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The Miracle

1 Kings 18:23-29

Prayer: *Father, I do again thank you for your grace and your goodness and your mercy. And Father, we pray as we again are back into our series on Elijah, that you would continue to give us the presence of your Holy Spirit as we open up your book, as we look into it, Lord, we just continue to pray that you would be here guiding us, opening up our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds so that we may see these truths and that they may be of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I said, we are back at the story of Elijah. This has been a three-week hiatus for Christmas and New Year's, and we're back at the story where this confrontation is about to unfold. So just to give you a little bit of background, let me sketch in where we've been. Israel is in terrible shape. A severe drought has been going on for three years, they're at the point of starvation. And this drought is not a natural event, it is a supernatural event that's been brought on by God himself as punishment for Israel having abandoned the one true God, for the fact that they're now

worshiping the baals and they're slaughtering God's prophets. The war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness has now broken through into the kingdom of flesh, and both sides have their heroes in this conflict. On the side of Baal, we have King Ahab, who is incredibly wicked and his even more wicked wife Jezebel. God's side has Elijah has a champion, and obviously these two are mortal enemies. Well, both sides agree to a contest to determine once and for all which god is the real God. And where we're at right now is Elijah is beginning to lay out the details of this contest. We are in *1 Kings 18* starting at verse 23. Elijah says this, he says: *"Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire -- he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."*

You know, I remember reading these words and thinking yes, this is good, this is a very good thing, God, at last you're going to make yourself obvious. There's going to be no more beating around the bush, I mean, Elijah has created a situation where it's going to be in no uncertain terms we're going to know who is who. Again verse 24, Elijah says: *"Then you call on the name of your god, and I*

will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire -- he is God."

You know, I wondered, God, why don't you do this more often, I mean, if every fifty years or so God did this spectacular kind of a miracle, well then, wouldn't there be far more Christians and far less atheists? So why doesn't God do this more often? Well, one reason why he doesn't, because it doesn't work very well and God knows it. In fact, in *Luke 16* Jesus tells us a story about a rich man and a poor man whose name was Lazarus, and this man was so poor he begged the crumbs that would fall from his master's table and after a while both of them die, and Lazarus goes right up to Abraham's bosom and the rich man goes to hell. And while he's in hell he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to rise up from the dead to warn his brothers of the terrible fate that awaits them if they don't repent. This is from *Luke 16:27*. The man says: "*Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.*" Abraham replied, *'They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.'* 'No, father Abraham,' he said, *'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'* He said to him, *'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'*" Jesus is quoting Abraham to say that the power of salvation is not in the

signs and wonders that raising Lazarus from the dead would represent. No, what Jesus is saying is the power is in Moses and the prophets, what he means is the scripture. It's the scripture and God's Holy Spirit. He says in verse 29: *"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.' 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"* So God is telling us right off the bat that miracles alone will never, never convince us.

Okay. That's one reason. Another reason why God doesn't use miracles that often is that miracles themselves can become the distraction. You know, as Jesus performed more and more miracles, the crowds that were surrounding him grew enormous, but they were not attracted to him. They were attracted to the signs and the wonders themselves. Jesus, it says in *John 6:2*: *And a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.* Jesus knew, he knew that hunger and sickness was a very real issue but he also knew that the gravest threat these people had, it wasn't physical. It was spiritual. You know, the miracles certainly got their attention but at the same time they re-focused that attention not on the miracle maker but on what they could get from the miracles. *John 6:26* says: *Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw*

the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Okay. So so far we see that miracles, they really don't convince and they certainly can distract, and there's another reason why God doesn't do them that often is that is that they almost are instantly polarizing, that is, they make folks make a choice. You know and sometimes that's exactly what a person needs but far more often than not God works very slowly, very patiently, very repeatedly in the lives of those he has chosen. You know, one aspect of God's grace, one aspect of his mercy is his amazing patience. You know, I think of the repeated times that I was exposed to the gospel, and each one moved me in incrementally tiny steps, steps so small that I wasn't even aware of it. I mean, I don't know that I would have responded or how I would have responded if I was forced to make a choice almost instantaneously. You know, experiencing a miracle, it raises all of these existential questions that force people to confront issues that they would rather simply put off. Jesus's enemies went from simply arguing with his positions to actively seeking his death because his miracles forced them to decide. I mean either this was the God that they needed to worship or this was the threat that they needed

