couldn’t have cared less. In chapter 18, Yahweh proves Himself God by striking an offering with a sort of lightning. And immediately, He ends a three-year drought. Yahweh is calling him to step into his role, finally. And what does Ahab do? He comes home and tells Jezebel. He cares not for Yahweh’s honor. His allegiance lies with his wife. Ahab is a man of moral compromise.

Evidence # 2: Ministry Complacency (19:1b)

***1*** *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done…*

Elijah had summoned 1000 false prophets, all the prophets of Baal, for this showdown. Ahab didn’t say a word. He merely watched in chapter 18 as Yahweh answered the prayer and how the people declared Yahweh as God. And then how they, in covenant obedience to the law of Moses, they slaughtered these false prophets. And Ahab just watched. As king, he should have led the purge. It was his ministry to uphold, and he was happy with the way things were. So in verse 1, it’s no surprise that he speaks of these actions and the ministry that should have been his, when he tells his wife that they’re the things not that he had done, but that Elijah had done. Elijah was the active agent. Ahab was passive. He had ministry complacency.

Evidence # 3 Marital Cowardice (19:1c)

Ahab was afraid of his wife. He lived to make her happy. And he knew she’d be furious about this slaughter. And he wants to be on her side right away. So like a good coward, he immediately reports the damage without taking any ownership for what happened.

***1*** *Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.*

Even after a divine miracle of fire from heaven, after a prophetic downpour of rain after a three-year drought, even after the slaughter of scores of false prophets, Ahab is less scared of Yahweh than he is of his wife. This is marital cowardice. He had ministry complacency. How disappointing the compromise of Yahweh’s agents is, even when God proves Himself able. Apathy.

**Disappointment # 2 Animosity: The Corruption of Yahweh’s Enemies (19:2)**

It hurts when leaders do nothing, and it hurts worse when adversaries do everything. Facing the true corruption of Yahweh’s enemies is tough to endure. Ahab’s opposition may be passive, but Jezebel’s is active. He doesn’t care at all about the right things, and she cares deeply about the wrong things. So after his rejection in verse 1, now verse 2 is Jezebel’s retaliation. And her animosity against Yahweh and His servants is terrifying. There are a few aspects to consider.

Aspect # 1: Maniacal Corruption (19:2a)

She is a woman of maniacal corruption. Look at how insanely devoted she is to her idolatry.

***2*** *Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also,* *if I do not make your life as the life of one of them…*

She sends Elijah a message, invoking a swear by the very gods Yahweh just disproved. Even though Baal never answered the prophets and Yahweh proved Himself God undeniably, she is still invoking her idols. She has the pagan corruption of a maniac.

Aspect # 2: Murderous Contempt (19:2b)

***2****…if I do not make your life as the life of one of them…*

This is murderous contempt. It is pure vengeance. “You kill my prophets. I kill you. You think you’ve proven you and your God are special? I’ll prove you aren’t. Count it! 24 hours to live.” Murderous contempt.

Aspect # 3: Extreme Commitment (19:2c)

***2****…by this time tomorrow.”*

24 hours! Avenging her gods! “If you’re still alive by then, then they’ll kill me.” The extreme commitment and murderous contempt, the corruption of Yahweh’s enemies even after God proves himself in every way. Animosity. That will drive a prophet to despair.

**Disappointment # 3 Deficiency: The Collapse of Yahweh’s Servants (19:3-4)**

After Ahab’s rejection and Jezebel’s retaliation, Elijah has a realization. Deficiency. He sees that even the perfect situation, the perfect prayer, the perfect ministry, they’re not enough to bring about the change. His dreams of revival are shattered. Ahab doesn’t care if it happens. Jezebel won’t let it happen. And Elijah can’t make it happen. And in a moment, he’s overcome by his deficiency. Look at verses 3 and 4. I’ll point out a few insights to show what I mean.

Insight # 1: His Realization: Ambition Futility (19:3a)

All that he had hoped for and wanted, was not going to happen. The revival of the nation, the king reclaiming the throne for Yahweh, is erased by this simple message from the queen, the true obvious ruler of this kingdom.

