

Elijah 4

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[0 : 0 0] Seeking God's blessing will turn again to 1st Kings chapter 18.

And particularly verse 21. And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions?

If the Lord be God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him. How long halt ye between two opinions?

In the third year of the famine, the famine became particularly severe, especially so in Samaria.

And the Lord called Elijah to return and to leave the house of the widow woman in Sarephath and to present himself again for the second time before Elijah, before Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

[1 : 2 8] And however alarming that commandment must have been to Elijah and it must have been that Elijah again obeyed because he was a man of obedience.

And he went to present himself before Ahab. Ahab was in a rage and in a fury by this time. We saw last week that he had sent messengers here, there and everywhere to try to locate this man to bring the famine somehow to an end.

And Elijah knows that Ahab desires really to kill him, but he knows that ultimately his life is in God's hand. And so he obeys the Lord and goes to present himself before Elijah.

And the scene then changes into Samaria itself, to the capital, where Ahab is a king perplexed, he's frustrated and angry.

And a large part of his anger is due to the fact that his army is in trouble. Ahab had a large collection of horses, foreign horses, prime specimens. One of the kings of Assyria, Shalmaneser III, tells us in his own writings that Ahab contributed 2,000 chariots to a coalition of kings that came against him.

[2 : 4 1] So secular history tells you there just how powerful and influential Ahab was and how much he prided himself on his horses and his chariots. And up to this point he had been able to find some fodder for them, but now that is proving difficult.

So he calls his steward, a man called Obadiah, who remarkably feared the Lord. However he stayed in that position, I don't know.

We know in Paul's time that there were saints in Caesar's household. So the Lord must have had some way of protecting this man, Obadiah. You never know, maybe Ahab managed to keep him there for his own conscience.

We don't know, but in any case his steward was a God-fearing man. And Ahab said to him, you go one way through the country and I'll go the other way and find some fodder for the horses.

Find some feed for them in case my army is decimated. And so they do that. Obadiah goes one way and Ahab goes another. Obadiah isn't too long on his journey when he meets this figure with the leather belt.

[3 : 46] And looking at him, he can hardly believe his eyes. He doesn't know the whereabouts of Elijah. He doesn't know if he's dead or alive. But there's no mistaking the man who stood once in his own king's presence.

And he recognizes Elijah. And he said, are you Elijah? Or are my eyes deceiving me? And Elijah says, go and tell Ahab that I wish to meet with him.

And Obadiah is first of all fearful, but Elijah assures him that he wishes to meet with Ahab and that Obadiah's life won't suffer. And so Obadiah returns and tells Ahab that Elijah desires to see him.

And so Ahab goes out to meet Elijah. And notice their first meeting in three years in verse 17. And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said to him, art thou he that troubleth Israel?

Are you the troublemaker in Israel? Are you the one who caused the famine? Are you the one who caused all the hardship in the country? Are you the one who brought on us the desolation, the shame, the abandonment, the dryness, the hunger, the thirst?

[5 : 01] Are you the man? And this is remarkable in several respects. First of all, in light of the fact that Ahab himself appears to be completely insensitive to all that Elijah had told him three years ago.

Elijah made clear that this famine was coming upon the earth because of the worship of Baal and the departure from the house of God and the tearing down of the altars of God.

And all these three years Ahab doesn't appear once to have thought, is it I? Was it my fault? Have I done something wrong? Did I marry a bad woman? Does she have a bad sway over me?

Am I doing what's wrong instead of doing what's right? It doesn't appear to have crossed his mind at all. His first words meeting Elijah is, are you the troublemaker in Israel?

Are you the troublemaker in Israel? And how many people there are who have exactly the same attitude today. It appears that for some people that Orthodox Christians or Evangelical or Reformed Christians are the trouble in the country.

[6 : 06] For some people, if only Christians were more tolerant, or if Christians better than that even disappeared from the face of the earth, there would be no trouble in the world.

It seems that some people would almost seriously suggest that there would be no murder, no cheating, no lying, no rape, no immorality of any kind. If only Christian people just sat down, and if they were quiet, that the world would be at rest.

When the Lord says in the word that the opposite is in fact the case. The very fact that the world stands at all today, the very fact that we are not at this moment hit by a bolt of lightning from heaven, is by virtue of the fact that the Lord has his people still in the world.

