

Portraits of a Prophet 6

10.8.23

1 Kings 18:30–46 (CSB)

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near me.” So all the people approached him. Then he repaired the LORD’s altar that had been torn down: ³¹Elijah took twelve stones—according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Israel will be your name”—³²and he built an altar with the stones in the name of the LORD. Then he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold about four gallons. ³³Next, he arranged the wood, cut up the bull, and placed it on the wood. He said, “Fill four water pots with water and pour it on the offering to be burned and on the wood.” ³⁴Then he said, “A second time!” and they did it a second time. And then he said, “A third time!” and they did it a third time. ³⁵So the water ran all around the altar; he even filled the trench with water.

³⁶At the time for offering the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah approached the altar and said, “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that at your word I have done all these things. ³⁷Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that you, the LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back.”

³⁸Then the LORD’s fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, “The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!”

⁴⁰Then Elijah ordered them, “Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let even one of them escape.” So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Kishon and slaughtered them there. ⁴¹Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a rainstorm.”

⁴²So Ahab went to eat and drink, but Elijah went up to the summit of Carmel. He bent down on the ground and put his face between his knees.

⁴³Then he said to his servant, “Go up and look toward the sea.”

So he went up, looked, and said, “There’s nothing.”

Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”

⁴⁴On the seventh time, he reported, "There's a cloud as small as a man's hand coming up from the sea."

Then Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Get your chariot ready and go down so the rain doesn't stop you.' "

⁴⁵In a little while, the sky grew dark with clouds and wind, and there was a downpour. So Ahab got in his chariot and went to Jezreel. ⁴⁶The power of the LORD was on Elijah, and he tucked his mantle under his belt and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Introduction: Baal has failed.

A. Baal was given the chance to consume a sacrifice, and he didn't.

1. All day long, the prophets of Baal danced, shouted, prophesied, and cut themselves.

2. But that god did not hear, did not answer, and did not respond.

B. And now it is time for Elijah, the prophet of God, to give God a chance.

1. In today's passage, we read what happens when God is given a chance.

2. When we give God a chance, His fire and His presence fall.

3. When we give God a chance, He forgives and restores.

C. But how do we give God that chance?

1. What does it look like to make room for God?

2. What does it look like to prepare our lives, our families, and our churches for a move of God?

a. We can call this move many things.

b. We can call it a revival, an awakening, or a move.

c. Whatever we want to call it, I can't help but believe every one of us here wants more of God in our lives.

3. A move of God is a sovereign thing.

- a. You can't MAKE God move.
- b. But once He reveals He wants to do something, there are several actions that the people of God must take.
- c. In today's text, I see 9 things Elijah did in response to God's promise to send both fire and rain upon the land.
- d. These 9 things provide godly guidance for those of us seeking more of God for our lives and family.
- e. I may not preach this all today: I'm going to preach till it's time to quit and respond.

1. Draw near to God.

A. After the prophets of Baal's failure, Elijah called the people to come near him.

1. This was an opportunity to witness and participate in Elijah's part of the demonstration.

2. If the people had remained at Baal's altar, they would have missed what was happening at God's altar.

- a. You cannot worship at God's altar and the world's altar.
- b. Often, we are people looking for options.
- c. We don't want to make Jesus the ONLY God of our life, but one of many gods.

3. But we can't worship at multiple altars and expect God's blessing.

B. The first step to experiencing a move of God is to make Him your focus.

- 1. You won't find God's blessings at the altar of the world.
- 2. You won't find the fire of God, His holiness, His perfection, His power from another source.

3. You won't find the water of God's Spirit and the accompanying peace, joy, happiness, and forgiveness within yourself, your spouse, or anywhere else.

C. **If you want what only God can give, you must draw near to Him.**

1. We do this through:

2. Prayer.

3. Reading Scripture.

4. Worshipping Monday-Saturday

5. Tarrying in the Presence (being still and waiting).

D. If God is not your all, He is your nothing.

We must Draw Near to God.

