



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Elijah the Prophet

“Elijah on Mt. Carmel,” 1 Kings 18:17-46 – TRANSCRIPT

Chapter 18 and begin reading with the 17<sup>th</sup> verse. 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 17. Now you'll remember in our study of the Prophet Elijah, who ministered in the time of King Ahab of Israel, that he announced to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.” And then God led Elijah off to hide at the brook Cherith, and there he was fed by the ravens. From there God directed the Prophet Elijah to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, and he dwelt there and a widow woman sustained him at that place. While there, the widow's son died, and Elijah was enabled by the power of God to resuscitate, restore to life that child.

Now in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of 1 Kings, Elijah receives word from the Lord that he should go and show himself to Ahab, and that rain is soon to come upon the earth. Now the circumstances of this meeting are described in the first part of the chapter. The king is very much concerned about food for his animals, so he and Obadiah the prophet go out seeking some green grass, in order that the animals might have sustenance. And while out, Obadiah the prophet meet Elijah, returning from Sidon to the land of Israel.

And he falls down before Elijah and says, “Art thou that, my lord, Elijah?” And Elijah says, yes, he is Elijah, and he directs Obadiah to go to King Ahab and tell him, Elijah is here. Now Obadiah was somewhat upset by that, because he realized that the bloodhounds of Ahab had been searching for the Prophet Elijah for a considerable amount of time, years in fact, since he made that announcement. And he was very much afraid, though he was a prophet of God, that if he went to Ahab and announced that Elijah was here, that when they came to find Elijah he might be gone, and then Ahab might turn on Obadiah, and it would be too bad for Obadiah.

But Elijah persuades him, and he does go to Ahab, and he comes back, and finally, Ahab now confronts Elijah again. And that’s where we pick up the story in the 17<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 18,

“And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him,  
‘Art thou he that troubleth Israel?’ And he answered, ‘I have not troubled  
Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the  
commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.’

Now, Baalim is simply the plural for the word Baal. In other words, you have followed gods, Baal gods.

“Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and  
the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of (Asherah or)  
the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.”

You’ll remember that Jezebel is the wife of Ahab. And she was no doll. [Laughter]

“So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, ‘How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.’ And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, ‘I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God.’ And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your god (that should be singular), but put no fire under.’ And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, ‘Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.’ And they cried aloud”—

And they took him seriously for some reason. After all, at this point, any advice was good advice. [Laughter]

“And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice,”

Now this is one of the first instances of speaking in tongues, perhaps.

“that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: 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 measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, ‘Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, on the wood.’ And he said, ‘Do it the second time.’ And they did it the second time. And he said, ‘Do it the third time.’ And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.”

There’s not going to be any possibility of an excuse, an explanation.

And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, ‘LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.’”

Now, you’ll remember that Elijah was raised up at a critical point in Israel’s history, that they might be turned from their backsliding away from the God, Jehovah. And that is the meaning of that last partition, for Elijah is the one is used of God to turn the people back to Jehovah. Even though it were only a temporary turning, it nevertheless was a turning. Verse 38,

“Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, ‘The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.’ And Elijah said unto them, ‘Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

Now that seems an awfully heartless thing to do. And it’s rather surprising that when the Lord Jesus appears in the New Testament, there are some who’ve said, he’s Jeremiah, he’s one of the prophets, he’s Elijah. There is a strain of righteousness and justice in our Lord’s nature, that is reflected in the prophet’s action here. We’ll say more about it in the message.

“And Elijah said unto Ahab, ‘Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.’ (I feel rain in the air) So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’ And he went up, and looked, and said, ‘Nothing.’

Now you’ll notice that’s all he said. He apparently had to run up the hill quite a bit, and ran back down, and really that’s all he could say. He was breathless. “Nothing.”

“And he said, ‘Go again seven times.’”

Now, he did not say to this servant, “I want you to do this seven times,” but he sent him seven times. He said, go again. He came back. What do you see? Nothing. Go again. He came back. What do you see? Nothing. Go again. So seven times, this servant ran up the hill to take a look. I’m sure he was quite tired at the conclusion of this little session with the prophet.