Sodom would not have come under the mass of burning brimstone and sulfur, had there been righteous people in Sodom. The fact is that the Lord's people are the preserving salt of the earth, and that they are the light of the world.

Maybe God is keeping you alive because you have a Christian brother or sister or father or mother. Maybe God is keeping your house decent and in order because there is a Christian there, or because there is a Christian praying for you.

[7 : 17] Far from the Lord's people bringing trouble into a nation, it is that very presence that keeps a nation from utterly corroding and utterly decaying, into a horrible abyss of immorality of all kinds.

And that's why Elijah responds emphatically in verse 18, Again, Elijah stands fearlessly and says, The problem, Ahab, is yours.

And you are responsible for your bad example. You are responsible for leading people after you. And however powerful your wife may be, and whatever hold she has upon you, you, Ahab, are the king of Israel.

And you are largely answerable for the state in which your country lies. And my friend, we should always remember that when anyone is elevated into a position of rule or authority in the church and in the nation, the civil magistrate, not just according to our confession, but according to the scriptures, the civil magistrate is responsible before God, our cabinet, our prime minister, the queen, for every single law that is repealed and for every single law that is passed.

And when they stand before the judgment seat of God, they will not just stand as individuals for themselves. They will stand and be examined on where they took the nation and what they did for the nation, what example they showed, what kind of laws they passed, and what kind of laws they repealed.

[9 : 00] And there are some people who say that the church should not enter into politics. What an utter absurdity that is. Can anyone honestly make a statement like that, having read the Bible from cover to cover?

Is the church not meant to preach to the politician as well as to everyone else? Is the word of God not applicable to every single person and to every single office which a person can occupy?

Is the civil magistrate somehow supposed to be in an isolated little corner where he doesn't have to obey the word of God at all? He does. And you who are in government, remember that you must agitate at every point and at every turn for the law of God.

And not just for the Sabbath day, but for the rest of it as well. And one of the things God willing we hope to do is to unfold gradually what this law of God requires. And the effect it ought to have upon us in our own society, in every institution and at every walk of life.

The Lord will require an account. An account. Ahab is responsible. Have I troubled Israel? Elijah says, no, you have troubled Israel.

[10 : 08] It's easy to mistake a troublemaker. Just because a person brings division doesn't mean that he's the troublemaker. That doesn't necessarily follow at all.

Did Christ himself not bring division? Think not, he says, that I came to bring peace into the world. I came not to bring peace but a sword. What's more explicit than that? He brought division.

Was he a troublemaker? No, he was not. He was a peacemaker. And there are people, and there always have been people, and I suppose there always will be people in the church who think that peace is the most important and the most noble end to aim at.

Well, it is not. And peace should never, ever, ever, in your personal life, or in your congregational life, or in a denominational life, it should never be put before truth.

Never. There is no peace without truth. Truth is even greater than love. It is even greater than love. What is love without truth at its foundation?

[11 : 16] The Lord requires truth, his truth, his gospel, his truth, to be protected, to be vindicated, to be asserted, to be maintained, and to be defended.

And if you find what we could perhaps call, for want of a better term, the ecclesiastical politician, defining that term as someone who puts peace before truth, stay away from that man, mark that man, that man is dangerous, and if it is yourself, change your ways, and change them at once.

Never put peace before truth and the cause of God. Elijah didn't do that. Elijah went forward, and he did what had to be done. Are you the troublemaker?

No, he says, I'm not, but you are the troublemaker. Now, Elijah has a proposition to make, and he puts it to Ahab. And the proposition is this in verse 19.

Now, therefore, send. Listen to the prophet of God ordering the king. Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves, four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.

[12 : 37] Now, he has a proposition to make, and it's in the form of a contest. There is going to be an open display of who is Lord and who is king. And that display is to be openly made on the top of Mount Carmel.

And Elijah, through Ahab, summons Israel to gather and to convene around that mountain. Now, I want with you to look, first of all, at the assembly on Mount Carmel.

Secondly, at the challenge which Elijah issues. How long halt ye between two opinions? Thirdly, the contest where the two sacrifices are made.

And finally, the outcome of the contest. Now then, we'll begin with the assembly. And what a fitting place for it to take place in, on Mount Carmel.

At the Mediterranean Sea, right on the western coast of Israel, a mountain ridge gradually rises up, which makes its way down southeast.

