

“CONFRONTATION ON MT. CARMEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: I Kings 18:30-40

Introduction:

The Baalites had their turn, they shot their best shot, they did everything possible to get their god to respond. They called on his name for six hours, they cried out even louder, they limped around their altar, they cut themselves until their own blood flowed. They raved on and on, but to no avail. No voice, no answer, no one paid attention. Nothing. Deafening silence.

So now as agreed by both parties, it is Elijah's turn.

Openness, come near to me.

I King 18:30 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 says, watch me closely that I don't do anything funny or tricky. Watch me closely so you hear and see and believe.

Christianity is out in the open. This is one of the unique characteristics of Christianity. There are no secret signs, secret words, secret practices. Truth does not fear investigation. God is in the light, it is Satan who hides in the dark. Jesus was very public in His ministry, the Pharisees and Sadducees are the ones who acted in private for fear of the people.

Let us be transparent and open, free of manipulation, political maneuvering, etc.

Elijah repaired (healed) the altar of the Lord.

Elijah is not introducing a new religion, a new cult. He is reviving the faith and worship of the God of their fathers. What does a broken altar signify? This is not new, this is neglected. He is pointing them back to their first love.

This is the need in every generation for renewal, revival, reformation. This is our constant need, to rekindle old fires that have been neglected or gone out.

What is neglected in our hearts or lives that needs to be repaired or restored?

We must begin at the altar of the Lord, with worship.

Bold faith, drenched altar.

I Kings 18:31-35 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. 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.

Elijah rebuilds the altar in the name of the God of all Israel, not just the ten tribes of this northern kingdom but of the twelve tribes. God is the covenant keeping God who remembers all His people, even though He has been rejected by these 10 tribes who have followed Baal.

Then Elijah follows this with twelve jugs of water to totally drench the sacrifice, the wood, the altar and all the ground around it. Why in a drought when water is a precious commodity did Elijah do this?

Elijah removes every hint of human origin, power, ability, so there is no possibility of trickery, there is no fire hidden underneath. Have you ever tried to light a fire with soaking wet wood? Elijah goes out of his way to handicap and hinder God, to put up every obstacle. This is the confidence of Elijah's faith, the absolute conviction that God is able. He wants them to be absolutely convinced.

Elijah wants them to feel and see the utter impotency of man and the absolute power of God. Jesus did that when He let Lazarus get good and smelly from four days in the tomb.

We are far too impressed with human ability, and too often fooled by it.

Does God do this with us?

Does God create impossible situations, circumstances where everything is stacked against hope or faith or joy or peace? Where it appears no possible good can come out of it?

When we face difficulties and impossible situations, how do we respond: unbelief, doubt, fear?

God is the God of the impossible. God likes to deal with impossible odds.

God delights to do above and beyond what we think or imagine.

God wants to remove every human element so He gets the glory.

The more impossible the situation the more God is glorified. God laughs at impossibilities.

Prayer, O Lord, answer me.

I Kings 18:36-37 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.”

At the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah prayers. We can't help but notice the contrast between the Baalites six hours of prayer and Elijah's one minute prayer. Remember Jesus' warning about the Gentiles who heap up words and vain repetitions.

Elijah's prayer is simple, clear, direct. He addresses the covenant God of Israel with two supreme desires, that God who has been neglected and forgotten would be glorified as the supreme God of Israel. And that salvation would come to the people, that they would receive a benefit, that they would be edified, that they would experience God's grace and mercy again.

This is what I ask God to do every Sunday. *First*, I pray that He will glorify Himself, make Himself known, that His name may be hallowed. I pray what we will see His glory, that He will increase and we will decrease.

Second, I pray that His people will be edified, helped, given divine assistance, spiritual food.

Our purpose is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever. When God is glorified, we benefit. He gets the glory, we get the joy.

Our prayer flows out of our theology, if our theology is bad our prayer will be bad.

Do we pray for God's glory and for changed hearts for ourselves and others?
Do we pray for God's glory and honor more than what we want.

Fire fell from heaven

I Kings 18:38-39 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. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.”

There has never been a fire like this that burned rocks, stones, and trenches of water, the wood, the sacrifice and the very dust of the ground. It's clearly supernatural, it comes downward, not upward like most fire; it consumes everything.

Most men and boys I know enjoy a good fire and love playing with fire. My boys sure do, there is a little pyro in all of them. But this is not a really great bonfire to be enjoyed. Does anyone tremble at this scene?

This is the fearful judgment of God that consumes everything. This is the awesome weightiness of the holy majesty of God. This is the Godness of God.

Fire from heaven is a terrifying grace, a severe mercy, a holy fire.

God is a consuming fire. God is holy. God is not safe, but God is good. Fire is not safe, but it is good. It must be handled with care, approached carefully, you can't touch it.

Remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus who later described their encounter with Jesus as a strange burning within their hearts.

The famous Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French philosopher and scholar, described his own experience of fire on a scrap of paper found in the lining of his coat a few days after he died.

The year of grace 1654, Monday, 23 November, feast of St. Clement. From about half past ten at night until about half past midnight, FIRE.

GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars. Certitude. Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace. GOD of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. Jesus Christ. Let me never be separated from him.

One word describes his conversion, Fire! Joy inexpressible, God! (I Peter 1:8).

God is His own proof. Only God can prove His own existence. Elijah can't. God must.

We can talk all we want, we can point to a thousand evidences, and make a hundred arguments, but only God can prove His existence and He still does it by fire, by the fire of the Holy Spirit falling on a human heart, burning away the ignorance, resistance and rebellion.

The heart of a sinner is cold, hard stone. The heart of an unbeliever is as drenched as Elijah's altar. The heart of a rebellious idolater is like solid granite. The work of regeneration and transformation is only possible by fire falling from heaven, by the fire of the Holy Spirit melting years of sin and turning a heart to Jesus and salvation. Only God can turn a heart back to God.

We all have Elijah opportunities every day. We help people see the idols, the lies, the sins of our culture and world. We can point out the difference between the false gods and the true God. We can speak the truth. And then we pray for the fire of the Holy Spirit to change sinners minds and hearts. We can speak, we can give a ready answer and pray, but only God can convert, transform, regenerate, bring resurrection where there is death.

Do you see the grace of God in this event, despite all their sinful rebellion and disobedience, God accepted this offering. There is still hope, if they will return to the means of grace and reconciliation that God has already provided for Israel. This is ***your place of atonement***, this is the place where I receive you and accept you.

Notice the judgment of God falls on the sacrifice, not on the people, just as God's judgment falls on Jesus and not on us. God's judgment falls on the substitute for Israel, and not on Israel.

By way of ***the old rugged altar*** and by way of ***the old rugged cross***.

The fire of God's righteous wrath must fall for there to be justice. It must fall either on the sinner or on the atoning sacrifice. There is no forgiveness without blood. When fire falls on the sacrifice it is a sign God accepts the sacrifice. God accepted Jesus' sacrifice.

The people become the judge and jury, they give the verdict, "The Lord, He is God!" Not Baal.

John 20:28-29 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Victory, the prophets of Baal killed.

I Kings 18:40 Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

There are some people who think this ending ruins an otherwise perfectly marvelous and miraculous day. Why does it have to be spoiled with a bunch of senseless killing?

People who use this text against Christians and against God just don't get it. The problem is not with the OT or with God or Elijah or violence. The problem is our complete lack of horror at sin and our complete lack of understanding of a holy God. The problem in this text is not with God, it is with us. If we understood a holy God, we would understand texts like this.

This is about the character and nature of God, about justice from a just and holy God. This is capital punishment according to the law of God.

The prophets of Baal had seduced Israel into abandoning their God and following a lie. Israel was a theocracy, church and state were one thing. Under the Law they were criminals that must be brought to justice (see Deuteronomy 13:1-11).

The people must be cleansed of the evil in their midst, they must purge the land of pagan idolatry, child sacrifice, and wicked sexual immorality.

This event reminds us of another similar event at another mountain. When the people of Israel made the golden calf and committed idolatry and sinned a very great sin against God Moses calls the faithful to destroy the idolaters.

Where do we find this kind of seriousness with sin in the NT? Jesus on the cross, God's righteous wrath and justice, and God's grace and mercy.

When God proves Himself to us, when God reveals His holiness, there must be a response. There must be worship and there must be a putting to death of all that is unholy. We must take up the weapons of spiritual warfare, and take the sword of the Word to the sin in our hearts. We must be as ruthless as they were to the idolaters. Crucify the flesh, crucify the old nature, the old man.

We must say over and over, the Lord, He is God, the Lord He is God. And we must be born again, we must turn our hearts to God through faith in Jesus Christ who endured the fire for us.

Conclusion and application.

Let's be clear. Everyone is free to choose to believe whatever they want to believe. Everyone can pick whatever religion they like or make up their own. We live in a post-modern, post-Christian, relativistic, pluralist culture with lots of choices.

But here is the reality. Believing whatever you want to believe, doesn't make it true. Believing the world is flat, doesn't make it so. Believing the moon is made of green cheese doesn't make it so. Believing Buddha or Shiva or Allah is a god doesn't make them real.

Shallow outward signs are no substitute for the depth of doctrine, theology, truth. Let this be the test of all true religions.

Does the God you worship offer a slain sacrifice as a substitute for your sin?
Does He demand faith in the atoning death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
Does the God you worship answer prayer, is He a prayer hearing and prayer answering God?
Does the God you worship come down from heaven in fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit?

We see here a blazing example of the difference between sincerity and true faith. If sincerity could save, these people surely would have been saved. Earnestness and enthusiasm are not proof and have no power in and of themselves. They had faith but no object, they believed a lie.

Wouldn't it be nice if every hundred years or so God would make a Mt. Carmel event happen so everyone would see clearly what is true and real.

Matthew 12:38-42 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." 39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Jesus is the sign. His death, burial and resurrection is the sign.

If God is merciful at some point He will bring about a confrontation in your life before it is too late, a confrontation that will leave you saying, "The Lord, He is God."

A confrontation lit by the fire of the Holy Spirit that leaves you saying, "Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!"