

## **Preparing for the Fire of God**

1 Kings 18:30-35; Proverbs 22:28

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If we would see the holy fire of God set our lives on fire for Jesus Christ to love and serve Him above everything in this world and to burn up the chaff of our backsliding and rebellion against His revealed will, we must begin by rebuilding the altar unto the Lord that has fallen into disrepair. The altar represents the worship and service that sets forth Jesus Christ and His precious gospel. The altar declares to God and to all who know you who is on the throne of your life.

Popular Christianity teaches that Christians have nothing to do with their past sins (since nothing in the past can be changed), so simply start afresh and forget about the past (as if it never happened). But dear ones, the Lord through His prophet, Elijah, speaks to you today, that you cannot move forward in coming to Christ or growing in Christ if you do not earnestly repair the altar by confessing your sins, your rebellion, and your backsliding of the past to the Lord against whom you have sinned.

You must not seek to offer your life on the altar of your former gods that you served thinking you can keep those gods and serve the Lord at the same time (whether those gods be money, work, bank account, pleasure, music, lusts of the flesh, clothing, health, family, or approval of others). No! No! No!

You must restore the altar and worship to Jesus Christ which has already been laid by the Lord in His Word to which nothing is to be added or subtracted. If that is too hard and difficult, then it is better to be honest and simply confess you do not want Jesus to be Savior and Lord of your life, in your family, in the church, or in this nation. You want your own altar that is dedicated to the gods you serve. This is the message with which the Lord challenges you today. We will be considering four steps that Elijah took in preparation for fire from the God of heaven.

### **I. The First Step: Elijah calls the people to come close (1 Kings 18:30).**

A. The 450 prophets of Baal have now exhausted themselves physically and emotionally for 6 hours in shouting out their urgent pleas to Baal to hear them and to send fire to consume their sacrifice to him. They have jumped and danced upon and around the altar to Baal seeking to get the attention of a lifeless god who cannot speak, hear, or act. They have even lanced their bodies so that blood covers them as they show how sincere they are in crying out to a god of their own imagination. Baal has failed. There was only silence. He is not the one true God that answers by fire. All attention now is focused on the one faithful prophet of the Lord, Elijah, who stood for Jehovah against the majority.

B. Elijah now calls the people to come close so that they can see for themselves the steps he takes in restoring the altar to Jehovah and to hear the prayer he offers to the one true living God (1 Kings 18:30). There are no funny tricks or sleight of hand that Elijah introduces (as if he were a magician that brings fire from his sleeves).

1. Dear ones, the truth of Jesus Christ does not fear the light of investigation. It is sin and error that does not want to be exposed by the truth. This is why Jesus Christ and all who stand with Him are so often hated, despised, maligned, and persecuted (John 3:19-21). Even as Christians, why do we lash out in anger at a husband/wife, a parent/child, or a friend who points out to us a sin/error or a contradiction in our lives? Is it not often because we do not want that sin or contradiction in our lives to be exposed by the light? That anger reveals we do not want to give up that cherished sin, but rather want to protect it.

2. The conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit (who uses the minister and others in your life) is

not your enemy—it is your friend; for like pain, it tells you that you are spiritually ill and need the healing and help of the Lord Jesus. Praise God for His conviction in revealing sin.

## **II. The Second Step—Elijah repairs the altar of the Lord (1 Kings 18:30-32).**

A. Elijah did not use the altar to Baal that had just been used by the prophets of Baal. Elijah was not about to go back and use in worship that which was corrupted by idolatry. He would not mix that which was corrupt with that which was pure in worship, and neither should we. Should we build our worship to the Lord upon ceremonies (bands, images, uninspired hymns, drama and dancing) that have not Christ's appointment in the New Testament or holy days (like Christmas or Easter) that have not the Lord's authority in the New Testament? No! That would be like Elijah taking the altar of Baal and offering his worship to the Lord upon it. God forbids it as seen from the example of Elijah.

B. Elijah also did not start afresh in building a brand new altar dedicated to Jehovah. Elijah did not want to convey to the people that he was beginning some new, exciting, religion or worship to God. He was not starting a new church. He was continuing the same church, religion, and worship which the Lord had instituted for His people at Mt. Sinai. He did not want to be disconnected in history from those who were faithful before him. Elijah was demonstrating his historical connection to the same Church of Israel that God covenanted with at Mt. Sinai. The God He served and the religion he practiced was the same as that of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon. Likewise, we should not see ourselves as starting a new church or introducing something new into worship (nor should anyone else), but rather we should restore and rebuild the faithful worship to Jesus Christ taught in Scripture and in our Confession of Faith that has been forgotten or has fallen by way of backsliding.

C. Elijah chose a spot there on Mt. Carmel where there was an altar that had been built unto Jehovah by the faithful that preceded him (it is called "the altar of the LORD that was broken down"). Perhaps it was a known altar that had been built before the temple in Jerusalem was built and had been cast down by idolaters.

1. What is evident is that Elijah was calling the corrupt, idolatrous, and backslidden people of Israel that had broken down the altar and worship of the Lord back to the God who in love had chosen them to be His people, in love had redeemed them out of Egyptian bondage, and in love had entered into covenant with them and had given to them His gospel and holy commandments—for Elijah rebuilt the fallen altar and testimony of the Lord not with 10 stones, but with 12 stones (signifying the 12 tribes of Israel). Elijah was calling Israel to repentance for having torn down the altar and worship of Jehovah and having built altars throughout Israel to Baal. An altar was like a throne upon which God was worshipped and served (as was the altar dedicated to Baal).