***3*** *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life*

Elijah sees and he gets up and runs for his life. What did he see? What did he realize? He sees that following God perfectly and powerfully doesn’t mean others will change. Some hearts are hardened against God decisively. And no matter how much Elijah wanted revival there, Jezebel

would never allow it. His realization is ambition futility.

Insight # 2: His Response: Methodical Flight (19:3b-4a)

He takes off, but he’s very calculated about where he goes and what he does.

***3*** *Then he was afraid**, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.* ***4*** *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree.*

In terms of geography, the nation is divided between Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Ahab and Jezebel reign in Israel, in the north, and another king reigns in Judah, to the south. The entire land stretches from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. And it is to the south that Elijah flees, where he should be safe. It is almost 100 miles below Jezreel, where Jezebel was. But not only that, he leaves his servant there and he travels alone an entire day into the wilderness, and sits down under a broom tree. This flight is methodical. He might have given up on his dream, but he is committed that Jezebel not achieve hers.

Insight # 3: His Cry: Overwhelming Fatigue (19:4b)

Now all of this disappointment has accentuated into an overwhelming fatigue.

***4*** *And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord…*

The phrase is, “Too much!” Too much! He is a prophet completely broken. For all of his swimming upstream, revival has not come. “The fatigue is overwhelming!” is his cry. Too much!

Insight # 4: His Request: An Immediate Finish (19:4c)

***4*** *And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”*

“I can’t go on.” And he prays to Yahweh, “Take my life.” It’s a prayer that Moses prayed back in Numbers 11 when the people rebelled.

**Numbers 11:14-15** I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for

me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.

Elijah says, “This is too much! Don’t let the wicked witch win. Take me so that she can’t find me. No one, not even my servant knows where my body is. The buzzards will get me before anyone can find me. She can’t produce me. Don’t let her win. Take me.” The fatigue is too much. His request is an immediate finish.

Insight # 5: His Reason: Ministry Failure (19:4d)

***4****… for I am no better than my fathers.”*

Perhaps this is the most disappointing of all. He said he was no better than his fathers. “I thought my ministry might transform the nation, but now I see we’re just headed for disaster.” In Elijah’s eyes, his ministry has failed and the disappointment is too much to take. Yahweh’s agents are compromised. His enemies are corrupt. And Elijah, His servant, has collapsed. Deficiency.

Disappointments like these represent the kinds of opposition that drag us down into despair and the abyss of self-pity. And God tells us this story to remind us that His goodness sometimes

seems missing or stumped. Sometimes God’s goodness can seem hindered. But just because we can’t see it, doesn’t mean it isn’t there. That’s a reality He’s about to prove with distinction. So hold on. Hold on with perseverance. Hold on with hope that comes by beholding His goodness even when it seems obscured and hidden.

What makes you cry, “Too much, God!”? What makes you say, “Too much!”? What kind of apathy frustrates you? Marital apathy? Parental apathy? Professional apathy? Legal or political apathy? What kind of animosity assails you? Relational challenges? Physical challenges? Or are you just overwhelmed by your own deficiency, knowing your weakness and failure? What in your life obscures God’s goodness? Could it be that amidst all that apathy, animosity, and even deficiency, that everything is going exactly according to plan?

How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus was betrayed? The kingdom was at hand. Revival was here. People were being healed. Israel was about to be restored. The Messiah had come. And suddenly, God’s goodness is not only threatened, but obscured. Betrayal. Mockery. Abandonment. Crucifixion. Death. Talk about disappointment! A time for sorrow? Yes. But despair? No. No need for self-pity, because while God’s goodness seemed obscured, it never

disappeared. And it was actually about to shine brighter than it ever had before. Sometimes God’s goodness seems missing or hindered, but His glory is found in the valley.

These are some causes that might lure us into self-pity. But now, let’s look at self-pity’s effects. What does it do to us? God’s goodness has been threatened, but the fatigue induced by

shattered dreams is going to be answered with a heavenly whisper. It’s a whisper so soft it’s almost entirely overlooked. How do we escape the pitfall of self-pity? First, hold on with perseverance. Second, draw near with trust.