[13 : 46] And this ridge rises. It's called the Carmel Ridge. And it rises as it comes down southeast. And it splits a plain, the famous plain of Estrela.

And it splits it into two. It is a, or it would have been without the famine, a lush and fertile plain. And on this ridge, or standing on the top of this ridge, you can see far north, east, and south.

Westerly, the ridge descends into the Mediterranean Sea. And you can see the sea, apparently, to your left. But the ridge descends sharply. And you can see to the north.

And you can see to the east. And you can see to the south. So it's fitting because it is accessible. It is a gradual slope up to the ridge. It's accessible.

And it is good for visibility. From the top, you can see far. You could even see Nazareth. You could see the Sea of Galilee. You could see miles in these directions.

[14 : 48] And Elijah chooses this mountain and asks the people to assemble there. And on the highest point, which is called Mount Carmel, which is over 1,500 feet high, there is a ruined, decayed, old altar that used to be used in the worship of Jehovah.

That altar is now cast down. Nobody uses it. Very few people are bothered enough to use it. Most people don't even seek to use it in any way at all. It's scattered.

The stones which constructed that altar are scattered. And the altar lies in ruins. Now, Ahab has to make a proclamation.

So you'll understand that several days pass. Between Elijah's call to the mountain and the people actually assembling to the mountain, several days must have passed.

The king would have sent messengers north, south, east, and west, and told them to gather at Mount Carmel. And as the people heard that there was to be a contest, they would leave their work.

[15 : 53] They would leave everything. And they would make their way from several towns and villages and cities. And they would all assemble around this mountain. I'm quite sure, myself, that Elijah spent the time in prayer.

As he always stood before any great event, he would have spent the time in prayer and besought the Lord to make his glory manifest again in the nation. And so the people begin to gather.

Until finally one day there is a multitude, thousands upon thousands of people on the slopes of Mount Carmel and on the top part of the mountain.

And there are three distinct parties there. First of all, there is the people. The multitude of people from the towns, villages, and cities.

And you can describe them as confused, wandering, lost. They are people who can't forget the past on the one hand. They can't forget what God did for their nation in the past.

[16 : 58] They know about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. They know what God did through Moses. They had heard of the miracles. They had heard of the blessings and all these things. But for some reason that was not too dominant in their minds.

It still pulled their heart, all right. There was an element of that wrestling with them. But there was something else blurring their memory. There was something else that was taking away these voices that were speaking to them from the past.

And that was the new religion. That was the easy religion of Baal. The easy religion which Ahab and Jezebel had brought into the country.

And that religion made them live much more at peace with the surrounding nations. After all, that was the way they were. The Phoenicians worshipped Baal. The Syrians worshipped Baal.

So it was quite easy for them to worship Baal. It brought them more in line. They didn't stick out like a sore thumb. They didn't become the object of people's wrath and contempt in the same way. Everybody was worshipping Baal.

[18 : 03] So why shouldn't they worship Baal? And as I said, the religion was cheap and it was easy. It involved indulging the flesh. Sexual immorality was a large part of this religion.

So it was easy. Didn't make the demands which the old religion made. And so they seemed to be a people who were pulled in two directions.

Pulled in two very different directions. They had one party. The second party stand. Arrayed like that together. The 450 prophets of Baal.

And possibly the 400 prophets of Ashtoreth. I say possibly because they were invited. But it's not clear from the rest of the narrative whether they came or not.

I would probably assert that they did. That they were in fact there. So you probably had near a thousand. You had 850 prophets. 400 belonging to Baal. And 450 belonging to Baal.

[19 : 08] And 400 belonging to Ashtoreth. Owned gorgeous vestments. They were the powerful people in the land.

They were the influential people in the land. They were high in government. They ate at Jezebel's own table. But more importantly than not, my friend, they were responsible for bringing Israel into the gutter.

They were responsible for that. They first of all mixed the true religion with the false. And once that had weakened the true religion, they then went on the offensive. They began to persecute.

And they introduced the full-blown orgy and worship of Baal and Ashtoreth into Israel. Now, it's worth bearing in mind what kind of religion and what kind of worship that was.

The symbol of Baal was the bull. And it was the bull for fertility. And the consort of Baal, or the one who accompanied him, was the female goddess, the Ashtoreth.

[20 : 18] Now, they were both. One was a god and the other was a goddess of fertility. And that was an essential part of the religion.