to eliminate, and the man born blind is a perfect case in point. You know, the religious leaders, they can't see the wonder of the miracle of sight that's being infused into his sightless eyes even though the miracle is standing right in front of them. Instead they see this peasant carpenter son garnering the esteem that they felt belonged to them. The blind man had been blind from birth and everybody knew him, so there's no getting around the fact that a genuine miracle had taken place, so now they have to make a choice. Well, they chose the weakest of responses. They chose the fact that he healed the man on a Sabbath as to be something that they were going to complain about. Nobody was buying that response. And so they grew more and more bitter and angry the more obviously the miracle became because they had to choose, and they chose poorly.

So here's the question: Why didn't this great miracle convince them? Well, it's because miracles never move a person from unbelief to belief if that person wasn't first moved that way by God's Holy Spirit. You see, God is incredibly gracious. Listen to what he says in *Matthew 7*. He says: "*For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*" But he also says: *No one understands; no one seeks for God.* You see what God is saying is his door is always open to everyone but no one wants to go in. See, miracles don't

move people except God moves people first. And the percentage of people who are moved that way is absolutely tiny. I mean Jesus said in *Matthew 22:14*: "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*" And among the Pharisees we have an example of one of the few who was chosen, a man by name of Nicodemus. You know, he comes to Jesus at night and he comes with all of these existential questions that all the religious leaders were wrestling with. This is what he says in *John 3*, it says: *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* Well, isn't that what we think miracles would do for everybody? I mean, Jesus's miracles had apparently forced only Nicodemus to make this kind of a choice. I mean this was a choice made possible by the Holy Spirit and not the miracles. I mean all Nicodemus knew is that he was deeply confused and greatly troubled and he was drawn inexorably to this Jesus. Jesus very matter of factly describes the reason why in words that seem to make no sense to us, he says this in *John 3*, he says: "*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*" Well, the Spirit's the Holy Spirit and it blows where it wishes and in this case it blew in Nicodemus's direction. See, the miracles didn't save Nicodemus, God's Holy Spirit did. And so

Nicodemus comes down on the side of Jesus as Lord while all the other Pharisees come down on the side of Jesus as threat.

Nicodemus was God's exception to the rule. And the more miracles Jesus does, the more polarizing and threatening he becomes, and by the time we get to the raising of Lazarus, not the Lazarus I just spoke about, the other Lazarus, the one who was raised from the dead at the end of Jesus's ministry, we see these spectacular miracles instantly dividing people into two very polarized camps. One camp views the raising of the dead as proof positive that Jesus is the Lord of life, that he is worthy of worship. The other camp views the very same miracle as proof that Jesus -- well, he's not going away and he's a threat and he needs to die. I mean again, it wasn't the miracles that save, it's God's Holy Spirit. The miracles simply reveal the process.

So we can say that God uses miracles very sparingly because he knows our hearts. Miracles can be ineffectual, they can be distracting and they can be polarizing not because they fail to establish God's overwhelming power over the laws of nature itself but because they reveal that nothing can penetrate the darkness of the human heart except the light of God's grace. Jesus said this in *Matthew 16:4*, he said: "*A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.*" You know, I think we can safely say that this crowd that

Elijah is addressing in our text this morning, they qualify as wicked and as adulteress. This is a crowd that had left the worship of the true God for the adulterous worship of Baal and Asherah. This is the crowd that centuries before were the very same people who had walked through the Red Sea on dry land as they left Egypt. You know, that miracle and all of the plagues, they were not enough to settle the faith of the Jews. All it took was a passage of time and it so diminished their faith that Elijah was now forced to challenge his own people by saying in *1 Kings 18*:
"How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him." But the people said nothing. Oh, if it would be that simple. But it's not.