**II. Draw Near (Trust)—The Sensitivity of God’s Goodness (19:5-14)**

Earlier this year my aunt passed away in Arizona. My wife and I decided to take our kids to the funeral, and so we flew. At the time, we had a 4 year old, a 2 year old, and a 2 month old. We

prayed before we arrived at the airport knowing that the logistics that lay ahead for us seemed especially daunting. And in God’s goodness, He provided a sweet couple from our church who

just happened to be on the same flight as us. They were headed on vacation to get some time alone, and yet they sacrificed and they helped us check in, make it through security, get our baggage when we arrived, and even load up. It was such a gift. In one of those moments where we might be tempted to be overwhelmed and turn to self-pity, we see the sensitivity of God’s goodness. There’s just a sweet hint of it.

Elijah is ready to die here. He’s sitting beneath a broom tree in the wilderness. After this kind of disappointment, Elijah is about to make a terrifying indictment. It’s an indictment against these people. So strong is his despair at the goodness of God being threatened, that this heavenly whisper almost goes overlooked. In the midst of these verses we see God’s tenderness to us in our fatigue through two encounters, two different encouragements He offers.

**Encouragement # 1 Refreshment: The Sufficiency of Yahweh’s Provision (19:5-8)**

In verses 5 through 8 you can see the sufficiency of Yahweh’s provision. What God gives is completely enough. Here are a few proofs of His tender care.

Proof # 1 Divine Presence

He provides His divine presence. We see the tenderness of Yahweh’s presence.

Quality # 1: Supernatural (19:5a)

***5*** *And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.”*

This is not just any angel. This is the angel of Yahweh.

***7*** *And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”*

This is most likely the second person of the Trinity. No one has ever seen God the Father, but when people see this angel, they say that they had seen God. Somehow, this is working. This is the pre-incarnate Christ. Yahweh’s presence is supernatural and very tangible.

Quality # 2: Tangible

***5*** *And behold, an angel touched him…*

***7*** *And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him…*

This is not a dream or a vision. This was real. And it’s continual. It happened twice.

Quality # 3: Continual

***7*** *And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him…*

Supernatural, tangible, continual presence. He is tender. And what is He there to do? To provide divine sustenance.

Proof # 2: Divine Sustenance

This is food and drink. Physical nourishment. It was marked by the same three qualities. The food is tangible.

a. Quality # 1: Tangible (19:5b-6)

***5*** *And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.”* ***6*** *And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.*

Quality # 2: Continual (19:7a, 8a)

***7*** *And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”* ***8*** *And he arose and ate and drank,…*

Quality # 3: Supernatural

***7*** *And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”* ***8*** *And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.*

Wow! This is not just any sustenance. Elijah needed a second helping because this refreshment had to last him over a month. Now this special journey ahead is a journey that Yahweh

says is ‘too great.’ And that word in Hebrew, ‘too great,’ is the same word that Elijah used in his prayer when he said, ‘it is enough!’ It’s ‘too much!’ Yahweh heard that prayer and said, “Yes, it is too much. In fact, I have more for you to do. And it’s too much. You’re not finished yet.” He gives him this sustenance, and Elijah travels 40 days and 40 nights. It’s a nice round number. Where have we seen that number before?

The first time was in the context of covenant in Genesis 7:4, when Yahweh promised Noah

**Genesis 7:4** For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights…”

The next time was in the context of covenant in Exodus 24:18.

**Exodus 24:15–18** Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the

seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

One of the next times is in Exodus 34:28. After Israel sinned and broke the covenant and is about to be destroyed, Moses intercedes. He appeals in the context of, what else? Covenant. Later, Moses recounts this in Deuteronomy chapters 9 and 10.

**Deuteronomy 9:7–8** Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath.

**Deuteronomy 9:18-19** Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me that time also.

40 days, 40 nights! God was unwilling to destroy them a first time and a second time. Moses was appealing to Yahweh on the basis of covenant. “Keep your promises. Spare the people.” He said, “If you don’t keep these promises, everyone will doubt whether You’re great and awesome and good!” (Exodus 32:11-14) And he says, “Remember the mission! You made a promise. You have to show that you’re awesome. Remember the mission, the glory!” And then he says in Exodus 33, “God, let me see it. Just let me see a bit of your glory.”