And it was an essential part of the cult. And even their temples had ritual prostitution taking place around about them.

Now, it's interesting that when people lose sight of God, they focus on nature, on the environment, or the sun, the moon, the stars, the grass, or the trees.

The problem is, or the fact is, that man has a sense of awe. You have a sense of awe. It is a religious sense that is inside you. It is there.

God himself planted it in you. It is a fundamental, essential, constituent part of your human nature. The need to worship. The need to hold something in awe.

[21 : 14] The desire to venerate. That is inbred in you. And if through sin it is taken away from the Lord, it is invested into something else.

And you may just focus all your energy and all your attention upon nature. And these things can suddenly become gods and goddesses to people. The trees can become more important than people.

Have you ever met a person like that? Have you ever met a person who thinks more of a tree than he does of another person? There are such people. People who get caught up with the importance and the beauty.

And notice the words they use. The grandeur of nature. They speak of the awesomeness of nature. Or the glory of the sun. That is exchanging the glory of God into the glory of the creature.

Worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator who is blessed over all. And you'll notice what happens then. What is the most significant aspect of the whole system of nature?

[22 : 17] Well, it is the power of reproduction. That is the height of its mystery. The way in which nature is able to reproduce itself. And that becomes the focal point of their attention.

It is the most awesome thing of all. And that becomes true of men and women. The attention which they ought to give to the Lord is gradually given to the flesh and to the indulgence of the flesh.

And you'll find in societies that are turning away from God that the sexual act itself is elevated gradually. In the minds and in the imaginations of these people to assume an almost religious central significance.

It becomes the center of everything. The focus of attention. What fills books. What fills magazines. What fills television programs. The soul is not thought of.

The body is thought of. How can I make myself more beautiful? How can I make myself more fit? How can I make myself more athletic? The physical things all focusing around the central act become more and more important.

[23 : 26] More and more worshipped. In other words, the picture I'm painting to you of Israel here is just different in degree from ourselves and not in kind.

There's no point in sitting down and saying, well, how can people worship bulls? If they're worshipping bulls, then that's got nothing to do with me. If you think that is the way idolatry works, you haven't understood it yet.

You haven't understood it yet. Idolatry is subtle. It is a device of Satan which focuses your heart and your energy and your whole being. On something else.

Usually finding its focus on the desires and the lusts of the flesh. And it found its full-blown display here in the open worship of Baal and Ashtaroth.

In the worship of Israel. Now that is a sad picture. Picture. But it's a picture that we see around about us today. Very, very clearly.

[24 : 27] It seems that these things that I've spoken about are the center of the universe. Everything revolves around that. And the most important thing is in the minds of some people that they be free.

And they call it freedom. And you call it freedom. And you think this is freedom. You fool. You poor fool. If you think that to liberate.

What was it? Mr. Jenkins called it. Was it the permissive age dawning? If you think the permissive age or the age of license is the age of your liberty.

It is not. It's the age of countless souls damnation. It is as simple as that. It is the exchanging of God for the worship of the creature.

For the worship of the creature. And many people's agenda just consists of this. The freedom to indulge in any act which they want to. Anytime.

[25 : 27] Any place. And the more that is allowed. By all our poor pathetic governments. The more the judgment of God is going to be poured out upon the land.

It is as simple as that. God will not allow these things to go unchallenged. And in your life it is the same. Never catch yourself fighting against the law of God. You unconverted person in here.

Never catch yourself doing that. Never fight against the law of God. In case God lets you go. And lets you slide into an abyss. From which you will never ever recover.

But there is a third party on the mountain. The vacillating people. The prophets of Baal. The ones who are promoting the agenda all the time. And then there is Elijah.

He stands calm. He stands dignified. He stands unruffled. He knows what it is to be beside the cherith. He knows what it is to live in Sarefa. He is a man of prayer.

[26 : 26] And a man of supplication. He does so fervently. He does so diligently. And he is at rest and at calm. When everyone else is losing or about to lose their own heads.

And he comes forward. He called the challenge. So he speaks first. And his challenge is very simple. He first of all addresses the people. And he addresses them passionately.

And you can hear him shouting at the top of Mount Carmel. To the whole multitude. Thousands of them convened around. And he says. How long? He says. Are you going to halt?

Between two opinions. If God is God. Follow him. But if Baal is God. Then follow him. How long hulk ye?