“And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, ‘Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand.’ And he said, ‘Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down that the rain stop thee not.’”

In other words, there’s coming such a rain that Ahab’s chariot may be bogged down in the mud and mire if he doesn’t hurry.

“And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.”

Now, that was the home of Jezebel, and there was the palace. And you can see him striking off toward the east in his chariot. And notice the 46<sup>th</sup> verse which concludes the chapter,

“And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.”

May God bless this reading from his word.

We’re very happy to have in our audience this morning, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Constable. They are the parents of Tom and Mary Constable, who are not only known to us, but are greatly and highly regarded by us, who have been with us for a long time in Believer’s Chapel.

Mr. Constable is Vice-President of Moody Bible Institute. And, I’ve asked him, if he will, come forward and lead us in prayer. And on behalf of the elders of Believer’s Chapel, Mr. and Mrs. Constable, we hope you are enjoying your time in Dallas – they are, seeing their children. And we hope, also, that the holiday season is a wonderful time for you and your family. Will you come and lead us in prayer?

[Prayer by Mr. Constable indiscernible]

[Message by Dr. Johnson] This is the fourth in our series of studies in the life of Elijah. And today, we are looking at the great event in which Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. And that is our subject, “Elijah on Mr. Carmel.”

Alexander White is one of the men who has commented upon the life of Elijah, and in the course of his comments upon the prophet, he has called him a Mt. Sinai of a man, with a heart like a thunderstorm. I think that we can go further and say, as we suggested in the Scripture reading, that Elijah was a man like Jesus Christ. And consequently his eyes, just as his great ante-type’s eyes, were like a flame of fire. And out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. And this is the way in which we look at the prophet today, for we see him confronting the prophets of Baal and exercising as a mediator, the judgment of God.

Elijah’s day was a day of confusion. It was a day compromise. And it was a day of corruption. And the day in which we are living is a similar type of day. For our day is a day of confusion. In Elijah’s days, the problem was, is Jehovah God, or are there many gods? There were gods many and lords many, and even in the Apostle Paul’s day, he spoke along this line.

Today, as we look about the professing Christian world, we certainly see, if we see anything at all, confusion. It’s startling the things that are believed by ministers in our standard, old line, denominational churches. Now, I’m not attacking the denominational churches, for in them are many godly men. And in the independent churches, there is often apostasy just as wide and just as deep as in the denominational churches. But it’s startling to see the things that some of our men are believing.

For example, a recent poll, the contents of which appeared in a magazine as late as December of 1967 – I’m sorry, it was October of 1967 – has said that after taking a poll of over 7,000 ministers, these are some of the things that are believed. The question, “I accept Jesus’ physical resurrection as an objective historical fact in the same sense that Lincoln’s physical death was an historical fact”—that was a question. In the Methodist church, of the ministers who were polled, 49% believed in the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Protestant Episcopal church, 70% believed in the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In the United Presbyterian Church, 65% believed. In the American Baptist Convention, 67% believed. In the American Lutheran Church, 87% believed, and in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and hooray for them, 93% believed in the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Now I want you to notice that this is not a poll of ordinary church members. This is a poll of ministers in the denomination. And we have, for example, in the Methodist Church, less than 50% believe in the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus. “I believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, and that it was a biological miracle”—only 40% of the Methodist ministers believed that. 56% of the Protestant Episcopal ministers believed it. 51% of the United Presbyterian Church ministers believed it. 56% of the American Baptist Convention believed in the virgin birth. 81% of the American Lutheran Church, and hooray for the Missouri Synod again, 95% of them believed in the virgin birth. But even there, 5% of the ministers did not believe in the virgin birth.



Well, let’s go on to something else. “I believe in the literal or nearly literal interpretation of the Bible.” Now, this is the kind of question that is catchy, and you would want to ask the man a lot of questions of what he means by literal or nearly literal interpretation of the Bible. 18% of the Methodists believe that we should understand the Bible literally. 11% of the Episcopalians believe that we should. 19% of the United Presbyterian Church believe that we should take the Bible literally. 43% of the Baptists did, American Baptists. Not Southern Baptists; they didn’t reply to the poll, [laughter] the Southern Baptists. 43% of the American Lutherans believed. And again, hooray for the Missouri Synod, 78% of the ministers believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Well, I don’t want to go on and give the other items of this poll, but I think you can see that there is a great deal of confusion in our Christian church, in America. There is also compromise. We have, in the Christian church today, a great deal of that. Is Baal god or is Jehovah God? And so we compromise our doctrines.

