Revival: Let The Fire Fall
1 Kings 18:21-39

Have you ever seen something that you will never be able to forget? Recently I read a description of an event an author saw as a child 30 years ago that is still vivid in his mind. His family went to Yosemite National Forest, and at exactly 9:00pm one night a park ranger at Camp Curry shouted from the base camp up toward the top of the mountain, “Let the fire fall.” The shout echoed through the canyon in the valley. At Glacier Point 3,000 feet above, another group of park rangers lit red fir tree logs and sent them rolling over the waterfall. The sparks from the flaming tree bark fell all the way down the waterfall and gave the impression in the dark night that there was literally a waterfall of fire. It was unforgettable.

Twenty nine hundred years ago an unusual prophet called for God’s help and he saw fire fall, too. But he didn’t see the fire fall from a campfire. He saw the fire fall from heaven itself. This display of fire falling from heaven showed God’s favor, God’s approval, and God’s power on His people, even at a time when His people were in rebellion. The falling of the fire called His people back to Him.

In today’s world we’ve grown indifferent to the things of God. If there has ever been a time when a church needs to rise up and cry out, “Let the fire fall,” now is that time. The God who answered Elijah’s prayer with fire has not changed. He is still able to move powerfully in our church, our city, our nation, and in the nations of the world. He is the same as He’s ever been.

Adrian Rogers once said, “Our greatest need is not a new definition of the Gospel. What we need is a new demonstration of the Gospel.” We need to see the fire fall again. God still wants to show up in power. He still wants a people on fire. In every generation someone must call the people to focus on the real problems before there can be a solution!

The prophet Elijah was willing to identify the problem in his day. The Bible says: Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? (1 Kings 18:21)

That is a simple question to answer. How long will you waver between two opinions? If God be God, serve Him, follow Him. If Baal be god, then follow him. We can insert almost anything else in that second slot. If God is God then follow Him, but if you choose anything else then follow that. There is no such thing as neutrality. God doesn’t want us sitting on the fence. God doesn’t want us stuck in the neutral position, not knowing where we stand when it comes to our personal faith or personal commitment. That’s why Elijah stepped forward and said, “Choose. Make up your mind.” Notice what the Bible says next: But the people said nothing. They were stunned in the silence of indecision.

Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them 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.” 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. "O Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered.
There is no god named Baal except in the mind of these people. Baal doesn’t exist. They continued to call and shout, “O Baal, please light the fire.” Nothing happened. *And they danced around the altar they had made.* (v. 26b) Notice Elijah in verse 27. If this were modern times, he would be called for a penalty for unfairly taunting the opposition. They’re in a battle so he’s doing a little trash talking here. *At noon Elijah began to taunt them.* …*Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy….*

The word *busy* is a euphemism. Do you remember being instructed as a child in school to raise your hand if you needed to leave the room to go to the restroom? You didn’t have to say what you wanted because if you raised your hand everybody knew. The teacher knew what you needed to do. If you raised your hand, you were excused. That’s what this word means: *Your god is busy.* Elijah is talking some trash. He said, “Maybe your god stepped out. Maybe he raised his hand and needed to be excused a minute. Maybe he is deep in thought or busy…or traveling.”

“Maybe he’s gone on a trip….*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.*

This represents about nine hours from the time they began until the evening sacrifice. I love this part of the Scripture which makes it abundantly clear how ineffective and inadequate it is when we turn anywhere but to the Lord for our help. Notice what the Scripture says: *But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.* When reading that passage of Scripture you have to read slowly because it is in a cadence and the wording sort of stilts, slows you down, and you stumble over the wording. That is exactly the way the Lord wants us to read it. We’re reading along: *But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.* If you are turning to a source of help other than to the Lord, in the end there will be no response. No one will pay attention. There will be no answer because only the Lord God of heaven has the answer you’re looking for in your heart, in your life, in your family, in your work, and for the very purpose of your existence!

*Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins. 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… Now watch what he does ….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. 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.”*

Water was at a premium because there had been a drought with no rain for 3 ½ years. Think about what happens in your area to lakes when it doesn’t rain for a few months, and then think what it would be like after a 3 ½ year drought. Elijah commands that water be poured on the offering and water was at a premium. It was a scarce and valuable commodity. Do you know what this says? Elijah was laying it all on the line!

*Are you thinking that they might have used seawater? That’s possible, but the Mediterranean Sea is fifteen miles away. However you look at it, there was some investment here. If somebody had to get seawater, that was a chore. During this extreme drought the prophet is seemingly wasting water on*
an offering that he is asking God to consume with fire. Elijah commands that four jars of water be poured on the offering and on the wood. Probably 30 gallons were in each jar each. …Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. Do it a third time…. 

