

Praying When There Is No Answer

1 Kings 18:41-46; Isaiah 30:18

October 14, 2018

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We have all had the experience in prayer of praying earnestly and fervently that the Lord would mercifully heal a very sick loved one, or draw a lost family member to Christ, or provide for an immediate and desperate financial need, but there was no immediate answer to that prayer in the form of healing, salvation, or work. Did God not hear that prayer? Was He not interested? Did He not care? Was He powerless to answer? No! No! No! God hears, cares, and is the same Almighty God who answered Elijah by fire and sent rain upon the land as Elijah persevered in prayer. Let us consider such a time in the life of Elijah and learn in the School of Christ what the Lord is teaching you when there are not the immediate answers to prayer from God that you have sought.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are: (1) Ahab Was Filled with His Own Comfort (1 Kings 18:41-42a); (2) Elijah Was Filled with Persevering Prayer (1 Kings 18:42b-46).

I. **Ahab Was Filled with His Own Comfort (1 Kings 18:41-42a).**

A. Elijah had uttered a brief but fervent prayer to Jehovah God and a supernatural fire fell from heaven and consumed the atoning sacrifice instead of the people (pointing to the sacrificial death of Christ). The people were overwhelmed at this great display of God's power as the fire consumed not only the sacrifice and the wood beneath it, but also consumed the altar of 12 large stones and the 12 barrels of water that had drenched everything and had collected in a large trench around the altar; and Israel fell upon their faces, professing with their mouths, "The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:39). Elijah commanded those on the mount (no doubt comprised of the princes and leaders of Israel) to take the false prophets and execute them according to God's law (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Before moving on, there are a couple observations to leave with you.

1. It was not only the sacrifice or the wood that was consumed by the miraculous fire of God from heaven, but also the very stones of the altar and all of the water as well. Why was the altar consumed? No doubt to show to Israel that this was no ordinary fire—this was the fire of God who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Let me also suggest that the 12-stoned altar was consumed to prevent Israel from idolizing that altar (as was done to the brazen serpent in 2 Kings 18:4). Even that which is good may be idolized (the sacraments, people, job, bank account).

2. But likely the consuming of this altar was also intended by the Lord to remind Israel where God had ordained that they go to worship Him (at the Temple in Jerusalem). This was an extraordinary altar that was consumed so that they would not continue to come to that altar but worship the Lord as He had appointed in His Law.

B. Now let us continue with our text in 1 Kings 18:41 where Elijah commands King Ahab to eat and drink.

1. Some commentators have suggested that Elijah's words were conveyed with sarcasm ("Go, do what is clearly on your heart to do anyway—eat and drink, party and feast."). Ahab likely was hungry and had not eaten since morning, but when we see the contrast in 1 Kings 18:42 between Ahab and Elijah, it is easier to understand the words of Elijah here as sarcasm. "Your heart has not been in the reformation of the true religion, but is all about what pleases you. Go and satisfy your desires, while I will pray for the rain that is needed upon the land."

2. There are times in Scripture that the Lord simply tells the wicked to do what their hearts

are already sinfully inclined to do (in other words, God turns them over to their own wicked desires and pleasures, Romans 1:24,26,28ff—God gave them over...). Ezekiel with sarcasm commands those who forbear to hear the truth (resist it), let them continue in it (Ezekiel 3:27). Paul commands with sarcasm the ignorant to continue in their ignorance if they will not listen to the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 14:38). The angel in Revelation tells John with sarcasm to let the unjust continue in their injustice and those who are morally filthy to do likewise (Revelation 22:11). And I suggest this word from Elijah to Ahab has the same sarcasm attached to it.

3. The work of the Lord was not yet finished, for though Elijah heard by faith the coming of rain in 1 Kings 18:41 (as God had promised back in 1 Kings 18:1), nevertheless, there was yet the spiritual work of calling upon the Lord to fulfil His promise. Elijah was going to attend to that spiritual work in spite of his bodily needs. Ahab was not about to attend to that spiritual work when his bodily pleasures and needs were calling for them to be satisfied. Here is the difference between those who truly have a heart for the Lord and His truth and those who have a heart for the things of this world. There are those, who like Ahab may not outwardly object to the truth God reveals to them (as we hear no objection from Ahab when God revealed Himself by fire and when Elijah even commanded that the false prophets of Baal be executed according to God's command), but their true affections are revealed when they will prefer the pleasures and comforts of the world (communion with the world) over the pleasures and comforts of God and His truth (just a little more sleep over communion with God in prayer).

4. Who is it most important for you to please? Yourself or the Lord? Your family and friends or Jesus Christ? Your will or God's will? Is it your delight to do that which pleases God more than what pleases you? Those who will deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ will evidence their faith and love for Jesus Christ by their perseverance in prayer and obedience to His commandments. Those who are along for the ride as long as Jesus does not interrupt their plans, their comforts, their work, and their relationships are those who will be known by their concern to eat and drink when they should be more concerned to persevere in prayer for God to be glorified and exalted through them and loving obedience to His commandments even when it is not easy.

II. **Elijah Was Filled with Persevering Prayer (1 Kings 18:42b-46).**

A. Elijah has just seen the mighty power of God displayed as a consuming fire that miraculously devoured the altar and all that was on it.

1. It might have seemed like a time to celebrate, relax after a very stressful day, and receive the accolades of Israelites that were utterly amazed. No, Elijah cannot yet rest because the work of the Lord is not yet finished. Now that Israel has made their public profession that Jehovah is the one true living God, Elijah turns again to the Lord in prayer to fulfil His promise to send rain upon the land (1 Kings 18:1).

