

Sermon Series
Elijah, A Prophet for Our Times
Sunday, January 3, 2021

Title: Elijah's Focus

Subject: Israel, Elijah, The Lord, The altar of the Lord, Sacrifice, Prayer, Baal, False Worship, The Word, Zeal, Passion, Order, Disorder, The Covenant

Theme Text: 1 Kings 18:36-37 (ESV) ³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O 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, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

Theme Illustration: Elijah had a threefold focus going into this Lord arranged contest between Baal and Yahweh. Elijah was trusting in the faithfulness of the Lord in administering His covenant with Israel as is indicated by his appeal to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. There would be no hope for Israel's future apart from that covenant the Lord made with Israel at Sinai. His second focus was on his hope that the Lord would turn the hearts of the people back to The Lord in devotion, worship, and service. He was clearly grieved and suffering spiritually at the wholesale abandonment of the Lord as Israel's savior. They have returned His love and care for them with rejection for a god that is not God. Thirdly, Elijah's focus is on the honor of God's great name and that if Elijah is to honor the name of the Lord himself, he must do all things following His word. Elijah knew that there was no room for innovation.

Oh, that the church of Jesus Christ, the Southern Baptist Convention, and this church's heart would beat with a like passion for the name of the Lord, His Son, and His kingdom. Beloved, only the Lord can turn the hearts of His

people to Him.

Read: 1 Kings 18:31-37

Introduction: Elijah has previously dictated the terms of this contest granting to the prophets of Baal, the privilege of going first and calling upon their god to answer by fire. The terms of the contest were that the God who answered and consumed the sacrifice with fire would be proclaimed, the only true God.

Going first, we observed the haphazard and frenzied appeals of the prophets of Baal. We observed Elijah's mocking of their attempts, even suggesting that perhaps their God was napping, or traveling, or otherwise indisposed. The more that Elijah mocked them the more frenzied their appeals, resulting even to cutting themselves. We also observed the calm, deliberate, confident demeanor of the Lord's prophet. Elijah was not the least bit worried that the Lord would not answer. The prophets of Baal have had their turn. Now Elijah takes center stage, or rather Elijah's God takes center stage.

Transition: After repairing the altar of the Lord, we observe Elijah's:

1. Obedience: 1 Kings 18:31-32a (ESV) ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed.

The first thing we observed in our text is Elijah taking care to add 12 stones, corresponding to the number of tribes of Israel to the altar. Why did Elijah do this? After all, the kingdom had been divided in this contest was in the presence of the 10 northern tribes and its leader and its people. Elijah in obedience was honoring the word of the Lord.

Elijah intended to offer the sacrifice in the name of the whole nation, Israel. Elijah was viewing Israel from the Lord's perspective. In the mind of God,

Israel was one from all eternity. Outwardly, they may have split, but in the Lord's mind. They were one. Elijah was walking by faith and not by sight. Faith is always reflected by actions that honor God and his word.

Despite the wide variance, we must never lose sight of the mystical union of Christ with all of the people of God, past, present, and future. We must always labor to see all things from God's perspective. We should view the church which Christ gave Himself for as it exists in the mind, eternal purpose, and councils of the divine Trinity. We will never see this unity visibly until we see Him descending out of heaven, clothed with the glory of God.

Elijah's actions, we review that God had given instructions about His altar, **Exodus 20:25-26 (ESV)** ²⁵ **If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.** ²⁶ **And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.'** Again, the Lord did not allow for innovation. The stones which were chosen were not polished or shaped by man's work. He used chosen stones that lay around on this mountainside. Elijah took what God provided; not what man had made. He acted according to the divine pattern. God's work must always be done. God's way.

In connection with His worship, God has not left things to our discretion, nor human wisdom. God has left us a pattern, **Hebrews 8:5 (ESV)** ⁵ **They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."** We should never leave the church to worship by acting in self-will.

