

Elijah on Mount Carmel

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[0 : 0 0] let's turn to that chapter that we read before first kings chapter 18 and we are going to read from verse 37 verse 37 where elijah prays answer me o lord answer me that this people may know that you lord are god and that you have turned their hearts back then the fire of the lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench a few weeks ago in the seminary in the mornings we went through a series called the mountains of god in the old testament and the one thing that struck me during that time was how important and how significant mountains were in the old testament they're also significant in the new testament but they're significant for one particular reason and that is as a place where god reveals himself to his people for example abraham on mount moriah where abraham was commanded to go to sacrifice his son isaac that place where god commanded him to go to became a place where god made himself known in a very special way to abraham and isaac as the place where god provides the lamb and all the way through the bible mountains have that particular significance to them as the place as places where god in a very special way makes himself known to us and that of course is true for the bible the bible is a place where god reveals himself to us in a very particular way tells us that all of us know that there's a god there is a voice within the heart of every single one of us that tells us that there is a god but the bible is the place we go to to find out how god makes himself specifically known to us that's why the bible is so important it tells us that god wants to make himself known to us because he wants us to belong to him he wants us to engage in a particular relationship to him but the place where god has revealed himself to us most of all is the lord jesus christ because the bible points us to calvary where jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for us at calvary and it was there that god brought himself to us and opened the way for us to come to know him calvary is the mountain of god where god reveals himself to us now here is one of those mountains and once again it is called it's called mount carmel and it's a place where god chose to reveal himself i'll tell you in a few moments time exactly why god chose that particular location to reveal himself to make himself known to ahab and his people but mount carmel is to the north if you have a map you'll you'll see that mount carmel is to the north end of israel it's near the place called the city called haifa i don't know if you've ever been there i remember many years when i was in business i went i had to travel there once and the place where i was having a business

meeting was right on the top of mount carmel it was a fascinating place i had to uh i do it was hard enough to concentrate on what i was trying to do without trying to look around and and imagine the scene on mount carmel because i knew this story so well mount carmel is right on the north coast and the river is called the river kishon and it's right at the bottom lies right at the bottom of mount carmel it's a long mountain with a flat top so it's quite easy to imagine this kind of confrontation that takes place in this chapter the reason that this was the place that was chosen was because mount carmel in those days was the place where baal was worshipped and baal was the god of the canaanites at that time the whole of israel almost had fallen into baal worship there were some who had not gone astray but in the mean israel had been led astray and they were no longer worshipping the lord the one they knew as the living and the true god they were now worshipping baal and one of the questions that we have to ask is why why was it so why was it that the israelites found it so easy to slip into baal worship what was so attractive about baal worship god had always warned them when they were in the wilderness under the leadership of mooses not to worship the gods of the canaanites and it seems quite astonishing doesn't it when god proved himself so vividly to them in the pillar of cloud and the dividing of the red sea and the miracles where god fed his people from day to day it seems astonishing isn't it that the people of israel with all they knew about the living and the true god would ever even think of worshipping another deity well that's how corrupt our human minds are and there are three reasons specifically why the people found it so easy to worship baal the first reason was because the celebrities of the day were doing it you don't think there were celebrities in those days well there weren't televisions there weren't cinema screens there weren't glossy magazines but there were still celebrities and the greatest celebrity in israel was a woman the king's wife queen jezebel everybody knew about her she was a powerful personality moreover she was an influential hugely influential personality and her influence on israel was absolutely vast never underestimate the power of the celebrity to make sweeping changes in the lifestyle of a community i was reading yesterday in the in the times yesterday's maybe a ridiculous example but it's an example nonetheless that it has now become fashionable once again to wear fair isle jumpers when i was a teenager it was fashionable to wear fair isle jumpers and i have never seen them since that time but all of a sudden it has become fashionable to wear them again and the reason is because a particular program with a particular famous female actor has made them famous once again everybody wants to do it if you get the right person you get the whole country doing the same thing that is the power of the celebrity jezebel was a celebrity everyone wanted to be a jezebel because she had such a hold on the people and it begs the question doesn't it who is the greatest influence on your life today who is it ask yourself that question because it's either god in the bible or else it's someone else or something else and god's command to

