

PP Standing In the Gap: Elijah, a Man Like Us

Part 9-*The God Who Turns Hearts (Concluded)*, 1 Kings 18:30-40

1/7-1/8/2012

Illus The Chinese Christian Watchman Nee, before the outbreak of WW II, led an evangelistic mission to an island south of the Chinese mainland. After days of preaching with no success, one of Watchman's teammates asked the people why they wouldn't believe. They answered, 'We have a god—one god—Ta-wang, and he has never failed us.' For 286 years, we have held his festival procession on a day in January that is chosen by divination beforehand, and every time it is a perfect day without rain or cloud. The missionaries asked when that year's day was, and it was January 11, 8 am. The youngest missionary on the team then audaciously announced, 'I promise you that it will certainly rain on the eleventh.' The people cried out, 'No more preaching! If there is rain on the eleventh, then your God is God.'

Would you have had the courage to make that promise to an unbelieving village?

It has been several weeks since we have been in this series, and if you have ever used

Google maps, mapquest, you are undoubtedly familiar with the zoom slider bar
We are going to start our time with the zoom bar out, and we will tighten in along the way

PP Zoomed Out: Review

The last time we looked at Elijah we found him on top of Mount Carmel in a contest with the prophets of Baal

PP Experts identify the site as 'El Muhra' which means *the place of burning*

He had challenged Israel to make a choice: either serve God or serve Baal

The winner of the contest was the God who answered by fire, consuming the sacrifice of a bull

Baal's prophets went first, pleading with their god from morning until the '*offering of the oblation*', the evening sacrifice around 3 pm, but nothing happened, Baal didn't show

Then it was Elijah's turn and it is here that we zoom in a little more

PP Zoomed In: Overview

"Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. "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," and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord." 18:30-32a

PP God had commanded the Israelites when constructing an altar: *"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."* Exodus 20:25

Atonement is entirely the work of God, no human effort of righteousness can be added in
Elijah took 12 stones representing the 12 twelve tribes of Israel, though they were currently divided, they were one people in God's mind

And he built the '*altar in the name of the LORD*', for God alone, and no other

But what is an altar?

It is the place of sacrifice where Holy God meets fallen sinner, and restores him or her to peace

It was the table of God, where He was invited to fellowship with the worshiper
But a sinner and God could not sit in fellowship at that table unless something took away the sin
You see, sin created an obstacle between God and man that prevents a peaceful relationship
And our holy, God of justice cannot just wink at sin and give people a free pass, or a mulligan
Israel, because of their rebellion is under the wrath of God, evidence by the 3 ½ year drought
There is a breach between them and God, an obstacle caused by sin and something has to remove
that obstacle, and God cannot bless them until His justice is satisfied
His justice will be realized, His wrath must either fall on Israel, or on an innocent substitute
An innocent substitute was killed and placed on it, to remove that barrier, its blood sprinkled
against the altar, because there could be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood
The innocent animal died in the place of the sinner, the nation, so that they could live

“And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed.” 32b

This was a little under 2 gallons of seed, half a bushel, which would have been a small trench
Some understand this to mean that the trench was deep and wide enough to place a half bushel
container in it, which seems a better understanding

“And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood.” 18:33a

First Elijah selected 12 stones, dug the trench, placed the wood in order, then killed the bull
This was the Olah offering, or whole burnt offering, one of the five sacrifices God instituted to
make create a right relationship with Him

It was laid down in the law to be performed morning and evening, to remind the people of their
great need to be forgiven and to point them forward to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ
Elijah would have brought the living bull before the altar, placed his hands on its head,
symbolizing the transfer of their sins upon that innocent substitute

He then slit the bull’s throat, while several men were holding it tight with ropes, and collected
its blood to throw it against in a bowl, to sprinkle it against the side of the altar

He then skinned the bull, quartered it, washed it and placed all the pieces upon the altar

It all pointed forward to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Who upon the altar of the cross,
would be killed for our sins, making peace with His Father for all Who believe in Him

***“Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” 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. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with
water.” 33b-35***

Elijah poured water over everything for at least two reasons, the first being to remove all doubt
as to the power of God, that nothing is too hard for God and He will bring revival

But another reason might be in seeing the type of water he likely used

There is a spring near where this contest is believed to have taken place, and a river at the bottom
of Mount Carmel called the Kishon, 65 feet wide in the rainy season and 23 miles long

But it is unlikely that there was much of any water after 3 ½ years of no rain or dew

But the Mediterranean Sea was nearby, and if that were the source for the water, then we see the
missing element in this burnt offering...salt

PP ***“You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain
offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.”*** **Leviticus 2:13**

Friends, the altar was a table of fellowship where God and humanity could meet in peace, and like our own tables, what was to always be on that table was salt
Salt symbolized God's eternal covenantal promises to forgive His people
It was at times more valuable than gold, used in place of money, as wages for Roman soldiers
The word 'salary' finds its root in salt payments, thus the phrase, 'worth his salt' came into being
Salt is incorruptible, prevents decay, sterilizes wounds, heals sores, guarded against the dangers of constant heat and was a symbol of friendship and faithfulness when shared
The presence of salt shouted out God's covenantal faithfulness!
Four barrels poured out, three times, because God loves all Israel, and He upholds His covenant
But let's zoom in again, and see what this all means as we now apply this inward to our hearts

PP Zooming inward: Interview

Are we like Elijah, inviting people to come near us so we can show to them the glory of God?
What confidence this demonstrates, come, taste and see that the Lord is good!