Transition: One of the main contrasts in this narrative is the contrast between the disordered worship of Baal and:

2. Order: 1 Kings 18:32b-35 (ESV) ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. **And he made a trench about the altar, as great**

as would contain two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” ³⁴ And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. ³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

We observe how carefully Elijah prepared the altar, its design, and the sacrifice as opposed to the haphazard way the prophets of Baal prepared their sacrifice. The arrangement for Elijah’s altar was done in the name of the Lord, by His authority and for His glory, **Colossians 3:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

What a difference it would make if the whole service of the church, discipline, and life of the church were regulated by the directions the Lord has already given us in the word. The path of obedience is the path of spiritual prosperity and blessing.

We observed that he placed the wood on the altar in order and orderly place the sacrifice on the wood. Elijah is carefully the pattern given him in Scripture, **Leviticus 1:6-8 (ESV)** ⁶ **Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces,** ⁷ **and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire.** ⁸ **And Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar;**

All worship of the Lord must be done decently and in order. The worship of the Lord must never be performed carelessly but with great reverence as far as human frailty will allow. We must heed this warning from the prophet Jeremiah, **Jeremiah 48:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ **“Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness, and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed.** This goes for the pulpit, the worship, the songs, and every part of our corporate worship. Every part of our life as a follower of Jesus Christ should be marked by order. Sin is disorder.

We also observe that there were four barrels of water poured on the sacrifice three times. 12 barrels of water were poured on the sacrifice. Each barrel corresponded with each of the 12 tribes. We see that the amount of water poured on the sacrifice does not phase Elijah. It won't make any difference to the Lord if it were 12 barrels or 1200 barrels. Elijah made sure that any answer to the sacrifice would overcome the seemingly impossible.

Transition: Elijah's preparations have been made according to the word. It was now time to approach the Lord. Elijah approaches the Lord by appealing to:

3. The Covenant: 1 Kings 18:36-37 (ESV) ³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O 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, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

Elijah now addresses the Lord mediated through the covenant. Why did Elijah wait until the time of the evening sacrifice? By waiting until this moment, Elijah was acknowledging fellowship with the worshipers at the temple in Jerusalem. That evening sacrifice was offered every day three hours before sunset. This sacrifice points forward to the fulfillment of the final sin offering when the fullness of God's time had come.

It is this sacrifice, which the Messiah would offer for the sins of God's people on the cross. We know that Elijah was aware of this sign and significance when he spoke with Jesus on the Mount, **Luke 9:30 (ESV) ³⁰**

And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah... Elijah's faith was not on the blood of the bull, but the blood of Christ. It was on this belief that Elijah presented his prayer to God. In essence, Elijah was praying in Jesus's name.

We also observed that Elijah came near the altar. He was expecting an answer by fire. Yet he was not nervous standing near the altar. What confidence in God this prophet had! He knew that with the Lord that he would not be a collateral victim.

Elijah addresses the Lord based on His covenant promises to the patriarchs. Elijah's prayer reminded the people of the foundation of their hope and blessing. What a difference it makes when we can plead the blood of the covenant, **Hebrews 13:20 (ESV)** ²⁰ **Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.**

The prophet was filled with a burning zeal for the glory of God. He did not care for himself. Elijah felt how grievously the Lord had been dishonored. The focus of Elijah's prayer was that God would vindicate Himself that day and turn the hearts of the people back to Him. Oh, that every church is so consumed, for the glory of God. We need to hear our Lord Jesus's words, **John 8:50 (ESV)** ⁵⁰ **Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.**

Please, Lord, he prayed, "let it be known this day!" Let it be known that I am just your lowly servant! Elijah was completely yielded to God seeking His glory and not his own.

Conclusion: Dear saints, we need to understand and embrace this great truth. Christian service is not doing something for Christ. It is doing those things which He has commanded us to do and assigned to us. Can we as individual Christians and can we as a church exclaim what Elijah claimed: "I am your servant."

How do we manifest this great truth? Only by our separation from the world, by our devotion to Christ, and our love for souls. This is manifested by spending ourselves on being spent in service to God's people. May we pray for our progress in the faith by praying Lord, let it be known that I am your

servant. Hear us, hear us, O Lord, let your people know that you are the Lord God.