Recently, there appeared in *Christianity Today*, an article on New Theology in New Zealand. The Presbyterian Church is very strong in New Zealand. It is second in strength in that country. And just recently there has taken place a heresy trial. The man who is the principal of the one theological college that they have has been tried on grounds of heresy. He did not believe in some of the fundamental doctrines of the word of God. And the group that tried him, at the instigation of a layman—who said publicly that the minister is not on trial, but our whole denomination is on trial by Jesus Christ, our Lord and master—that group acquitted the man who denied fundamental facts of the faith, and acquitted him unanimously. Now as a result of that, it looks as if it is going to be two Presbyterian churches in New Zealand.

But I think you can see this is a day of compromise, and it is a day in which the fundamentals of the Christian faith are not believed by a great number of people who should be standard bearers of the faith. It is, of course, a day of corruption, too; a day of

corruption among the priests, and among the ministers, and also among the people. So, Elijah’s day is a day similar to our day.

Well, to go to Elijah’s story, the bloodhounds have been out after the prophet for three-and-a-half years. And they have not been able to find him. They never thought, apparently, of going to Sidon to look for the Prophet Elijah, and so the result has been that Ahab has been a frustrated king for three years. He has been told by the prophet that there is going to be no rain, and the prophet’s words have come to pass. There has been no rain. There has been a great drought in the land of Israel, and everything, no doubt, has been blamed upon Elijah, for he is the man who brought the word from God.

Well through the circumstances, which I described for you in our Scripture reading, now Elijah is face to face with Ahab again. And we have the prophet of Jehovah versus the champion of Baal. We have the man who is the upholder of the truth standing before the presence of the one who is the abetter of lies. We have the man who is the herald of the light in the presence of one who is the head of darkness.

Generally speaking, when a black thundercloud meets another black thundercloud, you can expect a storm to take place. And that’s what happens when Ahab meets Elijah again. And so he meets him, and he asks him a question which has run down through the ages. He sees Elijah and he looks at the prophet and he says, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”

Now, I want you to remember that the reason Ahab is away from his palace and Jezebel, is not because he is concerned for his people. He is really concerned for his animals. He wants to be sure that his animals have sufficient provender, to keep alive in the midst of the drought. He’s not concerned about the spiritual condition of the people. He has not repented in any way for the iniquity of the land. And so lured out by the possibility of some provender for his animals – not by repentance – he is brought by God face to face with prophet of God. And we could stop and spend the rest of the morning in answering the question and setting forth the horror of unheeded admonition. For three

years, God has been trying to speak to this great king, King Ahab of Israel, and he has not been able to dent his conscience at all: a man who cares more for animals than he does for the people of God, the people who are committed to his care.

And now he is in the presence of Elijah, and you can almost sense that he is cowed by this commanding prophet, for he asks him, art thou he that troubleth Israel? It’s almost as if his rage has expended itself in a feeble challenge of God’s prophet. And so, Elijah answers, and he says, “I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house in that thou hast forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou has followed Baalim.”

And then the prophet commands the king, and it is so often this way. When the Lord Jesus appeared before Pilate, it was Pilate, we would think, who would command our Lord Jesus. But when the trial is over, it is Pilate who has been judged by our Lord, rather than our Lord judged by Pilate. And so, now, the prophet speaks up. And he says to Ahab, the king, “Now I want you to send and gather to me all Israel unto Mt. Carmel, and gather the prophets of Baal, and gather the prophets of the groves, 850 men, which east at Jezebel’s table.”