You know, we're going to be looking this morning at a spectacular miracle with spectacular results but history itself shows that that miracle didn't have any lasting effect at all on the hearts of the people whose hearts were already hardened and stone cold. And there's a reason why in spite of overwhelming evidence very few people will follow the God that Elijah represents. Understand, God says anyone, anyone who seeks him will find him. But he also says no one seeks him. And a million miracles is not going to make a difference. I mean, the Israelites rejected the very God who led them out of Egypt, the God who fed them miraculously day after day after day with manna that literally rained down from the sky.

That, that wasn't miracle enough to change hard hearts. You know, at one point God actually found himself stacked up against meat, fish, and produce, and the groceries won. This is in *Numbers 11*, it says: *The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost -- also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"* I think the answer to why God doesn't save more people through miracles like this account in scripture is because those miracles were never, never designed to change hardened hearts, and really nobody was ever saved by a miracle. I mean they may have been moved along the pathway that God had chosen for them but it is God's Spirit that changes hearts and not miracles. And outside of a miraculous change of heart, no one, no one will ever come to Christ.

I have a neighbor, I have a neighbor who's an incredibly sweet guy, I've known him for 36 years and in all the 36 years that I've known him, I've only had two incidents with him in which he ever even slightly raised his voice. Both of those instances were times when I tried to present the gospel to him. And you know, we can talk about all kinds of things. He loved to converse, we loved to chat, we chat all the time, but as soon as I got near his need for the gospel, his countenance dropped, his eyes narrowed, and he got

visibly angry and he said, "I don't want to hear it." Why do you suppose that is? I mean people say nobody wants to be sold anything, but the gospel is free. *Romans 3:23* says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* See, the reason why we resent God's free offer is that we are not convinced at all that we have any need of redemption and so we see the love of God as an intrusion rather than a blessing. You see, it is we who have rebelled, it is we who have walked away, it is God who is pursuing us. It is God who came down to earth, who took on flesh and lived the life we should have lived and then died the death we deserve to die just so he could offer up his life as a substitute for ours. But here's the problem. Hearts of stone can't understand and deeply resent the offer of eternal life that he makes, so much so that miraculous proof, it means nothing.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says: *For the word of cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* If the cross is folly, then the miracles that point to it is folly as well. It's the reason why Abraham tells the rich man that somebody returning from the dead will have no net effect on his brothers. It's the reason why a stinking corpse walking out of the grave causes people to have this reaction to Jesus' overwhelming proof of his mastery over death. This is how they reacted in *John 11:53*, it says: *So from that day on they made plans to put him to*

death. You know, God has no delusions about the miracles that he was about to perform through Elijah, that they were going to change the hearts of stone that had already given up the God of Abraham from the gods of Baal and Asherah. What is stunning to me is that God would even try, knowing the hearts that he's dealing with.

We pick up on the story at verse 25, it says this: *Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire."* So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. *"Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.* You know, we may laugh at what seems to be a very primitive expression of false worship, something like you see in National Geographic specials but how often do we go dancing around the altars that we make? I mean, make no mistake about it, we all do our own dance around the altars that we erect to the gods that we worship. These folks worshiped Baal. We worship money and power and sex and science and we worship them with the exact same enthusiasm even though we get the exact same response that they got: *But there was no response; no one answered.* Verse 27 says: *At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" He said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or*

traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

You know, I wonder as I'm looking at this, isn't Elijah kind of breaking the rules here? I wonder, this is kind of almost unique, since when is sarcasm and taunting appropriate in a conversation such as this? And you know, most of the translations reduce the bite of Elijah's taunting by ignoring that in all likelihood Elijah was using a local idiom when he said, "*Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling.*" Actually what Elijah was really saying was perhaps your so-called god is indisposed because he's relieving himself and he can't hear what you're saying. That's what he actually said. So I asked the question, is there really a place for that kind of mocking language, that kind of nasty language in dealing with unbelievers? Well, some of the nastiest language you'll ever find in the New Testament came from where? Came from the mouth of Jesus. He said in *Matthew 12:34*: "*You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil?*" Snakes, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs are not exactly nice things to say, but we all know that Jesus said