It means literally to limp along. Or to waver. Or to vacillate. Between two things. How long? He says. Are you limping? Undecided.

[27 : 21] Which way you should go. How long are you going to vacillate between these two things? How long are you going to waver? The word that he preaches is stark.

It's simple. It's clear. It's unmistakable. You couldn't come away and say. Well I don't know what Elijah was talking about. He asks them bluntly. He says. Look. If God is God.

Follow him. And if Baal is Baal. Then follow him. Let this be the moment of decisiveness. In your experience Israel. Let this be the moment of decision.

Let this be the time. Choose ye this day. Whom you will serve. God on the one hand. Or Baal on the other. And that is the stark choice.

That he puts before them. Are you for God? Or are you against him? He that is not for him is against him. He that doesn't gather with him. Scatters abroad. Now you like a person who's out and out.

[28 : 19] I like a person who's out and out. We all like a person who's out and out. You like a person who is earnest. A person who is a hundred percent what he is. You like to know what a person means.

And what a person says. Everybody likes that. You like it in your dealings with people. Just to know what they are. And to be able to read them. To read them decisively. And to read them clearly.

It's no different in the things of God. No different in the things of God. The Lord himself desires us hot or cold. Not lukewarm. Do you suppose if you are wavering between Christ and the world.

That the Lord is pleased with that? I dare say that you yourself aren't even pleased with that. I can put this question to you in many different ways.

How long are you going to halt between Christ and the world? You've got one foot with the church as it were. And you have one foot with the world.

[29 : 19] One minute you appear to be seeking the Lord. And the next minute you're not. And you're neither this nor that. You're neither here nor there. You're not one thing and you're not the other.

You're somewhere in between. And Elijah says how long is it going to be like that? Do you think you have all the time in the world? Do you think life's going to last forever?

Do you think that at the drop of a hat you're going to have the desire just to go down at the right way? How long? Let the test be now. Or let the moment be now.

Cast in your lot with Christ. Or else go the other way. You must be one thing or you must be the other. And that is the message that Elijah himself gives them.

Now, for all I know, you could even be a professing Christian in here. And you may have been professing for a while. Maybe even for many years. But you're yoked to Christ and you're yoked to Mammon.

[30 : 22] And you no longer have any idea what you should be. You can hardly for yourself distinguish the world from Christ because your witness has become smudged.

It's become confused. You compromised one day with the world. And you found that your whole life is now a compromise. And not only are other people finding it difficult to tell whose side you're on, you're finding it difficult to tell yourself whose side you're on.

You can't see anything clearly anymore. Get out of that. Get out of it at once. And be one thing or the other.

For any favor, my friend, be one thing or the other. If you, during the times of the prayer meetings, are finding yourselves in places of amusement and entertainment, it is time to choose between the two things.

It is time to choose between the two things. Is your heart with the people of God, where the people of God meet and where prayer is offered up, or do you rather be in the company of the vain?

[31 : 28] Do you rather be in the company of those people from whom you sometimes hear a swear escaping their lips? Is that the voice you rather? Can you tell me quite honestly that you prefer to be in that company than in the company of the Lord's people?

Well, do you expect me to believe that you're out and out the Lord's? No, my friends, I issued to you right away just now the challenge, and it applies to many, many people today, professing and not professing.

Choose this day whom you will serve. You're halting between the two. Are you out and out following Christ, or are you half-hearted in it? Watch it. For the sake of your own soul and for the sake of others, be out and out for Christ.

Does it not even worry you? Let's say for the moment that you are a Christian, and let's say for some reason that some of these things have got a hold of you, that you're giving a bad example, sitting watching the television, and watching unacceptable things on the television when other people are seeing you.

If it doesn't make your own soul tremble for yourself, which you do, what does it do for your children, or for your family, or for the people who are seeing you? Is it not a thought to you that your own careless indifference, and your lack of zeal, and your lack of earnestness for Christ, your lack of being out and out for the Lord, is causing another person just to go in a blind, slothful stupor into hell itself?

[32 : 56] Should there not be something in your life that is urging people to move heavenward fast, quickly? Should there not be a difference about you, a resolute standing against compromise, against what is unclean, against what is impure?

I mean, I so often hear the defense on the lips of some people that they watch certain things on the television, or they hear the name of God taken in vain, and they can take it because they know the context or whatever.