And Ahab sends out word quickly, and the people are gathered. Now let me say just a word about Carmel. Carmel is really not a mountain, but a mountain—or at least a ridge—it’s a mountain ridge which extends out to the Mediterranean Sea. I’m not sure how long it is; I think it’s about 12 miles long. The highest point is about 750 feet. But as you stand on the ridge of Mt. Carmel, you can look to the east and see Jezreel. And you can see – in that day, no doubt, you could see – the palace of Ahab. And Jezebel, too, no doubt, could see that way in the west. And perhaps, it’s entirely possible, that she saw the fire on Mt. Carmel that day.

It was very close to the Mediterranean Sea, and so it was very easy to look out to the west and see the Mediterranean Sea. It was a perfect place for what is to transpire, because there is a ridge, and there is a kind of cliff on Mt. Carmel, to the north of that ridge, from which there is a steep drop-off to the Plains of Esdralen, and there in that

great valley the children of Israel could gather, and could look up, and you would see almost on a natural pulpit, the affairs that went on that day when Elijah stood before the prophets and the Baal and the king and the people. So this was a very wise thing for Elijah to do so far as the people are concerned.

Well, they all gather, and Elijah issues his challenge. Now I want you to remember that there are three classes of people here. There are the Phoenician prophets, and they come in their gorgeous, purple and golden garments. Then there is Elijah. There is no evidence that Obadiah, the prophet, was ever there. In fact, we do not read of anyone being sympathetic with Elijah. It’s almost as if this man stands out alone. Now he thought that he was the only one who was faithful to God. He said, “I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord.” But we know that Obadiah was a prophet. And as a matter of fact, in another place, in the next chapter, God says that he has reserved for himself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal. But so far as we know, the prophet himself stood there alone, like some lone rock towering above the waves, breathing prayer to God, no doubt, “Arise, my God, and let Thine enemies be scattered.”

And then the third group of people who were there were the feather-headed, capricious, changeful people. They were the ones who were limping along with two opinions. Now those three classes are very significant, because we have the same three classes of people with us today. There are the unbelievers. There are the Baalites. There are those who go around saying all creeds are alike. It doesn’t really matter what we believe, it’s how we believe it that counts. If we’re earnest and sincere, everything is alright.

There are the Baalites. There are those who say, well, religion, after all – that’s only a pretense, and I do think that religion is only a pretense with most people. But many think that Christianity is only a pretense. It may be very useful; useful in business, useful in the affairs of state. But it is only a pretense. It doesn’t really matter.

And there are the Elijahs. And they are precious few today, as they were in Elijah’s day. And the great mass of people who are undecided, they are those who waver from one opinion to another. They say, yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, and I want to give him the complete control of my life, but not yet. I believe in Jesus Christ, and I think he’s a wonderful savior, and I want to commit everything to him, but not today. Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps later on. I’m too occupied right now in my affairs; my business, my pleasure, my life, my family. Not yet, not yet. The undecided people.

They are people who have enough truth to make them safe, but not enough to make them happy. And our Christian churches are full of that type of person. They believe; they have put their faith in Jesus Christ. But they are unhappy Christians because they are not really committed to him. Now, I’m not talking about people who are sinless. We never reach the stage where we are sinless. But there is a basic commitment to God that we have set before us in the word of God. And until we have not only believed in Jesus Christ, but also committed ourselves to him and our affairs to him, we cannot really be happy Christians.

And it seems to me this is the great fault of Evangelicalism today. We have lots of places, in Dallas, and throughout the United States where the word of God is preached. It is very difficult to go to a place throughout the United States where you cannot have the word of God proclaimed. But it is very, very difficult to find a group of Christians who are committed to the Lord. Now, I do not ever expect to find such a group on the earth in which we have 100% commitment. As a matter of fact, the New Testament and the Old Testament seem to imply that after all, in the final analysis, it is always the remnant that is committed to God. But it is, I think, a terrible failure with the Evangelical church today, and the reason why we have so much deadness among us is because we have people who have believed in Jesus Christ but they have not really committed themselves to him. And consequently, they are like the mass of Israel there that day: they are waverers.