them repeatedly to the Pharisees. But understand who it was that Elijah and Jesus were both addressing. They weren't speaking to rank and file unbelievers; they were speaking to religious leaders. In Jesus's case it was the Pharisees; in Elijah's case it was the prophets of Baal, and in both cases the gloves were off. And the gloves were off because the people being addressed were actively involved in rejecting the true God and actively leading others astray. Now, does that give us the right to do likewise? I don't think so. I mean after all, Elijah was a prophet, Jesus was the son of God, we are sinners saved by grace and we understand that no one anywhere in this entire world is beyond the sovereignty of God. Now, I'd be the very first one to tell you that the conversations that I've had with Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are different than a conversation that I would have with a non-believer, but I still believe we owe them respect, not for what they're doing but for what God might be doing through us. And besides, God says this in *1 Peter 3:15*, he says: *Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*

Our text continues in verse 30: *Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom*

the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. Now I don't know about you, but I read these words and I am amazed at the graciousness of God. I mean, Elijah is gathering together all of these people who have one thing in common, they have single-handedly turned their backs on God. Not only have they turned their backs on God, they are now worshiping false gods, gods that demanded human sacrifice. And Elijah is making his altar from an old altar that's been torn down, it's the remnants of an altar that was once offered to the true God that's now broken and in disrepair, and it stands in the silent testimony to the faith of the people that have a faith likewise broken and in disrepair and yet God still chooses to reveal himself to these people who've rejected him.

Verse 33 says: He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it a third time. The water ran down the altar and even filled the trench. You know, folks decry this idea and critics complain about how in the world can you have all of this water if you're at the end of a three-year drought? Where did

this water come from? They forget that the mountain that this contest took place on went right down into the sea and there's absolutely no shortage of saltwater. So Elijah in all likelihood sent the men down the mountain to fill up the jars, sent them back up the mountain to empty them, then back down again three separate times until everything is drenched, everything is dripping, making the idea of fire that much more improbable.

We pick up at verse 36: *At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD -- he is God! The LORD -- he is God!"* Who wouldn't say that seeing God respond that way, I mean, the sky opens up, flames leap out of the sky consuming not just the sacrifice but everything else including stones, soil and water -- not exactly flammable items. So the People see it and they acknowledge the obvious: *"The LORD -- he is God! The Lord -- he is God!"* I mean, no duh.

You know, what Elijah does next is actually very jarring to our way of thinking. This is *1 Kings 18:40*, it says: *And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.* Let me see if I can put this in context to our experience. Let's say that the president who's very soon, it's coming up very soon, the president gives the State of the Union address, and during the State of the Union address, in the Senate chamber itself he gets attacked by a band of Muslim extremists, a band who is determined to take out as many as high government officials as they can, sow chaos in the government and destroy as much as they can. I've wrote this awhile back and thinking it's not that far-fetched because we've seen brutal coordinated terrorist attacks all over the world and then of course we had what happened in France. Let's just say that after a protracted fire fight in which we take many casualties, we're able to subdue them, and we have 40 prisoners left. Now if a military tribunal met shortly thereafter and ruled that these 40, due to their extreme threat and attack, should receive death by firing squad, would you object? Would you say that's inappropriate, that it's too much? You see, the four hundred prophets of Baal were guilty of high treason to the nation of Israel. They transformed it from a theocracy which worshiped the one true God to a perverted nation that was worshiping multiple gods, a nation that now sought