2. Restore altars.

A. Once the people gathered, Elijah repaired the Lord's altar that had been torn down.

1. Elijah didn't repurpose Baal's altar.

2. Elijah didn't leave the Lord's altar in pieces, knowing God was going to consume it soon.

3. Elijah went through the work and effort to rebuild what the people and leadership had destroyed.

a. Some altars are destroyed on purpose.

b. Some altars are destroyed through neglect.

c. But altars are never rebuilt on accident.

B. **The broken altar was a visible reminder of the people's broken spiritual condition.** (Patterson).¹

¹ The altar's disarray is a visible reminder of the people's broken spiritual condition. Further, the twelve stones will remind them of the Lord's proper claim on his people as descendants of Jacob/Israel.^{[1][1]} Patterson, Richard D.,

1. We must recognize what is broken and what has been neglected.
2. But if we want a move of God, we cannot leave them the way we found them.

C. God calls us to come as we are, and be changed.

1. In America, we have adopted a Gospel that says, "Come as you are...and stay that way."

- a. The invitation from Jesus is to come as you are and leave changed.
- b. The invitation from Jesus is to come as an unholy vessel and be changed into a vessel for God's glory.
- c. The invitation from Jesus is to come as a sinner and leave as a saint.

2. Are there areas of your life that you have allowed to be broken and left in disrepair that God is calling you to rebuild?

- a. Have we replaced holy places with the unholy?
- b. Are we giving worship designed for God to lesser gods?

D. As we draw near to God, we will want to restore altars.

1. An altar is a place of encounter and dedication.
2. Maybe you have never encountered God.
3. Maybe you met Jesus years ago, but those areas have been neglected.
4. Part of pursuing personal revival, a family revival, and a community revival is the establishing and restoring of altars.

3. Remember God's Promises

A. In rebuilding the altar, Elijah took twelve stones to serve as the platform.

1. In Elijah's context, twelve is meaningful.
2. They represented the twelve sons of Jacob.
3. But notice how this is phrased:

B. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the sons of Jacob to whom the word of the Lord had come saying, "Israel will be your name."

1. Jacob was one of the main patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob).
2. But Jacob was a bad man for much of his life.
 - a. He was a deceiver by nature.
 - b. Always struggling and always hustling.
 - c. He was an unlikely person to experience the blessing and favor of God.

C. But one day, Jacob who was fleeing from the brother he had defrauded, had an encounter with God, and he wrestled with Him in a dream.

1. In the dream, the Angel of the Lord changed his name to Israel for he wrestled with God and won.
2. That's the first time God called Jacob, the deceiver, Israel.

D. In Genesis 35, we see another time God reminded Jacob about his new name and identity:

Genesis 35:1-7 (CSB)

RETURN TO BETHEL

35 God said to Jacob, "Get up! Go to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

²So Jacob said to his family and all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods that are among you. Purify yourselves and change your clothes. ³We must get up and go to Bethel. I will build an altar there to the God who answered me in my day of distress. He has been with me everywhere I have gone."

⁴Then they gave Jacob all their foreign gods and their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak near Shechem. ⁵When they set out, a terror from God came over the cities around them, and they did not pursue Jacob's sons. ⁶So Jacob and all who were with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. ⁷Jacob built an altar there and called the place El-bethel because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

1. I believe that Elijah is calling upon this story when he sets apart the stones and calls them Israel.
 2. When God spoke to Jacob and called him Israel, it was during a time of distress and pain.
 - a. It was a time of fleeing from an enemy.
 - b. But there was another that was chasing after Jacob.
 - c. Jacob thought he was fleeing from Esau but ran into the God of Israel instead.
 3. Upon this reminder in Genesis 35, Israel told his family to get rid of all the foreign gods.
 - a. As Elijah reminds the people of the promises of God, there is also an expectation.
 - b. God will meet with them there, but they must rid themselves of the other gods.
 - c. God's promises are exclusive and cannot be combined with other offers.
- E. You can't lay hold of God's promises while clinging to other gods.