A few years ago at the seminary, we had a man give some lectures, and he asked the question, “Where were the 7,000 who hadn’t bowed the knee to Baal?” He suggested that perhaps if Elijah had been a man such as we ministers are today, as he was speaking, if Elijah had been a man like one of us, he would have announced a summons to a dialogue. And he would have also said that it would be wise for us to have a joint meeting. And we should have some Baalist lead a prayer, and have Jezebel sing a solo. [Laughter] And perhaps, as we gathered in this way, in “dialogue,” we might have some meeting of minds which would be ultimately good for all the good religious people throughout the country.

Now Elijah is not that kind of man. I think you can see that. He stands before the people and he says, “How long hold ye between to opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him, but if Baal, then, follow him. And the people are so struck by these words of the Prophet Elijah, that they cannot say a thing. They are awestruck, and there is a deathly silence that follows Elijah’s challenge.

And so he announces the final challenge. He says, let’s have two bullocks. The Baalites take a bullock, and I will take a bullock, and we will sacrifice the bullock. We will place the Bullock on the altar, and the God who answers by fire—that means, the god whose fire comes from heaven and consumes the sacrifice upon the altar, let him be God. And the people say it is well spoken. And so the challenge is issued, and it is accepted.

Now remember this. Baal was the fertility god. Baal was the god who was supposedly responsible for the fertile crops of the country. Now you can see the thing God has done through the prophet Elijah is to challenge this Baal god, and the doctrine concerning him. He has, in effect, said that Baal is not responsible for the sun, he’s not responsible for the rain, he’s not responsible for your crops; I am. Now there’s some evidence that Baal was regarded by some as a solar god, a sun god. And if that’s true, then the challenge is even more to the point, because we’re going to see that the true

God is the God who answers by fire, who, in a sense, gives forth from himself as the sun and consumes the sacrifice.

Now the contest follows in verse 25 through 35, and I don’t think there is any scene in all of history that is more thrilling. Israel has nationally alienated itself from God, and so Elijah has called them to a public reconciliation with God. And he allows the prophets of Baal to have the precedence. There are 850 of them, and so he asks them to choose a bullock for themselves, and to dress it first. His reasoning is this: you are many, so you go first. And I think, by the way, we have some wisdom in this. There’s going to be no excuse whatsoever. The truth can always afford to be generous with error, in the sense that let error show itself for what it is. Let error reveal itself. And so Elijah says, you go first.

And so the prophets of Baal take their animal. They prepare their sacrifice upon their altar. And then the writer of Kings says that from morning until evening they call upon the name of Baal, O Baal hear us. I think of the things in the Old Testament that I would have liked to have seen, this scene is one of the scenes. And I can see these Baalite prophets dressed in their Tyrian purple and gold garments. I can see them engaging in the orgies and the dances involved in their worship.

I can also think—I can also hear the wild chorus of prayer, if we may call this thing prayer, that’s sounded out under a brassy heaven, for God did not answer their prayer. And from morning until noon, O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us! *Ha’ Ba’al anab nu! Ha’ Ba’al anab nu!* The Hebrew text says. O Baal, hear us!

And I can see them dancing, and they danced in a way in which they tried to make a circle about, and they had long, flowing hair, many of them, which they like to drag in the mud. And in the course of it, doing their dances—the equivalent of the frug in their day, you understand [laughter]—they were doing all of their dances and dragging their hair in the mud, and carrying on from morning until noon.

Well now, Elijah begins to get...what shall I say? He’s not frustrated, but he’s disturbed over this. He is impatient is the word I’m really looking for. He’s impatient over this, and so finally, about noontime, Elijah engages in a little sarcasm. Now it’s very strange that Elijah does this. After all, he’s a prophet of God, and you don’t always expect the prophets of God to act like this. But in the final analysis, when you’re killing snakes, you’re not really careful about the means you use to the end [laughter]. And so Elijah is now going to engage in a little bit of irony, and so he says, “What you need to do is to cry aloud.” And you can see the men, as they look at Elijah, they too are beginning to get disturbed; after all nothing has happened. It’s been four hours at least. They’ve been calling out these empty words. And so, as I said in the Scripture reading, any advice is good advice, and so they take the advice, and they begin to cry aloud.

