

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 18: 36-46 – “Elijah, Earnest in Prayer”, Message # 8 in the series –  
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The lesson that we want to learn at this time, from this passage, concerns our receiving answers to our prayers. The man whom we have been looking at is Elijah the prophet. He was a man of prayer and he was a man of power in his acts, as God’s servant. He was a great man in the sight of the Lord, for He was a man who was earnest in his prayers. He was earnest in prayer, 1<sup>st</sup> of all, in relation to proving God’s existence and His justice. 2<sup>nd</sup> – He was earnest in prayer so that God would send rain. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – He was earnest in prayer that he would bring glory to God even in his running. I pray that as you listen to this message that you might be moved to become earnest in prayer to God, even as Elijah was.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Elijah was a man who was earnest in prayer in relation to proving God’s existence and His justice.**

(verses 36-39)

In verse 36 of chapter 18, it says – “And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.’ “Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.” “Then the fire of God fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.” And when the people, the children of Israel, saw the fire of the Lord come down and consume the burnt sacrifice and the wood, the stones, and the dust, when they saw the fire lick up the water in the trench, they said, “The Lord, He is God!” “The Lord, He is God!”

We see here that Elijah prayed and God answered his prayers with the demonstration of His power. Elijah, as a prophet, was instructed in his spirit by the Holy Spirit, as to what he should do and what he should ask for in this situation of his contest with the prophets of Baal. If we would expect God to do great works in our day, works which will demonstrate the greatness of God’s Being and His power, then we must ourselves, become people who will earnestly pray to Him that He will act. I believe that we can know how we ourselves ought to pray by taking notice of the things that Elijah asked for, in prayer. First of all, he asked God that it would be known that He, God, was God in Israel.

This was a good place to start. We should start by praying that God would make Himself known that He is God in His Church, His spiritual Israel. God has a people in every age, in every generation. But sometimes those people can become dull and lifeless in regard to whatever relationship that they think that they have with Him. This is called backsliding. Israel in that day was terribly backslidden. You find backsliding mentioned in 3 books of the Bible; Proverbs, Jeremiah, and Hosea. Most of the references to it are found in Jeremiah. It is mentioned there 14 times. Sometimes people think that all backsliders are unbelievers who have professed faith in God, but have slidden back from their profession of faith. But this does not appear to be true if you will look with me at Jeremiah 3: 12-15.

Jeremiah was instructed in verse 12 to – “Go and proclaim these towards toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel; say the Lord; I will not cause My anger to fall on you.’ “For I am merciful says the Lord; ‘I will not remain angry forever.’ “Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under ever green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,’ says the Lord.” “Return, O backsliding children, says the Lord; for I am married to you.” “I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” “And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” This was how Israel was in the days of Elijah.

They were people who, some of them, knew God. And yet Elijah did not know that there were more than a handful who really knew the Lord, when actually there were 7,000. Such is probably the case with us today. There may be many more people in our country who know the Lord, than we think. Many people profess the name of the Lord, and some really do know Him, and some really don't. God would have all backsliders return to Him, he says here, "for I am married to you". Certainly this meant that some of them actually knew Him.

We should pray for the state of the Church in our nation, in our day; that God would make Himself known to His own people, even by His mighty acts of power in bringing conviction of sin to backsliding people, and salvation to those who may have sat on the fence far too long.

Then Elijah prayed that it would be known in Israel that he was God's servant and that he was going to do these things at God's word. And he would do them so that they would know that God was God, and that it was He who was turning their hearts back to Himself. This also, is the way that we should pray today. Only God can make it known to people's minds and hearts that He has called a man to be a minister and to preach His word. Only God can reveal to people the faithfulness of a man of God. Only God can turn the hearts of people back to Himself. Jeremiah 3: 22 says – "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." This is why we should pray earnestly in the way that Elijah did.

Elijah also prayed in verse 36 of our text, that God would let it be known that day that God was God, and that he was God's servant to execute justice; that all the things that he would do that day, that everyone would know that they had been done at His word. In other words, he was praying that the justice of God would prevail over all false religion. And so when the fire fell, and when the people confessed that the Lord, He was God, the Lord He was God, Elijah seized the moment, of their understanding the truth. They now knew that God was the only true and living God, and Elijah also knew that their hearts had, at least for this time, been turned to God, because they had beheld this mighty act of power.

This was why he could confidently ask those faithful Israelites around him – "Seize the prophets of Baal!" "Do not let one of them escape!" "So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there." What we should conclude from this, is that it was most definitely the right thing to do, in the sight of God in Old Testament times, to execute the prophets of Baal. It was right for the men who God had placed in authority, to execute just judgment upon those who were false prophets; those who had turned the hearts of the people away from the only true God, to worship idols. That is what these prophets of Baal had been doing for some years now, in that time.

If we were to look at Deuteronomy 13: 1-11, we would see that Israel was commanded to put to death those false prophets who would turn the people away from God and entice them away from Him by their false words and teachings. They were to "put away the evil from their midst". Elijah was very zealous in a holy way, according the law of Moses, to put these false prophets to death. The people brought them down to the brook Kishon, and Elijah slew them there. Ahab did not stand in his way or say that he was not doing the right thing by doing this. He was in no position to prevent it. The word of God in the law of Moses was very clear. But what are we to do in our day; in New Testament times, about those who are false prophets and false teachers?

