

1 Kings Chapter 18 v 20 - 40

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[0 : 0 0] thank you very much for your very warm welcome to the church today for the invite to come and minister God's word both morning and evening and again I've had such a wonderful day today so thank you very much for that thank you particularly for John and Alison for your hospitality day you've kept us well fed well entertained so thank you for that and let's turn to God before we turn to God's word again our father we confess our need of you Lord God we come to your word we've read together we've read concerning Elijah's contest on Mount Carmel but now Lord God we pray for that understanding that Lord God that we might come to this passage and say well what you have to say to me father we pray that we might not just be here as your word only but do us also for your praise and glory amen well some of you might not know but for the last two years I've suffered from depression and it's been a hard time it's been hard going and it really resulted in in some of my church officers asking me to step down from the ministry there at Canham Park in Middlesbrough and you know there's been times when I've honestly I've come before God and I said well why Lord why have you allowed this to happen what are you doing and you know I'm still not sure but I think one of the things that has struck me is we were very comfortable at Canham Park comfortable in our own setting coming along to church sitting under the ministry but we weren't seeing a lot of growth we were very active very busy but I think in one sense we've become too comfortable perhaps we needed a shake-up and as we think of the church today and the reputation the church might have what what does the world think of us well to be honest they don't think an awful lot about us you know we can do our own thing as long as we don't trouble them you know we are looked upon as being weak and not having much influence and sometimes we feel even as Christians well that's where we are but I want to ask a question really is that where we should be should we be men and women boys and girls without any influence because really that was the situation here with the people of God during the time of Elijah they were a people known for idolatry when Elijah challenged King Ahab to bring all the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel 450 prophets came along one man of God stood against them the king his wife were were Baal worshipers they were they were idol worshipers they were leading the country they were taking people away from the things of God

and it was a terrible situation to use the analogy we'll you know it's it's okay for a boat to be in the water isn't it we expect that boats float on water the problem occurs when the water gets in the boat and that's very much similar to what the church is like today we should be the people of God in the world and having an influence in the world but sadly the world has got into the vessel the world has encroached into the church and here at Mount Carmel the prophet Elijah is calling the people to be who they were the people of God and

I just want to look at three things this evening on this contest this contest between Elijah standing for God and the prophets of Baal I first want to look at the preparations made then the prayer that Elijah issues and then the proof those are the three main headings this evening and so firstly the preparations for this contest we find those in verses 30 to 35 notice what Elijah did to prepare for this event and several things stand out for us firstly he called the people to come near true faith unlike false worship has absolutely nothing to hide we don't need to worry about Christianity being put under the microscope it can stand the test

Elijah called the people to come near to see for themselves the God who answers by fire let him be God that was going to be the test and Elijah had every confidence that God was going to answer that God was going to glorify his name and when we stand up for Christianity we stand in the name of God and the word of God is mighty and powerful we have a weapon at our disposal the second thing Elijah did was he rebuilt an old altar that had fallen down the altar had come into disrepair so Elijah takes 12 stones to represent the people of Israel the 12 tribes of Israel and he did this work in

the name of the Lord the people of Israel had constructed altars to Baal while the altars of God had fallen into disrepair and so the question for us today is this are we a people who need to rebuild our altars are you spending the time in prayer that you need to not prayer which is superficial but real prayer doing business with God taking time putting away all the distractions giving God your undivided attention do you have regular quiet times or have these altars began to crumble how many of us would be honest to say that our prayer lives are what they should be I don't think anyone is happy completely happy to that extent and so Elijah rebuilt the altar and thirdly he also slaughtered and presented a sin offering the bull was used for the sin offering the people had sinned they'd gone after false gods false idols and Elijah here is offering up an offering for them the people of God Elijah knew where the real problem was it's our sin it's what separates us from God and so Elijah brings his offering and my friend if you are saved here tonight a sin offering has already been presented and you have been cleansed by the blood of the Lord [9 : 50] Jesus Christ however what God wants is that sacrifice of repentance and confession if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and then the final thing the final preparation that Elijah makes is that he watered everything down now as a pastor as a minister I would never encourage anybody to water anything down particularly when it comes to the gospel we must preach and proclaim the full counsel of God but in this instance Elijah said fill me four large water jars and he had them pour the water over the offering the sacrifice the wood the altar and it began to fill the trench he did it a second time and a third time twelve jars full of water were used to soak the altar