And Elijah says, after all, he’s a god, remember; cry aloud. He’ll hear you, perhaps. It’s possible he’s talking to someone else at the present time. Or perhaps he’s pursuing—now, good taste prevents me from telling what this is. But privately, it shows that the prophet was an ordinary man when he says that he is pursuing. Or, he said, he’s in a journey; perhaps he’s gone off to Las Vegas for the weekend, and he cannot hear you. Or, perhaps he’s sleeping off a good drunk, and he cannot hear you. And he must be awakened. And so, you see, the prophet is very ironic. He’s very sarcastic. This is biting irony which they have to be exposed to, so he mocks them.

And, we read, they take the advice. They cry out aloud, they cut themselves with knives and lancets until the blood gushed out upon them. Now it was the custom of the prophets at this time to do this. Why they did it, we’re not absolutely sure. It was thought by some that it was a way the prophets would show that they were earnest and sincere in their beliefs. Some have thought that they cut themselves because they wanted the gods in the heavens to feel sorry for them. Some, that they wanted to show their dedication. But at any rate, it’s not a very good way to draw fire, though it may be a



good way to draw blood [laughter]. So, they cut themselves after the prophets, and still nothing happens. There is no voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard them.

So finally, Elijah’s patience reaches its end, and, after all, it’s getting near the end of the day. And he has some things to do. And so he himself says finally, to them, “Well now come near to me.” And all the people come near unto him. And the first thing that Elijah did, is not to call down fire from heaven, but the first thing that he does is to build an altar to the Lord. Now it is important that this is the first thing that he does, because, you see, he wants to get over truth that blessing only comes by proper attention to sacrifice. And so the prophet impressively, majestically, indicates this.

And I think that at this point, he must have been the subject of some jibes from them. Perhaps they said, among themselves, “Look at that man. He calls himself a prophet. And what is he doing? He’s constructing himself an altar. And furthermore, he’s not here in his clerical garments.” For Elijah, you know, he didn’t wear anything like those Tyrian priests. All he wore was some camel’s hair and a mantle about his shoulders. And he must have looked the sight in comparison with those gorgeously arrayed, lavishly robed Tyrian priests.

I used to have a friend back in Birmingham when I was in business. She was a secretary in our office. She was a member of a denomination which has a very lavish ritual on Sunday. And even in those days I was not inclined that way. But she liked to rub it in a little bit on Monday morning. She knew I had been converted; she knew the difference. And so, she used to rub it in a little bit. And she would say, “Did you go to church yesterday?” And I would say, yes, I went to church yesterday. She would say, “I went to church, too. In our church, when you go to church, you really feel like you’ve been in church.” And I knew what she was talking about.

And so on that day, as those Tyrian priests stood, you could sense that you were in the presence of religious men when you looked at them. But when you looked at that Prophet Elijah, what did you see? Strange character. But they were the ones who were

frenzied. They were the ones who were agitated, and it was the prophet of God who is the man who is majestic and is impressive and in complete control.

Professor Sampey, at Southern Baptist Seminary, was an outstanding Christian man. Many years ago, he and some evangelicals attended a general meeting in which there were groups of religious leaders from all denominations. They went, of course, and they were dressed in the attire of Baptist ministers, which of course was an ordinary suit. But in this group, there were a number of people, some from the Greek Orthodox Church, some from the Roman Catholic Church and various churches.

And in the midst of the meeting Professor Sampey was over with a group of his friends, and they were just discussing the time of the day. And some of the men came over in their long, flowing garments and walked by Mr. Sampey, and later on he spoke and said they looked down at us very condescendingly. And one of them spoke out and said, “And pray, to which one of the sects do you belong? Mr. Sampey quickly replied, “To the male sex. [Laughter] To which one do you belong?”

So the Prophet Elijah now is on the mountain dressed in his camel’s hair garment, and the first thing that he does is to rebuild the altar. Now, I say this is very important because, you see, at the base of all blessing from God is sacrifice. And so, he carefully repairs the altar. Apparently, on Mt. Carmel, there was an altar where the children of Israel had prepared sacrifices in times past, and so the prophet goes over and carefully rebuilds it. And furthermore, he took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying Israel shall be thy name. And with the stones he built the altar. He wanted to stress the fact that it was not God’s mind for the division to exist between the ten tribes and the two tribes.