out and executed the very prophets of the one true God. And not only did these prophets treasonously steal the reigns of power from the physical government, they also stole the very souls of the citizens of Israel by substituting their demon god who demanded child sacrifice for the real God who led them out of Egypt. We live in a western style democracy where the idea of summary executions makes us think of Al Qaeda or ISIS and you know, many a times scripture such as these are trotted out to demonstrate what is claimed to be a moral equivalence between the Koran and the Bible. Folks say well they both advocate and condone violence. Well, allow me to point out very huge difference here. You see, Elijah is responding to a threat to the one nation that God had founded, the nation of Israel. Islam sees every single person on the face of the earth as either Muslim or a threat to Islam. It sees every nation that is non Muslim as subject to conquest until it is brought into submission. It sees every moderate Muslim not committed to violent jihad as non Muslim and an equal if not greater threat to Islam as well. But it's a religion of peace, so they say. It is a religion of peace if you understand peace the way they understand it. It is the peace of the conquered no longer able to resist. And we know this is not just theoretical. We are witness to this happening before our very eyes. And we don't have to just look at what happened in France. We as believers, we've seen the butchery of the Coptic Christians in Egypt, the wholesale

slaughter of Christians in Syria and Nigeria, the virtual elimination of Christianity in Iran, and just in case you didn't hear about it during all of what was taking place in this butchery that took place in Paris, 15 people butchered, understand that 2,000 people in Nigeria were butchered by Boko Haram, and these were women and children and the elderly who couldn't run fast enough. That got lost in what took place in France. But Boko Haram is also a radical Islamic group. There is no pretense to peaceful co-existence in countries that come under radical Islam. And history has proven over and over again that that is the way that Islam advances. So make no mistake about it. There are many moderate Muslims who do not share these extreme views of Islam, but the extremist view is the one shared by Muhammad, the one who founded Islam. Muhammad participated in over 60 military campaigns himself, and make no mistake about it, he preached violence against non-believers. And if we are ever taken over by radical Muslims, trust me, the very first ones to go would be the moderate Muslims. So there's simply no comparison between Islam and Christianity or between Israel's history and Islamic history.

You see, from the very start, God had set Israel apart as a unique nation with a government whose head was God himself, and God said to the nation that he led out of Egypt that he would protect them, he would defend them, he would dwell in them and he would feed

them, and they would also act as his arm, bringing his justice only to the nations surrounding and threatening Israel. He also told them that they, too, would be subject to the laws and commandments designed to impress upon them God's holiness, and if they were to violate those laws, they too would be subject to harsh punishment as well. You know, there's no other nation on earth in which God said gather sticks on the Sabbath and you're going to die. There's no other nation where he said curse out your parents and you will be executed. But he said that to the Israelites. You see, the good news and the bad news for Israel is that they would be singularly protected by God but within them, God's holiness would be established. So Israel was a special nation, a chosen nation with a theocratic rule unlike any other nation on earth. The difference between Islam and Christianity is that the Old Testament God is very narrowly focused in his laws, in his discipline, in his responses on Israel, on his chosen people alone. God never intended for Israel to be the conquering force that militarily forces itself on the rest of the world. Islam is quite comfortable with that role. You see, Elijah's command to execute the false prophets was addressing the threat they were to Israel. They were not part of a global Jihad. So was Elijah guilty of being a sore winner, of taking advantage of the weakness of his enemy to exact a vengeance that was over the top? Or was Elijah's response to the miracle that God had delivered perfectly proportionate to the evil

and the threat that the prophets of Baal represented? I believe that it absolutely was and that God used that miracle to remove that threat.

You know, I said at the beginning that one of the reasons why God uses miracles sparingly is because they can be ineffectual, distracting and polarizing. You know, history shows this miracle was no different. It never ushered in any kind of lasting revival in Israel. But you know, there is one miracle that God does repeatedly over and over and over again in the lives of those who also reject him and want nothing to do with him. God describes this miracle in *Ezekiel 36*. This is what he says, he says: *I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* Think about what a miracle this is. What God is saying is I will do a spiritual heart transplant in your life. I'll give you a brand new heart and that heart I give you will be accompanied by my Holy Spirit who will move you to desire to do things God's way. I mean, I know that is