Do you know why he did that? Because, he didn’t want anybody to say that fire came from an accidental spark on the dry wood of the altar. Elijah said, “You know, I know how you are, you skeptics, let’s just douse the whole thing with water – gallons after gallons after gallons. When you’ve done it, do it again, and when you’ve done it, do it again.” The Bible says that the water so saturated the wood, so saturated the offering that it literally filled up the ditch he had built. He had built the ditch specifically so the water would fill it up. That way, nobody could speculate that he had tricked them. The wood and the sacrifice were soaked with water – a normal fire would be hard to start under those conditions.

…At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward…. This is what some of us need to do right here. Some of us need to just step forward in the things of God. Decide that anonymity is no longer a comfortable place to live spiritually. Decide that from now on, from this moment forward in life, you’re going to step forward. You’re going to decide to be counted in the things of God. Why not you? Elijah stepped forward: …and prayed: "O LORD, 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, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that You, O 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. The Bible says that when this fire fell from heaven, everything, the wood, the bull, the stones, the soil and the water in the trench were all incinerated. It was gone, blistered by the Lord himself. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD – He is God! The LORD – He is God!"

A songwriter from another generation wrote: To make my weak heart strong and brave, send the fire. To live and die a world to save, send the fire. O, see me on the altar lay, my life, my all this very day. To crown the offering, I pray, send the fire.” Elijah challenges not only his generation but every generation. No matter what you turn to for authority, for power, for answers, he said, let the God who answers by fire be God.

What does it mean to answer by fire? Why do we ask God to let the fire fall? Do we really want a lightening bolt to hit the ceiling, rip down the wall, hit the floor, and set the carpet on fire? No, we don’t. In the Bible when God uses fire, sometimes it’s for judgment. Sometimes it symbolizes purity. But in this case, fire falling from heaven was a sign of God’s approval on something new. In these verses this is the fourth example of God causing fire to fall from heaven. In every case prior to this it meant God was doing something new. He was bringing revival.

In the book of Leviticus we see the tabernacle being built in the wilderness. In chapter 9, Moses and Aaron had built the tabernacle. The first offering ever offered by the nation of Israel was at the tent of meeting – the tabernacle in the wilderness. There had been other offerings by individuals, but under the sacrificial system that God gave to the nation of Israel, the first sacrifices are found in Leviticus 9. The Bible says that Aaron and his sons, who were the new priests, came and brought the offering outside of the tabernacle. “Fire came out of the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offerings and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw this, they shouted for joy and fell face down.” (Leviticus 9:24) Why? Because God had started something new and in order to show His approval, He let the fire fall from heaven to consume that offering.
The second example was hundreds of years later. David bought a piece of land, and he had a vision of building a temple. He was never able to build the Temple, but we know his son, Solomon, did! The first sacrifice ever offered on that piece of ground is described in 1 Chronicles 21:21-26. David himself built an altar in the place where the temple would one day be built and offered to God a sacrifice. Do you know what happened? You guessed it – fire fell from heaven!

The third example was when Solomon had finished the Temple and the first offerings were offered. *When Solomon finished praying, fire came from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the sacrifices and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. (2 Chronicles 7:1)*

Look back at 1 Kings 18. Elijah prays for God to absorb the offering with fire, it is the fourth example of fire falling from heaven. Every single time the fire fell prior to this, it was upon something brand new. It was always a time of fresh obedience. It was a time of a new commitment to the Lord, and it was an example of God saying, “I approve of what you are doing here and I’m going to answer you with fire.” What’s new about what Elijah was doing? A multitude of people had gathered that day on Mt. Carmel, above the valley of Jezreel, which today we call The Valley of Armageddon. It is a beautiful area. The Bible says that all the people were there. Every one of them was silent about their relationship with God. Every one of them was confused about their relationship with God. The nation was divided into two kingdoms, the north and the south. Still the possibility existed in those days when the people of God were absolutely strangled in their indecision about their relationship to God, a plain-spoken prophet appears and says, “Let the God who is really God answer by fire.” He then built an altar of rededication, of recommitment and then stood back. The Bible says that the fire fell and the people acknowledged the Lord – He is God.

Today when we ask God to “let the fire fall,” we’re not asking God to burn the shingles off the roof. We’re asking God to take hold of the hearts and lives of men and women, our dedication, and our recommitment. We’re asking Him to set our souls on fire. We’re asking for His blessing and His approval upon our fresh commitment. We’re asking the Lord to answer our prayers with a manifestation of His living power in our lives. How can we experience the fire fall in our spiritual life? How can we experience the fire of revival? I want to give you two principles so you can watch for the fire fall.