And finally he constructs this altar. He puts the wood upon the altar in order to have the fire. He cuts the bullock in pieces, and he places the pieces of the bullock on the top of the wood. And then he directs some of the attendants to go and, on Mt. Carmel there is, still today, a little pool, not far from that place, to take four barrels of

water and to go fill the barrels of water. And they run off, they scurry off, and they come back with the water. And Elijah says, pour the water out on the wood and on the sacrifice, and so they do. And he says, go do it again, and he waits. I wonder what was going on. All the time, the conversation buzzing among the people. And over on the one side, the jibes of the priest of Tyre and Sidon, and, saying the things they were saying about Elijah. All of this was going on. And the men hurry off and come back, and he says do it again, and so the third time. And by this time, everything is so wet that even the trench about it is filled with water.

Now we come to the conquest of Baal. And we read in the 36<sup>th</sup> verse that it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. Now that is very significant. So there was a breathless, stillness at the hour of prayer; for this was the hour of prayer. But do you know what the time of evening sacrifice was? Well, it was the time when Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” It is the ninth hour of the gospels. Do you remember the Lord Jesus was on the cross from the third hour to the ninth hour, and at about the ninth hour he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me”?

It was no accident that Elijah was led by the grace of God at the very moment when ultimately the lamb of God would die on the cross at Calvary, at the very moment when Israel thought of sacrifice. At that very moment, Elijah approaches the altar and he begins his prayer to God, and it’s a model of a short prayer – it’s the kind of prayer that people ought to pray. And he says, simply, “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel”—Elijah isn’t really anxious about anything other than that God be glorified, only secondarily that Elijah be justified and be vindicated, “And that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the LORD God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again.” Short, simple, stunning prayer. But you see, a prayer of faith; a prayer of faith in the God of sacrifice, the God of salvation

through blood, the God of redemption through Jesus Christ. The prayer of faith in that God can do more than all of the howlings for hours and hours to the false God.

So the moment that Elijah’s brief prayer is finished, we read that the fire fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, Jehovah, he’s the God! Jehovah, he’s the God!

And at this moment Elijah does something that I said is very startling at first. He said take the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves and take them down to the river Kishon and slay them. Now was that necessary? Was it necessary to decimate the priesthood of an entire denomination? [Laughter] Was it necessary to wreck an entire church? We’re supposed to be very nice to other religions, are we not? Now, of course, I’m not advocating in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that you engage in such a campaign with those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. But I do want to stress this, that this was in thorough accord with the will of God.

And as I said before, the reason for this is very simple. You see, the issues that are at stake are not physical. The issues that are at stake are spiritual. The issues that are at stake are not temporal. The issues that are at stake are eternal. And a man’s eternal soul, his eternal life, is of a tremendous significance to God. And consequently, he cannot stand evil! And he cannot stand heresy and error! For it means that a man’s soul may be destroyed. And as I said before, when you’re killing serpents, you don’t really care about the means that you use so long as you kill them. And it’s very important that these prophets be destroyed because they are destroying the souls of Israel.

That’s why God is so angry with error. That’s why God is so angry with heresy. That’s why heresy is so evil and so corruption. And that’s why you and I should never, ever compromise with evil, doctrinally. Never. We cannot afford to do it. Men’s souls are at stake. Men’s eternal destiny is at stake. That’s why the truth is so important. It’s a very unloving attitude that says we will let them exist with us. It’s the attitude of unlove.

It’s the attitude that ultimately is indifference to the souls of men. It is only true love that is angry with heresy and doctrinal error. And so, they are slain. And I think there were some hallelujahs in heaven.

Now Elijah, very quickly, Elijah at this point tells Ahab, who’s a very cowed and submissive person but not much changed, Elijah said to Ahab, go on up and eat and drink. We’ve got time. Eat your picnic lunch. But rain’s coming. And he gets down upon his knees. He knows that rain’s coming, but he doesn’t know when, yet. God has told him its coming, and he gets down and puts his head between his knees, and he begins to pray.

