

Portraits of a Prophet 7

10.8.23

10.30.23

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.

Recap From Previous Message:

A. The Prophets of Baal are in a contest with the Prophet of God, Elijah.

1. No matter how hard they tried, they could not get their god to respond and consume the sacrifice with fire.
2. And now it was time for the God of Israel to respond.

B. But Elijah didn't jump right to the calling down of fire.

1. Elijah went through several steps or moves that preceded the fire of God falling upon the sacrifice.
2. Before God's fire fell, He:
 1. Had the people draw near to God.
 2. He rebuilt and restored God's altar.
 3. And reminded the people of God's promises.

C. But Elijah doesn't stop there:

1. I want to draw our attention to what Elijah does next.
2. In these actions, we see guidance for people like you and me who are desiring to see God move in our lives and our Church.

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).
3. Perhaps the ditch does a couple of things:
 1. It clearly marks the area as holy, separate, and distinct.
 2. The ditch ensures the catching of the water offering so that none is wasted.
 3. The ditch anticipates an overflow even though they are living in a time of drought and famine.

B. All of this points to the importance of Elijah's preparation 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. God has already promised these things.
5. 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 or earn 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.
 - c. **Promise does not permit or promote laziness.**
 - d. Promise should be received with expectation.

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, in this generation, you must buy and possess a car seat before the hospital will let you bring your baby, your promise, home.

3. **We prepare for God’s moving through prayer, worship, and study; without which we aren’t ready to bring God’s presence home.**

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

1. This may look different for each one of us.

2. The ground of your heart and life is different from mine.

3. Yet, we all have areas of our lives that need preparing for the next move of God.

After the ditch is dug, it is time to bring the sacrifice.

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.

3. I am so thankful that we do not have to offer the blood of bulls or goats or lambs anymore.

4. But there is still a principle that applies to us.

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

1. And the same Paul says in Galatians:

Galatians 2:20 (CSB)

²⁰ I 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)

²⁴ Now 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. We cannot return to what God has told us has died.

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

3. For as much as Christianity is about experiencing resurrected life, there is never a resurrection without a death.

a. Jesus died and arose.

b. Baptism symbolizes the death and burial of the old person and the resurrection of the new life.

c. Communion speaks to us of Jesus' death and crucifixion.

d. The Apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:31 (ESV)

³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!

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

1. Our time, talent, and treasures.

2. We die daily by declaring, "Not my will but yours be done."

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

4. Could it be that God is ready, once again, to move with power, but we haven't prepared our lives as the sacrifice to be consumed?

a. We want to "consume" a revival but don't want to offer our lives to be consumed so that revival may happen.

b. Something American culture has lost that has a great is the willingness to sacrifice the lesser in pursuit of the greater.

5. Yet, Elijah didn't stop there.

a. The offering of a bull during a FAMINE and drought was expensive.

b. Then Elijah has the people bring an offering.

To see a move of God, we bring a sacrifice and an offering.

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. When it is Elijah's turn, the people become participants, not bystanders.

4. The people probably brought the stones, set up the sacrifice, and dug the ditch, and now they gather 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.
3. Imagine the people at this point:
 - a. The prophets of Baal didn't require the people to sacrifice, dig ditches, or pour out their precious water.
 - b. Doesn't Elijah know that water was life, and there wasn't enough life to go around?
 - c. How DARE he pour the life of the bull, blood. and the life of the people (the water) upon the ground?

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

1. When you've already brought a sacrifice, this stage seems like an overkill.
 - a. And the prophets of Baal, the voices of this world, don't require what God requires.
 - b. Perhaps you are thinking that what God is asking of you is too much:
 1. Going to church once or twice a week seems too much.
 - a. Yet, according to the department of labor, on an average day, 95% of those age 15 and over engaged in some sort of leisure and sport activity, with men spending 5.6 hours and women 4.8 hours a day.

b. On average, adults age 75 spent over 7.5 hours a day engaged in leisure and sports activities (more than any other group).¹

2. The world doesn't ask for a tithe like God does (you're right. **The world demands everything and blesses nothing.**)

a. American household debt is up to 17.07 TRILLION dollars in Q2².

b. It seems to me that we have worshipped at the altar of the American dream and have found it doesn't bless or satisfy.

c. The enemy is feeding us a lie:

1. Satan tells us we don't have the time, energy or money to serve God.

2. He tells us that what God asks of us is too much, too radical, and too hard.

3. Then, He takes it all anyway.

2. We have to remember that only God can bless us.

a. Only God can transform us.

b. Whatever God asks of us is a reasonable sacrifice.

c. So, when Elijah said "Go get the water..." there was a purpose.

d. When Elijah said, "Do it again," there was a purpose.

3. I know what happens next:

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

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.nr0.htm>

² <https://www.newyorkfed.org/newsevents/news/research/2023/20230808>

b. The water served 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.

4. When we tell God He can't have an area of our life, we don't experience God's presence in that area.

7. Give it to Jesus.

A. Are you at the point that you need to be still and 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 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.

APPLY: This is where I want to stop us.

A. What areas are we withholding from the Lord?

B. What stage do you find yourself in?

1. Are you drawing near to God?
2. Are you rebuilding altars?

3. Are you preparing the soil or getting ready to make the sacrifice?

4. Are you in an offering season, where you aren't just giving the sacrifice but you are bringing offerings in anticipation of God moving far beyond you?

5. Or is it simply time to step back and let the fire fall?

³⁸ Then 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.

³⁹ When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!"