**Exodus 33:19–23** And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man

shall not see me and live.” And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall

stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will

cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see

my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

This is an amazing moment in history! Yahweh unveils a bit of His glory for Moses in the context of covenants. And this is a very real significant number. It’s an actual number of days and it comes to the context of covenants. So Elijah journeys for 40 days. Where does he go?

Proof # 3: Divine Guidance (19:8b-9a)

We see God’s tender care provided through divine guidance. Look at some specifics about where Yahweh guides him.

Specific # 1: Yahweh’s Mountain

He guides him 100 miles or so into the wilderness, to this mountain, the mountain.

***8*** *And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.*

Wait a second! We’ve been here before. It’s almost like walking, in terms of distance, from here to Chicago through a barren wasteland. And he gets to this mountain.

Specific # 2: Yahweh’s Cave (19:9a)

***9*** *There he came to a cave and lodged in it.*

In Hebrew, there is a definite article here. This is not just any cave. The text says “the” cave.

Could it be that this is where Yahweh had let Moses see His glory? During that intense mission opposition, when Yahweh’s people rebelled and were about to be smited and Moses interceded by way of covenant? Let’s keep reading. We see Yahweh’s tender goodness through refreshment, divine presence, sustenance, and guidance all the way up to His mountain, to the cave of covenant.

**Encouragement # 2 Revelation: The Subtlety of Yahweh’s Plans (19:9-14)**

Yahweh has proven His goodness through the sufficiency of His provision, and now He will prove it by revealing the subtlety of His plans. There are a few traits hinted at by Yahweh’s revelation that are somewhat unexpected.

Trait # 1: Divine Empathy (9b-10)

Yahweh is a God with divine empathy. He understands and cares. He wants to hear from Elijah.

***9*** *There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

In this cave, perhaps where Israel was almost destroyed, Elijah has a message of indictment.

***10*** *He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of 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.”*

“It’s come to this,” Elijah says. “We’re at the last straw.” When Israel broke the covenant, Moses interceded and Yahweh offered covenant renewal. Here, Israel has broken the covenant again and Elijah makes an accusation. It’s an indictment that’s mostly accurate, but maybe not completely. In chapter 18, Elijah heard from Obadiah that at least 100 prophets were hiding, and in another cave no less. So the facts here seem not entirely true. But Elijah seems sincere enough. Israel has broken the covenant and his life is in danger and he has been very zealous for Yahweh. It’s just that there seems to be a pinch of self-pity. But God’s not without empathy. Second, look at the sensitivity of Yahweh’s goodness revealed through divine mystique.

Trait # 2: Divine Mystique (11-13a)

Yahweh breaks up the pity party.

***11*** *And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.* ***12*** *And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.* ***13*** *And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

Talk about mystique. Yahweh knows how to get attention. Sometimes you emphasize by noise. Sometimes you emphasize by silence. A gentle breeze. A heavenly whisper. A second wind. Now what point is Yahweh making here? It’s hard to know for certain. But most believe it’s something like this. Sometimes God works in intense and amazing miracles, like in chapter 18. Sometimes He uses lightning bolts and drama. But more often than not, He is pleased to work through the small subtleties, the silent unimpressive calm of His Word, so easily overlooked, it might seem Elijah might make that same mistake.

Trait # 3: Divine Stamina (13b-14)

You can see the sensitivity of Yahweh’s goodness revealed through the subtlety of His divine stamina; His patience with Elijah. After this kind of display of mystique, He asks Elijah the

same question. Maybe it’s even another chance to rethink his answer. “What are you doing here Elijah?” And in verse 14, Elijah states the same accusation.

***14*** *He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of 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.”*

It takes serious resolve to answer God the same way twice. And it seems here, while his accusation is sincere, that his self-pity might be a little uncalled for. And yet Yahweh’s goodness is so patient. His stamina is so enduring. He encourages Elijah through refreshment

and revelation, through the subtleties of His plan. Even though revival isn’t coming with flare the way Elijah had wanted, it doesn’t mean God isn’t working or that His plans aren’t completely on target.