My friend, that is all nonsense. Nonsense. If you sit allowing a program to filter in your eyes and ears, and you accept the abuse of God's name because of the artistic content of the program, you're in trouble.

What kind of soul have you got? What kind of priority have you got in this life, when artistic content matters more than the abuse of the name of Jehovah? Is it any reason that the witness of the church is damp and ineffective?

Why are we surprised at these things? We sometimes only have to look at our lives to discover why the church is what it is. Look to yourself and me to myself. It's as simple as that.

[34 : 10] Let us look and search and try our ways and turn to the Lord, and maybe the Lord will be gracious, and maybe the Lord will repent, and maybe he will turn. It's not Christ and mammon.

It is Christ or mammon. Christ comes with a cross. Mammon comes with ease and with a smile. And remember that. You choose tonight one or the other.

And don't halt any longer between two. And then Elijah issues his contest. And it goes essentially like this, and you know it for yourselves fairly well.

They are to prepare two sacrifices. A bullock is to be prepared. A bullock is to be dressed. The wood is to be cut up. It's to be put in order. It's to be laid upon the altar. But no fire is to be put near the altar.

And then each party, 450 on the one hand, or perhaps even a thousand on the one hand, and Elijah on the other, are to call respectively upon the names of their gods. And the God who answers by fire, let him be fire.

[35 : 17] And Elijah is gracious in the matter, and he says, there are many of you. I am only one. You go first. And so they go first, and they dress the bullock, and they put it on the wood.

And then the ritual begins. The wail begins. The song and the dance. And the frenzy. And the calling upon the name of Baal.

Baal hear us. Baal answer us. On and on they go, dancing with their prescribed rituals for three whole hours. And you picture that assembly at Mount Carmel, waiting for three hours, while these people dance their way through a meaningless series of routines to try and get their god to listen to them.

Three hours, the people waited for that until it was noon. Until the sun was high in the sky. And that was supposedly when Baal was especially to be worshipped, because the sun, of course, is so important for people like that.

The sun is central as well. So when the sun is high in the sky, it is time to fall down and acknowledge the giver of all that we've got. And the sun is worshipped. That's when Elijah lets loose and he says, call a little louder, he says.

[36 : 34] Maybe your god is asleep, or maybe he's taking a walk, or he might be on a long journey. Perhaps he's just fallen asleep, and if you shout a little louder, you might wake him up. Some people have seen his irony out of place.

It's not. There is an element of the ridiculous in idolatry. It is evil. It is vile and detestable. And so it is ridiculous. It is absurd that such a thing could be so.

The fool saith in his heart, there is no God. Are we not told that he that sits in the heaven shall laugh? The Lord shall scorn them all. The Lord shall have them in derision.

And that's what Elijah does. He's trying to point out to them the utter futility and vanity of their whole way of life. The way it is centered on the flesh and centered on the present world.

Call a little louder, and the sun might help you. Shout a little louder, and the sun might save you. And the fools do that, and they take the knives to themselves, and they cut themselves with knives and lancets, and the blood is flowing to try and get fire down upon the altar for another three hours until three o'clock in the afternoon.

[37 : 47] This goes on six whole hours. This process continues. Elijah obviously desires to bring them to exhaustion, to bring them to utter exhaustion.

You imagine moving like this and shouting like this for six hours. They were on the verge of collapse. They probably did collapse when Elijah stepped forward. God, when he's going to rebuild his church, or when he's going to restore a nation, he allows the folly of its ways to be made manifest.

He brings to exhaustion the opposing powers. He brings the darkness out into the open. He shows the wound. He shows the impurity, and then the healing of it begins.

And he exposes the folly of this way of life. And Elijah waits until it's empty before he steps forward. And that can happen in people's lives too.

And perhaps there's a Christian mother or father here who is despairing at the way their son or daughter is going. Perhaps it may be that the Lord allows that to go to exhaustion before he answers your prayer by fire.

[39 : 03] And by that fire, I mean the fire of the Holy Ghost scattered into a person's heart. Very often a person is brought to an extremity before the Lord rescues it to show his glory.

Who could after all pick out of that pit? Who could have rescued out of that miry clay but the Lord and the God who answers by fire? He is God. You show me another religion or you show me another philosophy or a psychology.