**The Fire Of Revival Falls When The Faithful Prepare**

Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver?” The word waver comes from a word which means disjointed. It’s a word which describes a person who has been injured and limps. How long will you limp? How long will you stagger back and forth between two opposing points of view? That’s the question for you and me today. How long are we going to say that we believe in God, and not see His power because we’re limping and wavering in the world? Some of us hallucinate and think we can live with one foot in the world and one foot in the things of God. The truth is you can never live that way. These things don’t mix. A double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways. He is tossed back and forth like the waves of the sea. (James 1:8) That’s why the great General Joshua once stood up to say, “Choose this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15)

My dad had an expression he used when things were going wrong. He would say he had one foot in the grave and one foot on a banana peel! That’s a no-win situation! That is what you would have if you think that you can live by this world’s agenda, this world’s standards, this world’s authority, and
still expect to see the power of God. Elijah is asking the most penetrating and poignant question any generation can be asked. How long will you live trying to go along with two opposing points of view? How long will you stagger between two opinions? In verse 30 he reconstructed the altar of God and then poured water on that altar, filling the trench around it. He was preparing for God to do something new. He was expecting God to do something brand new.

Do you expect God to move? We have to live in expectancy. We have to believe that God is still the God of Elijah. Elisha, who became the prophet of God after Elijah, asked this question: “Where now is the God of Elijah?” 2500 years later Leonard Ravenhill said, “The question is not, where is the God of Elijah. The question is: Where are the Elijahs of God?” Where is the man, the woman, the teenager, the student, the single adult, the couple, the preacher, the choir, the deacon, the Sunday School teacher, the small group, the prayer group, the congregation, the somebody who will stand up and say, “I expect God to move.” I’m living with this anticipation that one day Jesus is going to do everything He said He would do. He’s going to take full possession of His church, and we will be exactly what He wants us to be because somebody said, “I’m getting ready for the fire to fall.”

THE FIRE OF REVIVAL FALLS IN ANSWER TO PRAYER

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “O LORD, 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, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You are turning their hearts back again.”

Armin Gesswein, the Lutheran evangelist, once said, “Why a prayer meeting first?” He then went on to answer his own question, “Because there is nothing in His church that does not depend on prayer.” If God is going to do it, it has to be by prayer.” Remember, Elijah was a praying man. We might be tempted to think, “If I was a prophet like Elijah, I’d be a praying man too.” But, we need to think exactly opposite of that. Remember James 5:17: 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. Elijah was a man with the same kinds of distractions, the same kinds of temptations, the same kinds of agendas….just like us! The point is this – anyone can pray and see God move! He was a man like we are and, yet, he prayed. Notice the simplicity of his prayer. He’d already done all the leg work. He’d done all of the preparations. He was already living with expectancy. He knew God was going to answer so he just stepped forward. He didn’t even pray for the fire to fall. He just said, “Lord, hear me when I pray so that the people will know that there is a God in heaven.” You might say, “I’ve been praying and my friend is still not saved. I’ve been praying and that child is still straying. I’ve been praying and my marriage is still in trouble. I’ve been praying and I’m still facing opposition. I’m about ready to hang it up.” Don’t stop now! You’re closer to the answer than you have ever been!

Have you heard of David Brainerd? He is one of the greatest Christians America has ever seen, but he never pastored a great church. He went to Yale University until they expelled him for criticizing one of his professors. The criticism: “He has less grace than the chair he is sitting in.” He felt bad about it and he repented before God. He sensed God was calling him to ministry and he had callings from churches all over colonial America, but he refused all those opportunities. Instead, David Brainerd went out into the woods to minister to the American Indians. He didn’t know their language and had to rely on an interpreter that was unsaved and drunk most of the time. He was never sure if
his words were correctly interpreted. He had very few converts. Still, David Brainerd today is remembered as one of the greatest Christians that ever lived because he spent his life in prayer.

He described in his diary, not assuming anyone would ever see it, his daily exercise in prayer. Entries like, "Today I began the morning in prayer and I couldn’t get much joy, but I kept praying and toward the middle of the afternoon, I began to feel my desires for Him were more insatiable." He talked about praying two or three days at a time. He would pray in the snow and yet the perspiration and the heat of his body would, literally, melt the snow around him. He spent his life in prayer. If you Google his name you will find his diary on the internet, 250 years later. David Brainerd, who died at the age of 29, never pastored any prestigious churches and never preached in many well-known places. He spent his adult life in the woods praying but was able to inspire generation after generation because of the example of his prayer life. Yale Divinity School eventually named a building in his memory. The only building at Yale named for an expelled student. His prayers out lived him!

William Carrey pastored a small Baptist church until he read the diary of David Brainerd and God set his soul on fire for missions. William Carrey would not have gone to the mission field had he not read the diary of David Brainerd. John Wesley, as he was setting two continents on fire with the Gospel of Jesus, told every Methodist preacher to not dare to step a foot in the pulpit until they had read the diary of David Brainerd. The influence of one praying man has reached across the centuries! Your life, devoted to prayer, can ignite a fire of revival that might leap to the lives of those around you!

It doesn’t matter what you have been through, it doesn’t matter what a congregation has come through. It doesn’t matter what a city may face by way of challenge. I’m telling you, according to the eternal word of God that cannot lie, when God’s people pray, He sends revival because He answers with fire.