each one of us is this it absolutely has to be god and the people of israel fell away from god in refusing to worship him the very first command that god gives us is this you shall love the lord your god with all all your heart all your mind all your soul all your strength and you're either doing that tonight or you're not you're either in a place where god takes the first place in your life or he doesn't you may think well i'm not a murderer i'm not a thief i'm not a violent person and if i do sin i'm sure i do sin from time to time but it's not that bad but in god's eyes we are breakers we are violators of his first commandment which is you shall love the lord your god with all your heart sin begins with what we fail to do rather than what we do do it's when we fail to worship the lord and as somebody else said when when you decide to fall away from god it's not that you believe nothing you believe anything and that's what the the children of israel that's how they had they had gone astray at this time and god had withdrawn himself from that now the second reason is this that god was that baal rather was the god of fertility and the land and growth and the fields and so if you were a farmer as everybody was at that time you wanted your crops to yield the more your crops the more your fields yielded then the more rich you became and the more successful you became and you you would be able to provide for yourself and your family so you depended upon the land but instead of recognizing that god was the god of the harvest they believed the canaanites who said that baal was the god of the harvest and they said that if as long as baal is kept happy then your fields will yield a good harvest and they fell into it fell into the habit but the third reason was that baal was the the god of fertility and it was all too easy for them to to slip into a religion that encouraged promiscuity and adultery and cheap sex rather than to keep the law of god i suppose when you think about it you know god's law is rather dull isn't it it's not very glamorous the bible's not very glamorous being a christian is not very glamorous there are far more glamorous ways in which you can obey your natural instincts that's what we're told today isn't it you only live once you've got to make the most of life you've got to obey your natural instincts you've got to sow your wild oats that's where the attraction is isn't it in doing what your body tells you to do and rather than what god tells us to do after all here was the god who told them that there was only certain foods that they were allowed to eat there were other foods that they weren't allowed to eat the god who said to them do not commit adultery stay with your wife love your wife love your husband the god who said remember the sabbath day to keep it holy who wants to do all these things when you can look around you and you see the way that other people are living and how much fun they're having and all of these are just as relevant in our day as they were then with the lord when the lord comes to us in his word and when he gives us the lifestyle that he wants us to live it's for our good and for our freedom our liberty it's the very best life that he can that he can possibly give us and you have to trust him to live that good life the life that comes from faith in the lord jesus christ putting god first and putting the lord jesus christ first now mount carmel was the place where baal was worshipped and god chose this particular location in order to confront baal once and for all this was the final battle this was everything coming to a head for years baal

worship had been simmering in the background people had been doing it and it appeared that god was silent on the matter although he wasn't he had withheld the rain from the land if you go all the way back to the beginning of chapter 17 elijah said by the word of god that there would be no more rain because god was going to withhold rain for three years from the land and that's exactly what happened but instead of listening to the lord and repenting to the lord right away the people continued with what they were doing but now they had become miserable they were now beginning to really suffer loss and poverty because there was a land like that just simply couldn't survive without rain their crops were yielding nothing they were beginning to really suffer the effects of not having any food and not having any water i guess their animals were all dying and now they were beginning to see how miserable it was to have chosen to live outside of god's command and the life that god had shown them to live and now it was coming to the point where god was actually going to reverse his promise he was going to say go show yourself to abram i will send rain on the earth so in actual fact chapter 18 contrary to what you might expect it's an it's a chapter full of mercy i'll show you that this will actually become unfolded as we go along it's actually god showing mercy to his people it's quite amazing isn't it here is his people and they've chosen to live as if god didn't exist they've chosen to elevate a god who wasn't a god and worship him and now god wants to have mercy upon that people and and give them rain and that's because god there was a particular bond between the lord and his people that could not be broken even if they sinned that bond was never going to be broken they would suffer for it but the bond was never going to be broken but before he was going to send them rain there had to be this this final showdown this ultimate showdown between the people of between elijah rather and the prophets of baal i want you to imagine what is taking place here as this thousands of people it wasn't just the 450 prophets of baal thousands of people gathered on the top of this great mountain for this showdown that was going to take place there was elijah on his own the lone voice the unpopular voice in the minority and then there were the 450 prophets of baal these were the men who led the rebellion against god and they were the ones who were ones that were the influences in the land of israel but there were also thousands of other people who had gathered to witness this these people were coming because they were suffering the the and elijah was being accused of having offended baal and what was being said was that baal was withholding rain baal was the god of rain he was withholding rain because elijah was offending him and if elijah could be done away with then they believed that baal would send rain once again but elijah was saying you are completely wrong it's not me who is withholding rain it's not baal who is withholding rain it is god who is withholding rain and i have to prove to you once again and what i want to do he says is to restore your hearts back to the truth of god to the worship of god to the service of god and here's the way we're going to do it you say that baal is the god of fire okay let's see who's right i'm telling you and you know in the depths of your heart that what i'm saying is true that god is the god of fire