Show me anything that can do for a person what the Spirit of God does. And I will say he has answered by fire. But I tell you only one God has ever answered by fire and only one God can answer you by fire, my friend.

And that is the God of heaven. And if you are far astray, I pray that you are being emptied and brought to exhaustion so that the Lord may cast his fire into your heart.

And Elijah goes forward and he has a work to do. He gathers the stones himself. At least I believe he gathers them himself. He puts them up.

[40 : 05] The old stones of the altar that were scattered, he finds them. I don't know, maybe he had spent the three or four days while the people were gathering. Maybe he had spent those days gathering these stones, taking them back to their place, but now he builds the altar.

And a trench is dug around about it, a deep trench. And he issues the command strange to the ears of the people, fill four barrels with water and pour it into the trench.

and that's done three times so that four, three times so that twelve barrels altogether or three and four, I'm not sure which was three barrels four times or the other way around, but anyway, there were twelve barrels that were poured onto the sacrifice, drenching it, saturating it with water until the situation looked absolutely impossible, which is the way the Lord very often likes to work.

And all that is important. All that is significant. After that happens, he prays. And once he prays, the fire comes down.

What does the altar represent? Well, we don't have to stretch it. It is straightforward. The altar represents the worship of God. And it's broken and it is scattered because that has gone from the lives of the people.

[41 : 34] And notice it was first abused and then disused. That's the way it always is. It is first abused and then disused.

Jeroboam tried to make the worship of Jehovah more pretty and more easy. By the time that was finished, there was hardly any worship of Jehovah left.

The worship of God is always abused before it is disused. And this broken altar speaks of a church as sleep. A church that is spiritually slothful.

A church that needs to be reawakened. Let me put it this way to you. In the next chapter, the Lord tells Elijah that there are 7,000 who haven't bowed the knee to Baal.

Well, that's all very well, but where are they? Where are they? And where is their voice? Are they on Mount Carmel? Surely when they heard that there was to be a challenge between the prophet of God and the prophets of Baal, surely they would be the first to lend their support.

[42 : 40] So then you suppose they're on Mount Carmel. But why when Elijah issues the challenge, how long halty between two opinions, if the Lord be God, follow him, if Baal followed him, the people answered not a word.

If they're on Carmel, where are they or where is their voice? The church is asleep. The altar is broken. The prayers are few. The prayers are fragmentary.

And when Elijah is putting the altar together, it speaks of rebuilding and reuniting the church of God, seeking God in worship, seeking God in adoration, so that he will respond with refreshment and with power and with revival.

You'll notice there are twelve stones, one for each tribe. The kingdoms had been divided before this, but he wishes them brought together in a oneness and he wishes them brought together in a unity.

And he says, oh, that the Lord's people would all come out and come out openly and gather together as one and that they would worship the Lord, for then surely the fire of God would come down.

[43 : 57] Now, my friends, please notice this. Please notice this. The twelve stones in the altar were unfinished stones.

By that I mean that they were not touched with the hand of man. God had given specific instructions in Exodus 21 that when an altar was to be built of stones, no man's engraving tool was to come upon it.

It was to be found rough and ready as it was and put into the altar. Before I go on to the teaching of that, I know that that's the way this altar was because God sent the fire.

God is very jealous about his commandments. Uzah touched the ark and he was struck dead. These stones must have been uncut and unpolished for God to acknowledge the altar and for God to send the fire down upon it.

Now what truth is taught by the uncut or the unfinished stones? It is this, that God desires this worship spiritual, he desires it pure, he doesn't want the inventions of man added into it, he wants it as he has stipulated it and he wants it as he has said that it should take place.

[45 : 15] In the New Testament worship we find prayer offered in the synagogues and in the early Christian synagogues, we find these prayers led by the males, 1 Timothy chapter 2, the word is males, although it's men in the authorized version it's males, so we have prayer led by males in the early Christian synagogues, we have the singing of psalms and psalms alone in the early Christian synagogues, you have a sermon offered by a preacher of the gospel in the early Christian synagogues, and that is what the Lord desires.

He has left us a pattern of how worship is to be conducted. What I want to emphasize is this, today around me in Scotland or in our church, there is a dissatisfaction on the part of many people without form of worship.

there is something wrong with singing psalms alone, we are told. And by the way, I find that especially tragic when I came from a continent where there were people phoning me from Texas right the way through to the north of America, asking me where they could find a church that sang the psalms alone.

