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SERMON TITLE

Reviving the Altar Fire

SERIES

DATE

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KEY SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 18:21-41

SYNOPSIS

We need fresh fire in our hearts. How can we revive the fire?

HIGHLIGHTS



🔥REVIVING THE ALTAR FIRE

1 Kings 18:21-41 Elijah confronts the people on Mt. Carmel

It started with a severe drought which was meant to get their attention through the door of their need. God often has to get our attention in the natural before He can speak to us about the spiritual. Elijah seemed to understand this and he didn't care if the people suffered in the natural, if it led to spiritual revival. He was so moved by their sinfulness that he earnestly asked God, "do whatever it takes to get this people's attention."

We know how the story ends: Verse 38 ...*"Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!'"* But how did we get there? What is involved with reviving the altar fire?

🔥REMOVE THE MIDDLE GROUND

Verse 21... *"Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.' But the people said nothing."* Elijah was attempting to force them to a point of decision, but they tried to ignore it... They said nothing.

🔥 Many try to stay in the middle ground, but **sooner or later, you have to make a decision.**

When Elijah came to Mount Carmel that day, the middle ground disappeared. When John challenged men to respond to God through repentance and baptism, the middle ground disappeared. When Jesus walked on earth proclaiming truth, the middle ground disappeared.

You cannot be indecisive with men like John and Elijah because there is no middle ground. The very nature of their ministry forces you to decide one way or another. Watchman Nee said, "The same 🔥 fire that melts wax, hardens clay." You can **choose God and receive his refreshing** rain, or you can reject God and end up with a hardened heart, which can lead to you committing sins you would have never dreamed possible. And, God is still in the business of removing the middle ground.

Revelation 3:15-16 says, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."* Ultimately, you have to choose: God or not. In reality, there is no middle ground.

🔥REPAIR THE ALTAR

Verse 30... *"he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins."* As we have seen, altars symbolize prayer, fellowship with God, dying to self, and yielding to the will of God. The fact that the altar was in a state of disrepair says a lot about how far the people had gotten away from God. Our text says



the altar was broken down in ruins, and I think there were two reasons for this: satanic attack and the law of entropy, which are still true today.

Satan hates prayer, and attacks it more than anything else on this earth. Many modern churches have little to no prayer included in their gatherings, let alone extended time at the altar as we have done the past few weeks. Even in Christian families there is very little of what could be called a family altar. The personal altar has also been heavily under attack. Satan fights and discourages prayer. William Cowper said, *"Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon their knees."*

Then, there's the law of entropy. The law of entropy simply suggests that things left to themselves tend to break down. A garden gets covered with weeds, metal rusts, things just wear out. I don't believe most Christians intentionally neglect the place of prayer; it's just that they drift away from it. Weeds must be pulled, metal must be protected, and the prayer altar has to be kept up or it will break down as a natural consequence of neglect.

Elijah was a man of prayer, thus, the first thing he did was repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down. The text also states that he took 12 stones, one for each tribe of Israel. Some think he did that to say that individually they had a call to the place of prayer and communion with God... "Ephraim, God wants *you* to be a people of prayer; Asher, God wants *you* to be a people of prayer; Judah, God wants *you* to be a people of prayer." Church, God wants you to be a person of prayer.

James 5:17 says, *"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years."* *Don't underestimate what God can do with a person who prays.* This story demonstrates the power of God in response to prayer. Yet, Elijah was a regular person, just like you and me. Don't underestimate what God can do in response to *your* prayers. If your altar is broken down, it's time to repair it.

🔥 REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

Verse 31... *"Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, 'Your name shall be Israel.'"*

Verses 36-37... *"At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'"*

It was no accident that Elijah used of the name Israel. People in the bible were often given names that would be prophetic descriptions of their life. Moses means to "draw out," so called by Pharaoh's daughter because he was drawn out of the Nile by her. But prophetically it foreshadowed his ministry of leading the people of Israel out of Egypt. Jacob means "usurper or cheat," which



described his early years, but when he had an encounter with God his name was changed to Israel, which means "God prevails" and also, "prince or soldier of God."