4. Prepare the soil

A. This action by Elijah is a little confusing.

1. He digs or has the people dig a substantial ditch around the altar.
2. This ditch is designed to hold water (we will talk about that here in a moment).

B. I cannot help but see this as another indicator of the amount of preparation Elijah is doing before God moves.

1. God's success is already guaranteed.
2. God IS going to come down with fire.
3. Then, God IS going to send the promised rain and end the drought and famine.
4. So why is Elijah going through all this labor?

C. Even though God has promised seed time and harvest, He has required us to till the soil and prepare it.

1. Too many of us think, "if God wants me to have it, then it doesn't matter what I do."
 - a. Yet, we prepare not to deserve a move of God but to express anticipation of a move of God.
 - b. Preparing ahead of time is an expression of faith and anticipation.
2. When a couple discovers they are pregnant, they say they are "expecting a baby."
 - a. Part of the expecting is the preparation for the baby's arrival.
 - b. You prepare the room, buy some diapers, and get some clothes.

c. **Illustration and none are perfect:** In America, you must buy a car seat (can't bring a baby home without a car seat).

3. We prepare for God's moving through prayer, worship, and study, without which we aren't ready to bring it home.

4. Elijah knew the fire was coming, and he prepared the ground for it.

5. Bring the sacrifice

A. Now comes the sacrifice.

1. Theoretically, he could have backed out any time before now.

2. But once the knife is laid to the bull, there is no retreat.

B. Romans 12:1 tells us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

1. But the same Paul says in Galatians:

Galatians 2:20 (CSB)

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 5:24 (CSB)

²⁴Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

2. **We cannot let live in our lives what God has told us to kill.**

a. There comes a time when we cannot and will not turn back.

b. Christianity includes a dying to the flesh, a mortification of our sinful desires.

c. For the fire to fall, there must be a sacrifice on the altar.

C. For believers, that sacrifice is nothing less than our lives.

1. Our time, talent, and treasures.
2. It's declaring, "Not my will but yours be done."

6. Bring an offering.

A. There is a big difference between the prophets of Baal and Elijah.

1. The text shows the false prophets doing ALL the work, all the worship, all the dancing.
2. The people are bystanders and not participants.
3. In Elijah's instance, the people are participants, not bystanders.
4. They probably brought the stones, set up the sacrifice, and dug the ditch, and now they gathered the water.

B. The English translations struggle with the amount of water mentioned here.

1. Some English translations say the trench could only hold 4 gallons, but that seems not to be an accurate description.
2. The size of the trench and the amount of water isn't overly important.

C. What is important here is that Elijah requires the people to go find water during a drought to pour over the sacrifice.

1. How far they went and where they got it, we do not know.
2. But they went three times to fill the pots, and three times they poured it out till it soaked the sacrifice and filled the trench.

D. I admit that, at times, what God asks us to do seems like too much.

1. When you've already brought a sacrifice, this stage seems like an overkill.
2. Yet, I know what happens next:

a. You see, everything the water touched, the fire consumed.

b. The water served almost as a marker:

1. It marked what Elijah wanted consumed.
2. Not just the animal, but all of the altar, and all the stones, and even the ditch felt the fire of God.

7. Give it to Jesus.

A. There then reaches a point that we give it to God.

1. NO matter how prepared Elijah was, he could not make fire fall.
2. He did what he could, and then he called upon the name of the Lord.

B. His prayer is simple but direct.

1. No dancing, shouting, or cutting.
2. "Answer me, LORD!"

C. Most of us tend to two extremes.

1. One extreme is to do nothing in preparation and hope God blesses.
2. The other extreme is to be so busy preparing and working you don't ever stop long enough to let God move.
3. Both extremes often miss the presence and fire of God.

8. Remove the corrupting voices.

9. Prepare for rain.