And when we invite people near to hear and see the love and redemption of Jesus Christ, we will often find that they have built their lives on broken altars, worthless religious systems
Some of the most heart-wrenching moments for me have been with people who are weeping at the emptiness and despair in their lives as they have lived at the broken altar
So many believe that they can find peace and atonement on the broken altar of good works
Their lives are shipwrecked after worship the altar of their career and come out empty
Do we, like Elijah know our God well enough to repair the altar for those who come to you?
Study God's Word, know your God, hold out hope for struggling people

Friends, is there someone in your life who has a broken altar?
That person needs you to invite them near to hear and see the redemption of God
And sometimes this can be very difficult to do, for all of us, me included

Illus Several weeks ago, the pastor of a well-known church in our area stopped by to visit with me. He wanted to know if I would be interested in joining an inter-faith clergy group. My answer was 'No'! That I am, our church is, only willing to partner with those who will exalt the name of Jesus Christ and base the hope of our salvation on His Gospel, His good news of Jesus Christ. I can only imagine what was going through his mind, as has already let go of the uniqueness of the gospel's call

Elijah's example makes us look inward and examine our prayer lives
Elijah prayed such a simple prayer of faith, full of zeal for God's glory: *"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. 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. Then the fire of the Lord fell..."* 18:36b-38a

PP James in his NT book had said of Elijah, *"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."* **James 5:16**

Did you catch that: *It is the righteous person whose prayer is powerfully effective*
Christian brother and sister, if you have thought that God would answer your prayers, regardless

of your faithfulness to Him, just because you are His child, you are seriously mistaken
PP ***"If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."*** Psalm 66:18

Being saved is not sufficient to a mighty life of prayer, we must live in daily submission to God

PP ***"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*** John 15:7

PP ***"whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him."*** 1 John 3:22

Have we ever wondered why are prayers seem so ineffective?

The power of prayer is found in more than being a Christian, it is found in walking closely with God in faithful obedience

Elijah served God in a time of great spiritual darkness, yet he was filled with courage

All 8 times Elijah speaks in this passage, He issues bold commands

He is vastly outnumbered, by the pagan prophets, literally one man against a nation

PP Yet he knew what Isaiah would later write: ***"no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,"*** Isaiah 44:17

He trusted that God was on his side and it was more than enough

Do you live in, go to school in, work in a place of great spiritual darkness?

Have you ever felt overwhelmed at the spiritual decay all around you?

A friend told me this past week that her fellow waitresses and waiters come in to work stoned, and cooks would drink alcohol the whole time they are working

Even alone, you and God always make an overwhelming power of righteousness

And when God moves in your family, or school, or sports team, or job, or neighborhood, it will be in unstoppable display of power

"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." 18:38

The fire consumed everything from the top down: bull, wood, stones, dust and water

Invite people, repair the altars, pray, and when God moves, He will be unable to be opposed and people will respond as all Israel did: ***"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."*** 18:39

Finally, we must be willing to enter the battle against that which is destroying our society: ***"And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there."*** 39-40

Many have cringed at the violence of this, yet this is what the Law commanded for false prophets
It is radical surgery for the radical problem of inward spiritual corruption (I.e-cancerous tumor)

The Lord has not placed the same sword into our hands, ours is the mighty Word of God: ***"For***

PP ***though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete."*** 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Know the Word of God, wield it well, hold it up against darkness, it is our mighty weapon
Invite people to you, rebuild their altars on the gospel, pray with confidence, and fight for God's
glory!

And watch what our sovereign, unopposable God does!

You must have known that I would tell you the rest of Watchman Nee's story

It was the youngest member of that missionary team who made that audacious promise that it
would rain on January 11th

He went back to his team and told them what he had said, and they did not doubt that Ta-wang
was capable of providing fair weather, either through demonic influence or through the
ability of the local fishermen to predict the weather

So they began to pray, not desperately, but confidently, resting in the finished work of Jesus
Christ and in His power over all things

Let me quote the rest of the story from Nee: "I was awakened [on January 11th) by the direct rays
of the sun through the single window of our attic. 'This isn't rain!' I said. It was already past 7
am. I got up, knelt down and prayed. 'Lord,' I said, 'please send the rain!'"...I walked
downstairs before God in silence. We sat down to breakfast—eight of us together, including our
host—all very quiet. There was no cloud in the sky, but we knew God was committed. As we
bowed to say grace before the food I said, "I think the time is up. Rain must come now. We can
bring it to the Lord's remembrance." Even before they said Amen to their prayer to God, they
could hear a few drops of rain hit the tiles outside, and as they ate their rice, the drops became a
steady shower. As they began to have seconds, they asked God for a heavier downpour, and the
rain came down in buckets. By the time they finished breakfast, the streets were flooded and the
bottom three steps of the house were covered with water. One of the younger villagers shouted,
"There is God; there is no more Ta-wang! He is kept in by the rain." But Ta-wang was a
portable idol, so the older men carried out on a litter to begin the festival procession. As soon as
they brought their god outside, the downpour increased. The men bearing the litter for the idol
slipped and fell, and Ta-wang fell breaking its jaw and left arm. But he could still be repaired, so
they patched him together and brought him out again, until the rain came down so hard that they
could not see and the mud grew so thick that they could walk the processional.

When the people of Israel saw the fire come down from God, *"they fell on their faces and said,
'The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.'"* **39**

Pray