So, Elijah was drawing the attention of the people to the fact that they had a prophetic destiny to fulfill. They weren't meant to live as heathen idol worshippers, but they were a specially chosen people to be "princes and soldiers" of God. Elijah tries to bring this thought home by the use of the phrase, "Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel," rather than the more common "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." By calling them Israel repeatedly, Elijah caused them to remember something about themselves that sin had tried to bury and destroy... they were a people of destiny, a people with a calling.

☞ Likewise, today, **we are called saints**. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "*you are a **chosen** people, a **royal** priesthood, a **holy** nation, a people **belonging to God**...*" Remember who you are!

☞ PREPARE FOR THE FIRE

Verse 33... *"He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood."*

☞ While there is a sovereign element to any revival, **you can help to bring about a move of God**. For example, 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, *"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* In Joshua 3:5, Joshua told the people, *"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."*

☞ **Today's preparation produces tomorrow's power**. If we ask we will receive. There is a biblical way to prepare for revival and when that pattern is followed, people can expect God to move. Elijah prepared the altar, the wood, and the sacrifice in an orderly manner. He had also prepared the people with 3 ½ years of his prayers, a drought, and calling them together before the Lord. Elijah was simply following what he believed to be a proper pattern of behavior. Where there is no altar, there is no fire. Preparation is not optional, it is essential.

☞ SACRIFICE SOMETHING

Verses 32-35... *"With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it... Then he said to them, 'Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.' 34 'Do it again,' he said... 'Do it a third time,' he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench."* This was an extravagant and costly demonstration. Remember, there had been no rain or even dew for 3 ½ years! Elijah wasn't playing around. Not only was this over-the-top, he made it absolutely impossible for anything to happen other than what God alone could do.

In 2 Samuel 24:24, David said, *"I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me **nothing**."* **If you really want the fire of God and the refreshing of his blessing, it's going to cost you**. Elijah had put in the time and effort. He sacrificed a lot to get to this place. Some people think



you can just hype yourself up into revival, and, some so-called moves of God are nothing more than human emotionalism. But Elijah was the genuine article, a real man of God who made the necessary sacrifices. He had no fear that a little water would stop a genuine move of God. **Revival is the fire of God coming down on broken and contrite hearts.**

Verse 38... *"Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench."* What began with a regular man praying, led to a powerful response from God. When the conditions are right, God will always respond with fire from heaven. One of the steps in the process is to sacrifice something.

🔥 CANCEL THE COMPROMISE

Verse 40... *"Then Elijah commanded them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!'"* They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there." When the fire fell there was a purging in the camp. The fire had a direct and dramatic impact on those under its influence - they **forsook their sin!** Chains were broken and strongholds were torn down. What Satan had spent a lifetime building up was pulled down in a few moments through a man who was consecrated to God and **living in holiness.**

Some preachers would want to write a book about, "The day the fire fell." Some would want to make a TV special out of it, while asking for funds for their ministry. But, for Elijah, fire was not a means of self-promotion, fundraising, or a photo-op. For him it was a catalyst for men and women to repent and be broken before God. It was a means for sin to be purged from the camp.

Once all these things took place, God began the restoration of the people as well as the land. Verse 41... *"And Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.'"* Since there had been no rain for 3 ½ years, imagine the devastation! Poverty, famine, sickness... but all that was about to change. When we go 1 inch in God's direction we find He has already come 10 miles in ours. With repentance came the rain of God and the curse was lifted off of the land. Crops were restored, granaries were filled, and economic recovery came again to Israel. Matthew 6:33... When we *"seek first his kingdom and his righteousness... all these things will be given to you as well."*

God is looking for people of prayer who are willing to come to him. As one of his Holy People, he wants *you* to fulfill your destiny, remove the middle ground and repair your broken altar. He wants you to prepare for his fire and sacrifice something, turning from sin. And, when you do, God will respond with fire and rain. God's fire consumes what doesn't belong, and his rain refreshes, restores and revives. **How's your altar? Is the fire burning?**

Closing song: Rest on Us