and now we're going to see who is right and before we do anything else you are going to have to face a huge massive challenge don't stand in the middle don't sit on the fence if baal is god then go for it but if god is god then worship him and serve him with all your heart that's the challenge that not only the not only uh that's the challenge that all of them had to face and it's the same with the gospel tonight if god is god if jesus is savior if he is the way to god through his death on the cross and his resurrection then worship him come to faith in him don't sit on the fence i wonder who i'm talking to tonight you may be being there for years you perhaps been on the fence you've been in no man's land you think that there's a no man's land that isn't you're on the wrong side perhaps you're one of these people who likes to spend years of your life musing and considering and well maybe it's this or maybe it's that it's too important for you to sit on the fence all your life this is the most important issue you'll ever have to face in your in your whole life because your eternal destiny depends on whether your sins are forgiven or not as long as you keep on the outside your sins remain unforgiven and that's the most fearful state to be in because if you die with your sins unforgiven you die in your sins you die a guilty person and you go to face the lord and his condemnation and yet you've been hoodwinked into thinking that somehow this is some kind of elaborate intellectual exercise in which you can think one way and think another and sort of consider all the possibilities and perhaps you this is too important you can't spend your life i'm not saying just trust in jesus if you don't know who he is maybe there's somebody here tonight you've never heard the name of jesus in your life before i'm not saying don't think about what you're doing of course the bible tells us to think about what we're doing but don't spend too long thinking about it it's too important listen to him listen to him by faith and come to him in trust and in in worship and in service and in obedience and listen to what he says when he say to asks us and he commands us to follow him so he says this in verse 21 how long will you go limping between two different opinions if the lord is god follow him but if bail then follow him and he was just about to prove he was going to prove in the most spectacular manner this is one of the most spectacular chapters in the bible i'm sure you'll agree with me what he did was this he gave the prophets of bail the opportunity to prove that bail was god he did that by saying take a bull kill it put it on wood but don't put any fire on it don't burn it don't start the fire the god who answers by fire he is god okay and they said okay sounds reasonable after all we're talking about god with whom nothing is impossible so he should very easily be able to send fire down from heaven that's the easiest thing in the world for him to do it's not something that we can do but it's something that he can do okay that sounds reasonable so they did that he watched on his own while all these prophets of bail they