The truth is, God’s goodness is sometimes very subtle. Sometimes His goodness can seem hidden. But no matter how big the problem, there is no room for self-pity. It just doesn’t belong. Yahweh, in His goodness, can encourage through refreshment and revelation and show everything is under control. He calls us to draw near to Him with trust. Draw near and have hope. Because if we aren’t careful, we might overlook His goodness in the challenges of school, in the difficulties of our marriage, in the trials of our parenting, in seasons of opposition. Even while He refreshes and reveals Himself to us, we might miss His tender sensitivity and subtlety.

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses had told the people something. He said, “Listen. I’m not going to be here forever.”

**Deuteronomy 18:15-19** “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

Now, Elijah is a prophet, but it doesn’t seem that he’s *that* prophet. We’re still awaiting another. Who, I wonder? When he comes, might he also prove that God doesn’t need to work with big flare and pomp? He doesn’t need the fire. He brings the Word. Somehow, God’s plan is most secure in the form of a lowly infant in a manger born to a nobody in the middle of nowhere. It’s so subtle that it’s almost overlooked. But don’t let that subtlety fool you. It is finesse like that that proves the sensitivity of God’s goodness. It’s a sensitivity we too often mistake for neglect. And that fatigue drags us into the pitfall of self-pity. We know the disappointments that cause self-pity. We’ve seen how it affects us and how we need encouragement and we can even overlook it. What does God do in the end? How do we overcome self-pity?

**III. Take a Breath (Confidence)—The Reliability of God’s Goodness (19:15-18)**

It was almost a decade ago that I was blessed to have a friend of mine, a minister from Africa, come visit me in California. He had been in a church for a while. Someone paid for him to come attend a pastor’s conference in LA. The experience was more than he could have imagined. It’s awesome seeing this guy come to California and to try to taste just a hint of spicy Mexican food, but also, to be at this pastor’s conference. And in his entire life, he’d only met a handful of pastors, maybe a couple hundred Christians at the most. And all of a sudden he’s at a conference with thousands of pastors. And it was this awesome realization. His eyes were opened. And this is an experience that is shared by many Americans who travel on short-term missions and go overseas. They realize that God has people everywhere. There are thousands of followers of Jesus out there. And you realize that you’re not alone. You can kind of sit back and take a breath, and be reassured of the reliability of God’s goodness. He’s working!

It’s way too easy to feel alone. Elijah felt it. He’s the last of the prophets. And when it comes to God’s goodness, he needs to realize there is more than meets the eye. God’s goodness can be obscured. It can even be overlooked. But in the end, it will shine unveiled. After Elijah’s disappointment here and even his terrifying indictment, Yahweh is going to respond with a just verdict. What will He say to this self-pity? He’s going to give two reassuring guarantees. They are guarantees that draw Elijah out.

**Guarantee # 1: Retribution: The Certainty of Yahweh’s Justice (19:15-17)**

Retribution is judgment, punishment. He hears what Elijah says. The complaints haven’t gone unheard. And this is the certainty of Yahweh’s justice. It’s the terrifying retribution of Yahweh. And it’s going to unfold with three spheres of justice.

Sphere # 1: International Justice: Hazael, future king of Syria (19:15, 17a)

***15*** *And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.*

Elijah will anoint. It’s the same word for messiah. He will anoint, not a prophet, but a pagan foreign king. Why is that? Well, because now is the turning point in the covenant. It is now that Yahweh will begin to raise up foreign nations and drive Israel into exile like the covenant promised. So for now, retribution will be wrought through the hammer of Syria. In verse 17, Hazael will wield Yahweh’s sword. It is international justice.

Sphere # 2: Royal Justice: Jehu, future king of Israel (19:16a, 17b)

There is going to be a new national king.

***16*** *And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel,…* ***17*** *And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death…*

That is a serious deal, let me tell you, about Jehu. We don’t have time.