2. The stones of the altar to Jehovah were not to be cut and shaped by tools, but untouched by man's works (Exodus 20:25). Your work, righteousness, and obedience will never make you acceptable before God—they are all tainted with sin. Only the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ upon that divine altar of the cross can make you acceptable to God. If you believe God should welcome you into heaven because you are good and help others, then you still don't understand that you are a sinner before God. And God, the righteous Judge, condemns you. For all that you have done cannot remove your sins against God and man (nor can the good that a criminal has done). It is only Jesus Christ (God's perfect sacrifice) who bore upon that altar of the cross the sin and condemnation of all that will trust Him that can cleanse you (John 14:6).

3. Though Israel had torn down the true and faithful altar of the Lord (through their idolatry and covenant-breaking), Elijah, God's prophet and minister, was rebuilding it to the glory of God. If you would see reformation and sanctification in your life, family, church, and nation, the old altar must be rebuilt in worship and service to Jesus Christ. He must rule upon the altar and throne of your life. You must

repent of having built altars to other gods in your life. You must go back to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16) and the old landmarks (Proverbs 22:28) and renew your first love to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. There is no other way.

4. Elijah was not in a hurry to just throw some altar together in the quickest way he could. He was orderly in restoring the original altar to the Lord. He didn't care if others mocked him or laughed at him because he was restoring an altar that was old and took more time. He was more concerned that the altar and worship of the Lord be restored and built correctly and faithfully than that it was done carelessly. Likewise, dear ones, reformation of which God approves in your family, church, and nation is a reformation that is sure and faithful by way of consistency, by way of care for the name of the Lord, by way of faithfulness to what God has already revealed rather than innovative and entertaining. It is not that church that can most quickly ordain church officers, but that church that can most faithfully do so, and can most faithfully set before the people of God a spiritual and pure meal that God will bless to your spiritual life, health, and growth.

5. **Objection:** Elijah was not a Levitical priest ordained to offer sacrifices. This altar was not in the Temple in Jerusalem. **Response:** being a prophet Elijah did extraordinarily all these things according to the word of the Lord (1 Kings 18:36). Elijah was given supernatural revelation to take these steps—he was not worshipping God according to man's will, but according to God's will. Elijah is here a type and picture of the Lord Jesus Christ who was ordained by God to be our priest though he was not of the tribe of Levi, but was from the tribe of Judah and was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek and offered His life for sinners upon the cross (not in the Temple)

### III. The Third Step—Elijah looks to the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:33).

A. In this next step care is taken by Elijah to place wood upon the altar in an orderly fashion and to slay the bullock, placing the sacrifice upon the wood. Which is greater the altar or the sacrifice? To what did Elijah look as that which would cleanse God's people of sin: the altar or the pure sacrifice? In New Covenant language, which is greater the cross (altar) or the Lord Jesus Christ that hung upon that cross as God's sacrifice for sin? As important as is the altar and the outward forms by which you worship the Lord, what is most important is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the object of your worship. Never think you have worshipped the Lord Jesus simply because you have used the right forms. For if you are not looking to Jesus Christ with the eye of faith and with the heart of love for who He is and what He has done, it is all vain and useless worship. All that Elijah was doing by way of preparation had as an end the sacrifice for sin which he would call upon the Lord to receive on behalf of all who would look to that greater sacrifice for sin—the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. When your stand for the altar and the outward form of worship becomes more important to you than the life, death, resurrection, glorification, and rule of Jesus Christ over your life, family, church, and over the world, you may have built a biblical altar, but you act as though the altar was an end in itself. It's not! Jesus Christ is your life and your reason for living. Without Him there is no forgiveness of sin. Without Him there is no righteousness accounted to you. Without Him there is no hope, but only the darkness of God's holy wrath and condemnation awaiting you. But with Him there is love forever more, pardon of all sin, righteousness in Him, help, hope, provision, and preservation. Elijah was looking in faith to the sacrifice (Jesus Christ); where are you looking by faith? There must be daily inspection of your life in the presence of God so that love for Jesus Christ does not become a love that you have left behind for something else (even for that which is good like your family or the ordinances, sacraments, and testimony of our faithful forefathers). Your altar and outward worship and profession may be in place, but have you forgotten who is on that altar.

### IV. The Fourth Step: Elijah looks beyond the obstacles (1 Kings 18:33b-35).

A. Now just before Elijah calls out to the Lord in prayer, there is one more step that he takes: he

digs a large trench around the altar and pours 12 barrels of water upon the sacrifice, wood, and altar so that it fills the trench that was dug. How odd and strange he probably looked to all of Israel. What was the point of this? It was to make clear that even the greatest obstacles, trials, temptations, opposition, or adversity you may face is not able to prevent the Lord from sending His holy fire from heaven to see reformation when the Lord Jesus and His worship is restored. That much water certainly demonstrated that any ordinary fire of man would not be able to consume the sacrifice. This would take the supernatural fire of God by His Spirit to consume this drenched offering.

B. Dear ones, as long as your eye of doubt is on the water that drips from the altar and fills the trench around it, your eye of faith will not be on the one true living, eternal, almighty God that supernaturally sends fire from heaven and has already consumed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and has already overcome all obstacles, enemies, trials, and afflictions. You are walking by sight and not by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are trusting in natural fire and natural means of delivering you, rather than by supernatural fire that comes from God in heaven. There will only be change, reformation, and sanctification as you restore the altar that is fallen (by way of repentance, love, and new obedience) and look in faith to the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

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