[20 : 16] prepared their bull and they put it on the wood and they danced in a frenzy how long did they dance oh bail answer as they said verse 26 but there was no voice no one answered they limped around the altar that they had made you notice that word limped is the same word as when when it when elijah challenges them in verse 21 how long will you go limping between two different opinions that was the way in which they worshipped they kind of nimbly danced around their their offering around the altar that they had made verse 27 at noon elijah mocked them saying cry aloud or cry louder you're not you're not doing it enough for he is a god he's musing or he's relieving himself or he's on a journey or perhaps he's asleep and must be awakened and they cried aloud and they cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out upon them isn't it pathetic wasn't it really pathetic the length to which they were prepared to go in their total unbelief and as midday passed they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation but there was no voice no one answered no one paid attention and that's the end of their attempt there was no voice no one answered no one paid attention and it will be the same with yourself tonight if you choose another way you're choosing silence and emptiness and emptiness and darkness the great the great truth of the gospel is that you're coming into fellowship and into a relationship with the living god to whom you can come do you notice how many times prayer features in all of these chapters in chapter 17 for example elijah prays for life there was a boy who had died and he went into the the bedroom where the boy was lying he prayed for that boy the boy came to life in answer to elijah's prayer when god wants to do something he puts a prayer in the heart of his people to remind us to draw us to him in need and then in chapter 18 as we're just reading elijah prays for fire at the end of chapter 18 elijah prays for rain if there's time we'll see that in a few moments time all the way through elijah's ministry he prays he prays he prays nothing happens without him praying when god wants to do something when he wants to do something in your life and in my life he puts he stirs up that sense of need within me and that can be for anything there's nothing impossible with god we have not tapped the possibilities of prayer god is the god of the impossible the problem is we don't have the faith or rather we're too caught up in our trivialities to really realize what we have in our relationship with the lord when you go to prayer is it a chore is it something well i better do this because i'm a christian and because it would be pretty weird if i didn't is that the way you look at prayer and when you go to prayer is it just kind of some kind of form of words that you use the same thing time and time i'm not saying that's not prayer but i'm saying that that's lifeless prayer and i'm saying that how the easiest thing in the world is for you to just

it just fall into the same kind of forum without and but elijah tells us that his prayer was fervent he prayed as if his life depended upon his life actually did depend upon it and everything he did there's a sense of real excitement in elijah's relationship with the lord because he knows that when he's coming to pray things are going to happen and when god's people pray things happen as well but we don't believe that we're so used to the ordinary that we've forgotten i believe god is an extraordinary god so the next time starting from now the next time you go to prayer believe that god is an extraordinary god the god of the impossible who does things in us and for us more than we can ask or even think elijah was a man james says listen to what james says he says the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working elijah he says verse 17 chapter 5 elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed fervently that it might not rain and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth then he prayed again and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit now i love that i love that because it tells me that elijah was full of weakness and temptation and sinfulness as i am and yet god heard his prayer he put a prayer into his heart and he came to the lord with that how how fervently do we pray i can't answer that for you i can only answer that for myself do i come to god with a sense of the unknown with a sense of how risky it is what i'm doing is going to yield something that that i don't expect i'm not ready for it that's what prayer is remember when peter went up to the top of his house went up to the roof of his house to pray it's pretty ordinary thing to do at the time of prayer he went up and yet when he went it was when he went there that god showed him something that he the last thing he expected to see he was really challenged and the same is true when we take prayer seriously god is going to challenge us and he's going to change us and he's going to prepare us he's going to lead our minds and our hearts and he's going to transform us the way he's doing in prayer and he's going to show us things that we never expected to see i really believe i honestly really believe that i've seen it in my own experience sometimes more than others doesn't mean to say that every time that you pray that something's going to happen in an extraordinary way of course it doesn't we have to believe that even in the ordinary times of prayer that god is hearing us and he's answering us and there's a there's a time for for regular steadfast prayer when we don't think something is happening and yet we stay there and we pray for exactly the same things as we've prayed for time and time again believing that somehow god is hearing us and answering our prayer do you believe that do we believe that as a congregation do we really i hope we do i really hope we do or are we so overwhelmed with the troubles in the world that we've lost heart well elijah could have been he was on his own all the forces of evil were against him and yet what mattered to elijah was if god is for us who can be against us that's the way elijah saw it and so god was the god of the impossible for him and he prayed now the