Sphere # 3: Spiritual Justice: Elisha, future prophet of Yahweh (19:16b, 17c)

In response to Elijah’s concern for vindication and his overwhelming fatigue, God commissions him to anoint his successor.

***16****…and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.* ***17****…and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.*

That anointing is a task Elijah will complete by the end of the chapter. He’s going to get help, a companion in the midst of his fatigue. Retribution through a foreign power, a new king, and

another prophet. Yahweh has heard and is responding. God will exile His people as punishment for their rebellion, just like He promised Moses. Now begins the time of suffering beneath the rule of foreigners like Syria, like Assyria, like Babylon, and ultimately, Rome. Retribution. But that’s not all.

**Guarantee # 2: A Remnant: The Integrity of Yahweh’s Promise (19:18)**

All this terrible justice can do nothing to threaten the integrity of Yahweh’s promise. He addresses Elijah’s self-pitying claim head on, and He unveils His goodness to lift the prophet from despair. He says, “Elijah, you’re not alone.” There remains an unseen remnant, the stability of which is proven through some surprises.

Surprise # 1: Significant Quantity (19:18a)

***18*** *Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel,…*

Seven thousand. That’s a lot more than just one. And perhaps they’re also hiding in caves. For all of Elijah’s self-pity, he is not in any way alone.

Surprise # 2: Sincere Fidelity (19:18b)

***18*** *Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”*

They are committed to God. They’re undefiled. The covenant is not all lost. You see maybe most in apostasy, but it’s not total. There is a remnant because of God’s grace. Isn’t that what we only recently read in Romans 11? Do you remember when Paul is speaking about God’s plan for the Jews. People thought maybe Israel had been rejected. And he says, Romans 10:21, “Sure, God knows this nation is wicked.”

**Romans 10:21–11:5** But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” But what is God’s reply to

him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

Paul appeals back to this moment. God’s grace is at work even though Elijah couldn’t see it. They haven’t been rejected. There’s a covenant to keep. There’s a promise that was made. And it’s all going to happen by grace. Even if Israel would reject Him and the desolate waste would leave nothing but a stump, Isaiah 6 tells us there would still remain one holy seed. The integrity of Yahweh’s promise means there will always be a remnant. God’s goodness is reliable!

The truth is, God’s goodness may seem missing, it may be subtle, but it will always be certain. It will always be sure. Even when we can’t see it, it’s happening. Justice will be wrought. A remnant will remain. So we can take a breath and renew our confidence and have hope. God is working in ways that we have already overlooked. It’s in subtle quiet ways, but they are nonetheless certain. This coming exile is only going to begin a deeper, longer suffering that is going to move toward the ravages of Rome. But amidst the opposition, the mission marches along. There is a hidden remnant, and there will be a suffering servant, a rejected Messiah. These are not the mind-blowing displays of fire and power, but that doesn’t mean they are any less sure. In the words of one leader, “No longer in the earthquake, [Now] God will be heard instead in [the] rasping whisper from the cross: it is finished.” And with awareness of such goodness, who could find room for self-pity?

He’d been lost at sea for 32 hours. He paddled with all his might to get back to shore, but

fatigue had given way to resignation. The sun began to set for the second time, and he was

looking at imminent death. As the helicopter flew past, his final hope gave way to despair and he knew he was going to die. It was the worst moment of his life. But then, something happened. The chopper banked and started flying back. They saw him and they were coming in for the rescue. The hope that had become despair now exploded into joy. That surfer said, “It was indescribable. It was a combination of the worst and greatest moment of my life.” Back at home, his father’s cell phone rang. His dad walked outside preparing for the worst. His wife looked through the windows and saw him weeping and thought the tragedy had been confirmed. Her hope and strength now failed. But then he ran inside blurting the words, “He is alive!”

Sometimes it is on the heels of life’s worst moments, that we’re able to enjoy the greatest ones.

The mission for glory is accomplished in the valley. There, God unveils that He is good. And that should give us all a second wind. These are tough days for Moses and Elijah. But don’t feel too bad for them, because I suspect they might make a surprise appearance next week while some disciples face their mission impossible in Mark chapter 9, *The Immovable Mountain*.