2. As was noted a couple weeks ago, the prayers of Jesus and of His prophets and apostles are so instructive and helpful to us in teaching us in the School of Christ how we should likewise approach the Lord in prayer, what we should include in our prayers, and how we should interpret God's answers and delays to our prayers (Romans 15:4).

B. Let us consider the following instructive lessons from this prayer of Elijah.

1. **Elijah's prayer was a prayer of faith based upon the promise of God who cannot lie. God had promised Elijah that He would send rain (1 Kings 18:1) and Elijah believed the Lord (1 Kings 18:41).**

a. Someone might object, "Well, if God had just sent miraculous fire from heaven and not only consumed the wood and the sacrifice upon it, but also the stone altar and all the water around it, I would also have believed His promise to send rain upon the land after 3 ½ years of drought." Such statements are always excuses for our unbelief. If you are a child of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, you have a greater miracle worked in your life than fire coming down from heaven. You have been

spiritually raised from the dead through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Physical resurrection rescues one from physical death, but spiritual resurrection rescues one from spiritual and eternal death in hell. Thus, you who have been born again, justified, adopted, and are being sanctified, have every reason to believe the promises of God in His Word every day in whatever difficulties you face, for you have been made alive by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ while others remain dead in their trespasses and sins.

b. Dear ones, the enemy is always ready to sow the seeds of doubt into our minds as if we need any help from him. We are all very good at doubting by way of our sinful nature inherited from Adam. We don't have to learn how to doubt (it's already there). We have to learn and to grow in faith, which is a gift given to all who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God. Faith is like a muscle—the less you exercise it and use it, the smaller it becomes and the less likely it will be ready for any strenuous, spiritual work in the Christian life. However, the more you learn to lean upon Christ and His promises, to draw strength and encouragement from the Word of God, to stand upon the truth of the Lord without compromise or bowing the knee to the pressure of family, friends, or the world, the stronger will grow your faith. Elijah was trusting in the promise of God. What about you? Here are some promises: 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 13:5-6; James 1:5-7; Philippians 4:13; Philippians 4:19; Isaiah 40:28-31; Philippians 1:6.

c. When you trust in the promises of the Lord you are trusting in God's absolute power, God's faithfulness, God's love, and God's mercy. It is because God is infinite and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth that you have every reason to rely upon Him; and there is no good reason (other than your own sinful unbelief) not to trust Him.

2. **Elijah's prayer was a prayer of urgency (1 Kings 18:42).** His prayer brought him to his knees and cast his head between his knees in utter dependence upon the Lord. There was no help in any other (Psalm 124:8). If the help you seek is not first and foremost from the Lord, then your help is in the creation rather than in the Creator. God uses means for your help, but He is your help, and the means He uses are merely His helpers. Do you approach the Lord as if the Lord is simply one of many who can help you or as though He alone is your Help and there is none other?

3. **Elijah's prayer was a prayer of perseverance—he did not quit (1 Kings 18:43-44).**

a. This is the aspect of Elijah's prayer that is so notable from our text. He did not give up praying even though there was nothing that came by way of tangible results that he could see or measure with his senses. He prayed earnestly and fervently that the Lord would send rain, but the servant returned saying, "There is nothing." And Elijah did so not two times, three times, or four times, but seven times (the number of completion—as many times as were necessary).

b. Here, dear ones, is where you will often face doubt and discouragement as to whether you should continue in prayer—when you see no tangible results to your prayers. You see nothing by way of your natural senses (the sky is empty—there are no clouds and there is certainly no rain). God did not send rain immediately in answer to Elijah's prayer, even though He had promised to do so. God was testing Elijah and his faith. Would he quit or continue? What if Elijah had stopped praying after the sixth time and had not proceeded to the seventh time?

c. Dear ones, this is for your instruction and learning in the School of Christ. God always answers the prayers of you, His adopted children, and only gives to you that which is good (Matthew 7:9-11). Whether the Lord answers with a "Yes", or with a "No", or with a "Wait", He as your loving, sovereign, wise, and just Heavenly Father will always and only give you what is good for you and what will most glorify Him (Isaiah 30:18).

d. God was not anxious because He had not sent rain after Elijah prayed three times, four times, five times, or six times. The Lord was not nervous or wondering how this was all going to work out. He was waiting for His own appointed time to glorify Himself and send rain. Just as Jesus waited to heal the man born blind (John 9) and waited until Lazarus was dead before He went to Bethany (John 11), so He often waits in bringing the rain for which you have prayed. The Lord Jesus has not promised that you will

not pass through storms, trials, sorrows, afflictions, and delays, but He has promised to be with you and that you will pass to the other side of those storms, trials, sorrows, and afflictions safely by His power and grace. His death and resurrection have secured and are our absolute guarantee of that safety.

e. Therefore, be not faint-hearted in prayer. When you quit, the enemy rejoices. When you persevere by God's grace, the enemy trembles and all of God's angels rejoice. It was not until after the seventh time of persevering prayer that the Lord provided a small cloud of encouragement (the size of a man's hand off in the far distance). But that was encouragement enough to Elijah's faith. Don't belittle the small clouds or the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10)—rejoice in them and take encouragement from them (Matthew 15:21-28—here is the persevering prayer of Elijah evidenced in this mother—a faith that would not be discouraged). Let not your heart be discouraged, neither let it be afraid. Trust in the Lord Jesus. It is impossible for Him to fail you.

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