tables turn they've had their chance they've had their opportunity elijah gave them as much time as they needed they almost killed themselves maybe some of them did now it was elijah's turn you notice what he did first he he built an altar because for him this was a sacrifice it wasn't just a test of who's going to bring down fire remember what i said before it was god revealing himself to his own people this is how we get to know god through the events and the times and the circumstances in the bible in which god makes himself known right remember that so elijah took 12 stones 12 why did he take 12 stone because there were 12 tribes of israel why was that important because he wanted to preach a sermon to all those thousands of people and his sermon was this remember you have a god you don't need to go after baal baal is going to be of no use to you whatsoever because you've got as your lord the real living and true god and all you need to do now is to repent from all your darkness and wickedness and return to the lord because he already is in a covenant relationship with you here we have a 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of israel remember he says what god promised to our forefathers abraham isaac jacob that he would be our god forever that's the god who we're going to come to and that's the god who's going to answer by fire so he's preaching a sermon to them at the same time reminding them of their responsibility as people who were chosen out of this world by god and then he cuts the bull cuts it up and he lays it on the altar and then he says bring some water and don't stop pouring the water until i tell you they're pouring and pouring and pouring he digs a trench all around it the water was filling up with a trench the place was absolutely sudden you couldn't have set fire to that sacrifice even if you had poured petrol on it it was so saturated with water that was impossible for that sacrifice to be burned and then elijah prayed and he said oh lord god of abraham isaac and israel let it be known this day that you are god in israel and that i am your servant that i've done all these things at your word answer me oh lord answer me that this people may know you look at that that this people may know you this was not just a an empty exercise you know it wasn't just some kind of spectacular display god's purpose was that he was going to he's going to bring back his people to himself that they may know that you oh lord are god and that you have turned their hearts back then fire of the lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench what a sight that would have been what a spectacular vision of god that was no wonder the people when they saw it they said the lord they fell on their faces what else could they do they fell on their faces and they said the lord he is god the lord he is god i wonder how how they must have felt at that moment in time having spent years of their life worshiping a god who wasn't the real god i wonder how they must have felt knowing that they were in the presence not only of god but of the judgment of god because fire as they well knew represented god in all his consuming judgment and wrath and his anger and well they deserved it they knew that

but where did the fire fall the fire listen to this please listen to this this is the key to the passage the fire fell on the sacrifice and not on the people who deserved it and that is what separates the living god from every other god in the world and that is how god revealed himself he made his known he made his he made himself known to his people as the god of mercy as well as the god of wrath the bible puts it elsewhere so like this in wrath god remembers mercy why is it that these people the fire is going to come to from heaven and these people have lived their lives rebelling against god why in the world are they not consumed because god is a merciful god and he chose to concentrate his anger upon the sacrifice so that his people could return to him and so that their sins would be forgiven i'm not talking about the 450 prophets of baal they had they had were so immersed in leading the people astray their time had come but the people themselves who had been drawn so easily away they were now experiencing the present the power the reality of god but they were also discovering his mercy at calvary exactly the same thing happened the fire of god fell upon the sacrifice this in many ways is a picture that looked forward to what god was going to do in his son on the cross when his son was made to be sin for us and when he hung and he suffered on the cross he suffered not only the anger and the cruelty of men and women but he suffered the righteous anger the righteous wrath of god and that's why he cried my god my god why have you forsaken me and this was the mountain of god where god showed himself as never before where he displayed and he demonstrated his own peculiar love for sinners like ourselves in not doing what we deserved in in destroying us altogether but in concentrating his anger and his punishment on his own son who died on the cross at calvary so that we would be brought to worship him and so that we would be brought to say the lord he is god the lord he is god is that true for you tonight is that a true statement that you would make tonight because you've come to jesus you've trusted in him the lord he is my lord he is my god if jesus has paid the penalty for your sins you are able to say that he is your lord and your god and you're the greatest delight that you have tonight the greatest thrill is to know that jesus is your savior i wonder how how these people went away i hope they went away

having seen something they had never seen before having experienced not only the wrath and the nearness of their own destruction but how gracious and how kind and how merciful god is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to life in him tonight god is not willing that you should perish but that you should come to discover him as you've never discovered him before how long how long will you go limping between two different opinions let's pray gracious and eternal god lord we ask that by your power that we may listen to you and that by listening to you that our lives will be transformed and changed by the gospel lord bring us to you each one we confess our own sinfulness in not having prayed as we ought with a fervency and with a life that we see in someone like elijah we pray for that fervency but we pray also for a real movement of your spirit to to show us the mercy and the love of god in christ jesus towards lost evil people like ourselves we pray that as we see as we discover that mercy that you will draw each one of us pray that there will be no one here tonight who is not under the power of your spirit in jesus name amen