Well, we are certainly not to tolerate them in our churches; those men and women who try to turn us away and entice from the true worship and service of the living God. But are we to put them to death? I think not; not at least, without the people of the land enacting a law which would be the will of the President, and the Congress, supported by the will of the people. Certainly they deserve to die, but we have no example or instruction for this from the apostles, except in Romans chapter 13, verses 1-4. Certainly we do have an authoritative word there, on rulers being able to enact capital punishment upon those who are evil-doers, and certainly promoting false religion is a severe evil in any society.

But in New Testament times, the ecclesiastical minister's authority certainly does not extend to putting to death any person for doing evil. In our times, we must learn to pray earnestly that justice would be done. In our times, it is only by the civil magistrate's power that capital punishment can be done. But we should pray for God's power to be shown forth in the decisions of men. God in New Testament times commands all men everywhere to repent, for He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world through the Man whom He has appointed, that is – Jesus Christ. And He has furnished proof of this by raising Him from the dead. We should pray that men would repent, and they would believe in Christ, even men who presently hate Him.

What can we do, personally then, about false religion and false prophets? We should point out to people the fact that all religions but Christianity are false religions. Their teachers are false. And we should warn people that their teachers should not be listened to. And we should do everything that we can, politically, to elect people to office who will oppose false religion and false prophets. We should attempt to show people the tremendous damage that is done to people and to nations who believe in what is false, and what rejecting the truth of the Bible, by a whole society, leads to. It leads to the Lord's judgments coming upon that society and against those people, not to mention their endangering their eternal souls.

And so where we opportunity, we should proclaim the truth about Christ being the only Savior of men, and that He is the Lord over all men. For Christians to do these things and proclaim the gospel to sinners, it is pleasing to God. But we should also see that it will take acts of the Lord's power in judgment and His bringing revival to change whole societies away from false doctrine. That is why we must earnestly pray.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Elijah was earnest in prayer so that God would send rain.** (vs. 41-44)

Verse 41 says: "Then Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.'" "So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, 'Go up now, look toward the sea.'" "So he went up and looked, and said, 'There is nothing.'" And seven times he said, "Go again." "Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, 'There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!'" "So he said, 'Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'"

Now, you will notice that since the evil in Israel had been addressed publicly and since the prophets of Baal had been slain by Elijah, God's appointed minister of justice in this case, that the way is now opened for God to show mercy to Israel in giving them rain once again. Notice that Elijah says to Ahab – "Go up and eat and drink for there is a sound of abundance of rain." Elijah knows this because he is the prophet of the Lord; that the Lord would now bring rain. But even though he knew that the Lord was going to bring rain, even so, he does not neglect the appointed means of the rain being brought, humanly speaking. The appointed means was prayer.

Turn with me over to James chapter 5, verses 16-18 – "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months." "And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit." Here in these verses, we find that there is nothing mentioned which indicates that Elijah was an extraordinary prophet, and therefore we should not follow his example of prayer. Indeed, it says the very opposite.

James states that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly. And since he had a nature like ours, we should therefore use him as an example to ourselves of earnest, effective, and fervent prayer. So what exactly did Elijah do, in our text? In verse 42, Elijah went up to the top of Carmel, and he bowed down on the ground and put his face between his knees. And after a little prayer he told his servant – "Go up now and look toward the sea." "So he went up and looked, and he said, 'There is nothing.'" We should learn from this that when we first set out to pray, we should not be discouraged if we do not see the result that we are looking for immediately.

It says: “And seven times he said, ‘Go again.’ And it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!’”

We should learn from this to continue in prayer. We should continue seeking, and when we see the smallest indication of the answer coming, we should conclude that God is beginning the work for which we are longing for. Seven is the number of completion in the Bible. Keep on praying until you see the evidence that your prayers will be answered favorably. And have the faith to believe that you will receive the whole answer to your prayer; it is coming. In Elijah’s case, he knew that the Lord was going to answer his prayers by giving a heavy rain, and so he had his servant go say to Ahab in verse 44b – “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’”

Whenever we are tempted to doubt in relation to the legitimate prayers that we offer up to God, let us remember the words of James 1: 5 and 6 – “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” Be not unbelieving when you pray, but believe that God can, and He will, when it is according to His will, give us answers which are exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. (Ephesians 3: 20)

**And 3<sup>rd</sup> – He was earnest in prayer that he would bring glory to God even in his running.**

Verse 45 – “Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain.” “So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.” “Then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.” In the New American Standard Translation it says: “Then the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel.” This too, was one of the Lord’s acts of power. In verse 41 Elijah had said to Ahab – “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.” He knew that Ahab was more interested in eating and drinking than in whether the judgment would be lifted from Israel.

But he himself was more concerned with the glory of God than anything else. And God rewarded him for this. He gave him a more than ordinary strength for a man of his age, and he was enabled by God’s strengthening him, to outrun Ahab’s chariot to Jezreel. When Elijah prayed that God would demonstrate His power that day, little did he know that God would go to answer that prayer exceedingly abundantly more than he could ask or think. Let us remember in closing the importance of doing all that we are doing to the glory of God. For when we do, we will know the Lord’s power surprising us at certain points.

I am sure that Elijah could identify with the prayer of David in Psalm 71: 16 – “I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.” “O God You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works.” “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.” There is no indication that Ahab took notice of this, to make mention of the wonder of it, to Elijah. Neither is there any mention in the text of his offering Elijah refreshments after his arduous running. But let us remember in closing that God is able to sustain us in our strength until His purposes are all accomplished. And so, let us thank Him, in our prayers for His mighty works of power, and pray that because of them, hearts will be turned to Him.