That's why I find it sad. I found it sad because there were congregations phoning here, there, and everywhere, sprouting up with people gathering, wishing to return to the reformed faith and the purity of worship as was practiced in Switzerland, in France, and in Scotland, and to a perhaps lesser degree in Holland.

They wish to return to that, and we're dissatisfied, are we? Or we wish to depart from it, or we wish to change it. Well, let me tell you this. I would assert that to keep our worship simple is the most Catholic thing we can do, and by that I mean Catholic in the good sense of the term.

[47 : 05] It is universal. It is an open door. The moment you add to what God has put in the word, you're dividing the church. I confess it took me a long time to understand that simple principle, but I hope by God's grace I have understood it, and I hope it will stay in my heart forever, that the minute a person adds to the word, he is dividing the church.

Can you see how that works? If you keep to the simplicity of what's in the Bible, that is an open door for everyone to gather around it, but if you say, well, we are going to add this, or we are going to add this to what is being done in the church, you are dividing, because that is going to be an offense to the conscience of some person.

It must necessarily be so. The more simple the worship, the more universal or Catholic it must be. And that is why I still believe that the simplicity of the purity of worship, once practiced in all these countries that I mentioned, will yet return to be the glory of the Reformed Church.

Will the Scottish ever accept the English hymns? Will the English ever accept the American? No. The more man adds in to the thing, the more divisive it becomes. The more we realize that God has kept it simple to gather his church around that simplicity, the stronger it will be.

So by all means, pray for the twelve stones. But remember that this simple faith of the Reformation is the altar which we wish to erect.

[48 : 38] And that will gather from the north, from the south, and from the east and the west, and will usher in by God's grace a millennial glory yet to come. And then again you'll notice, just remember that formula, people who add, divide.

People who add, divide. Then again you'll notice that he is praying, and he pleads to the God of the covenant, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And he pleads that God would make his glory manifest. That is the prayer that he puts up. Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God.

And there's a silence, and suddenly there's a bolt from heaven, and the fire falls down in a thunderous fury, not just to consume the bullock, but it consumes the wood, and not just the wood, but the stones, and the water in the trench.

It is all licked up by the powerful fire of God. And the result is that the people all fall down on their faces, and they said, Jehovah, he is God.

[49 : 54] Jehovah, he is God. And you'll notice it all happened at three o'clock in the afternoon. The time is passing me by, but let me just say this.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, we're told, in verse 36, that that was the time of the evening sacrifice. Now, look at that, verse 36.

And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near. In other words, in Jerusalem, at this point in time, the lamb was offered up, and the lamb was slain as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At that same hour, the fire comes down from heaven in Carmel and consumes the sacrifice. What's that telling us? It tells us, yes, that God will remember his covenant.

It tells us that God will send the rain and he will revive the church, but for Christ's sake he will do it. Not for mine, and not for yours, but for Christ's sake alone. At the hour when the lamb is slain, at the hour when we have the typical foreshadowing of Christ on the cross, then the fire comes down, and after that the rain pours down from heaven.

[51 : 04] It is all on Christ's account, and it is all for Christ's sake. Notice again that the Lord, he is God. That's the meaning of the name Elijah. The name Elijah, El and Yah, means the Lord is God, Jehovah is God.

I think that tells us that this was the crowning moment in Elijah's life. When everyone, as it were, said his name, Elijah, the Lord, he is God. Now Cherith was worth it, now Zarephath was worth it.

When they acknowledged that Jehovah was the great God and the great king. Finally, let me say this to you, that the fire of God always precedes the rain.

God's fire always precedes the rain. God always visits in judgment before he visits in blessing. The 400 prophets of Baal had to be slain before the rain would actually come.

You must do your part and I must do mine to build up the broken wall of Jerusalem. And it is that that the Lord blesses. And he will cleanse the church and judgment begins at the house of God.

[52 : 16] And that is why we should never be too disheartened when we see judgment. Because it may, it may be the precursor of rain. May God pray that through all the troubles which we ourselves pass through that there may yet be rain waiting to descend upon us from heaven.

The fire comes before the rain. Don't waver, my friend, before the God of fire. Don't halt between two opinions.

Kiss the sun. Blessed in his wrath you perish from the way. His wrath wants his wrath. Begin to burn. Blessed all that on him stay. May you come to Christ and be saved.