true because that's exactly what God did in my life. You know, in May of 1973, God broke through my own hardened and bitter heart, and even today I am at a loss for words to describe the power, the strength, and the immediacy of that miracle. You know, I was a bored and completely disinterested participant in a house church prayer meeting in a house church in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. I was about as far from God as you can be, and I frequently laughed at and belittled and flat out cursed out those who believed in what I considered to be the absolute nonsense of Christianity. I had been challenged only two nights before by the pastor of this house church to ask God if he was real, and when I told that person who asked me that I didn't believe in God, he challenged me to go the extra mile and declare myself willing to be convinced if God would only do a miracle, if God would only show himself. Well, his challenge appealed to me because he said, if you don't hear from him, then you can walk away from this knowing that you gave it your best shot. I agreed to that because it made sense. So I prayed the strangest prayer I've ever prayed to a God I didn't even believe existed, and two days later he made himself known miraculously in a way that I couldn't possibly dispute. You know, in the middle of this prayer meeting I'm sitting there and I'm bored and I'm distracted, I'm just waiting for it to be over and suddenly God breaks through and he begins to speak to me. You know, there were no audible words spoken except the ones that came

out of the mouth of a stranger who I didn't know from Adam who looked directly at me and said, "I don't know you but God wants you to know that he will never leave you nor forsake you." Now, God spoke those words right into my soul that night. I didn't even know they were in the Bible for months afterwards. And what God said to me without using words at all was that he was real, that he was God, and he was at that very moment speaking directly to me. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that that was a miracle, and it was a miracle no different than the one that Elijah and the nation of Israel witnessed on Mount Carmel. The one on Mount Carmel had a specific goal and a purpose for the nation and for Elijah. It was the sign of an incredibly gracious God calling once again a rebellious people away from a false god and back to the real one. What God did for thousands that day on Mount Carmel he does individually every single day in the hearts of those he has chosen. The thousands of miracles that take place inside cold human hearts every day are the ones that God uses to produce his church. And if you are here and if you are a believer, you're the recipient of a miracle. I mean, I have never in my life ever seen, met or even heard of someone coming to Christ simply on the basis of the overwhelming evidence that he's God in the flesh. I mean, empirical evidence is very helpful but it's never enough. You know, the Pharisees, they're looking at the dead body of Lazarus now alive and breathing and they're deciding Jesus needs to die.

You know, Jezebel knew that God had ignored the prophets of Baal and had caused the whole sacrifice to go up in smoke and what does she decide, Elijah, you've got to die. The point is evidence alone will never change a human heart. The only way you'll come to a saving knowledge of Christ is by a miraculous intervention of God's Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus said in *John 6:43*: *Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."* This is not to say that unless you've had some kind of amazing out of body experience with God that you're some kind of second class Christian citizen. In fact, if you are raised in a Christian household and you had the blessing of the gospel from childhood and just understood the kingdom of God as a normal part of your upbringing, consider yourself blessed with a similar miracle. Consider people like myself who needed a stronger miracle to get there as to be considerably more needy. Either way, the fact that we now have a living heart of flesh and not stone in God's Holy Spirit living within us is no less a miracle. What I want us to understand about the natures of these miracles is that they are out of our hands and firmly in God's, and that means that all God expects from us is to be witnesses to the miracles that he's done in our lives. I mean, to faithfully recount what he has done and what folks do with that witness is between them and God. I mean that's incredibly liberating when you think about it. I

don't have to convince people, I don't have to argue them into the kingdom, I don't have to be brilliant. I simply have to be honest in telling folks who God is and what he has done to save us from the power of sin by the blood of his Son. You see, getting someone to understand that on his own or on my own is as impossible as getting a water-soaked bull to burst into flames simply by saying a prayer. Both of them are impossible, both of them require miracles, both of them God is willing to do. Our job is to be willing to be used as the conduit through which those miracles flow. And so my question this morning is are you willing? Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you for the graciousness that you demonstrate again and again and again, you go after those who have rebelled, you go after those who have taken off, you go after those who turn around and reject you and reject you in the worst possible way. Father, thank you for going after each of us as you did and you demonstrated in Elijah. We praise you, we thank you, we pray for the courage to just present our miracle, and trust you for the rest. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.