In those days, prophets had attendants. Now I’m not suggesting I need one. I don’t believe in prophets today. There are no prophets today. Prophets gave direct revelation from God. But he had an attendant, and he said, I want you to go off and take a look; do you see any clouds. Elijah prays, Lord, is this the time? The rain’s coming. Thank you, Lord, thank you for what’s happened on Mt. Carmel. The people’s hearts apparently have been stirred. Is this the time? Servant comes back, sir, there is no rain. Go again. So this goes on seven times.

You know James says, the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Now, look at this prayer. It’s righteous, because it comes from a man who is right with God. It’s fervent. He prays and sends that servant off seven times, praying all the time. Fervent—by the way, fervency in prayer is not enough. Baal’s prayers were very fervent, weren’t they: O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us! Very fervent. Fervency is not enough in itself. Elijah’s is persevering; their’s was persevering. Elijah’s was believing; their’s was believing. Elijah’s was humble; their’s was very humble near the end.  
[Laughter].

But Elijah’s prayer, you see, was to Jehovah. His prayer was the prayer of a man in right relationship with the right God. There’s all the difference in the world between a prayer to the right God, and a prayer to the wrong God. The prayer to the wrong God is

never answered. God does not answer the prayer to the god who is not God. He answers the prayer that is directed to him; the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the prayer that he answers. All of the fervency, all of the preserving character. All of the believing prayer, all of the humble prayer that is not directed to the right God is wrong prayer. And so now, this prayer, directed to the right God, avails much.

The conclusion of the chapter is very simple. The servant comes and says, I see a little cloud. It’s just about that big. Elijah said that’s the sign. Ahab, you better get in your chariot and you better run, because you might get bogged down before you can get back the twenty miles to Jezreel, to Jezzy.

And so he gets in his chariot, and the hand of the Lord is upon Elijah. Now, I don’t know how fast he ran those twenty miles. But I know this, that he kept ahead of Ahab in his chariot. It says the hand of the Lord was upon him. It was almost as if it were a supernatural enablement from God, that enabled the prophet to go into Jezreel in advance of the chariot of Ahab. But, you know, it show the respect Elijah had for the king. After all, he was the king. And so, even though the king has been humbled, and even though the prophets have been defeated, it is Elijah that leads him into the city.

Well, the lesson, I think, of this great event is very simple. To believers who are half-hearted: quit your like men, be strong. If you’re like Elijah, though he may not be in the mainstream at the present, soon you will be the entire stream. You may not be in the majority now, but soon you will be the majority. And for those who are like these people, who were professors, but who did not really possess, take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief and departing from the will of God.

The God who spoke by fire in Elijah’s day is a God who speaks by fire, still. Our God is a consuming fire, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, and if we have not put our trust in Jesus Christ, if we have not looked to Calvary when the fire of God raged in the Son of God—the only sacrifice, by the way, that consumed the fire itself. All other sacrifices were consumed by fire, but the sacrifice of Christ so availed before God that it

consumed all of the judgment of God, and Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. And if we do not hear the voice of God concerning our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, then the God who speaks by fire shall speak again at the Second Advent, and those who have not responded shall be lost.

And may God enable you to look off at the cross at Calvary and see Christ as the sacrifice, and may you put your trust in him just simply saying – this is all you have to do – thank you, Lord, for dying for me. I take you as my personal Savior. Jehovah, he’s God. Jehovah, he’s God. And learn to love him, and to pray to him, and receive answers from him. He’s the true God. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the wonderful good news concerning Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that the altar looked forward to him. And we thank Thee for the fires of divine judgment, which were meted out upon him, that we might go free.

We thank Thee for the Prophet Elijah, a great-hearted man whose devotion was to the true God. And enable us, Father to have that devotion. Strengthen us for holding between two opinions.

Now we commit ourselves to Thee, and we pray Thy blessings upon us as we depart. May grace, mercy and peace be and abide with all who know him in sincerity.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.