Elijah wanted there to be no doubt that this was the work of God we see the same thing when we come to the character of Gideon and Gideon was told to gather an army to fight against the Midianites and he gathered together an army of 32,000 men and the Lord came to him and said well I'm sorry Gideon it's too much tell you what if anyone's afraid if anyone wants to go home tell them they can go and Gideon was left with 10,000 men sorry the Lord said Gideon there's still too many of them tell you what I'll take them down to the water and let them have a drink and those who lap up the water like a dog with their tongues they're the ones I want the ones who put their hands from their weapons bow down and put their heads into the water no good they're not prepared and Gideon was left with 300 men okay we'll go we'll go and Gideon split them into three groups gave them a torch gave them a clay jar that was their weapons and with those weapons they gained a mighty victory and it was seen that it was God who was at work 300 men against the mighty army of the

Midianites God was at work and here on Mount Carmel Elijah stood as a lone prophet but God was at work 12 stones for the 12 tribes 12 barrels of water really to signify it was these 12 tribes who were really the hindrances to the glory of God being revealed to them Elijah's primary goal was that God be glorified and when it comes to your goal and my goal then surely we want to see God at work and God recognised as being at work and we have that wonderful promise those who honour me I will honour so that was the preparation that

Elijah made he called the people together he rebuilt the altar he offered a sin offering he showed that all this was to be of God and when everything was prepared he prayed the prophets of Baal had prayed for at least six hours and nothing had happened I don't know this is one of those occasions when you can almost see the scene in your mind the prophets of Baal 450 of them prancing around crying out slashing themselves with knives and spears so wound up and nothing was happening and you can imagine

Elijah coming up and says perhaps he's asleep shout louder perhaps he's on a journey really as it were winding them up even more but you know we read don't we that even though they cried out no one answered there was not a reply and so Elijah stood forward and he prayed and his prayer was constructed to accomplish three things first and formerly was that God's name be glorified that he as the prophet of God be vindicated and thirdly that the people might be revived Elijah could have prayed for rain they'd been without rain for years the ground was parched he could have prayed for rain but he didn't he knew that as badly as rain was needed the people needed something more they need to be revived they needed to see

[16 : 37] God for who he is and sometimes we think that we know what our needs are we think that we can instruct God how to work how to move in our lives but we need simply to come to him humbly and say Lord your will be done not mine he knows what is best for us and that God's name be glorified that was the thing that Elijah wanted to see above everything else the God who answers

by fire let him be God and again he prayed that the people themselves would come back that they might turn once more from their sin to the living God and so when we pray what's our motivation sadly so often it can be for our own needs what we want we offer

God our shopping list but really when we pray how is this going to benefit the glory of God how is this going to move the kingdom of God forward and how can God use me in this well the third point we come to this evening is the proof what happened as a result of this contest on Mount Carmel well when Elijah finished praying God answered in a spectacular fashion remember the prophets of Baal had been praying six hours or more Elijah as soon as he finished praying we do in verse 38 then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice the wood the stones the soil and also licked up the water in the trench fire from heaven fell and you notice that when the fire fell it fell on the sacrifice not on the people what a wonderful description the fire fell upon the sacrifice it didn't consume the people it didn't consume these sinful men and women who had rejected God for so many years it didn't fall on those who deserved the wrath of God it fell on the sacrifice and that is our hope when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation to know that the wrath of God does not fall upon us but it fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ we have that word propitiation and that word really means the wrath of God being diverted away from us and falling upon Jesus that's something of the proof but we also see the repentance of the people in verse 39 when the people saw this they fell prostrate and cried the Lord he is

God God the Lord he is God we see something of the conviction they fell on their faces before God finally finally these people are bowing down before the Lord in humility humility they should have done it all along but they see a demonstration of his power and they fall and if you know that the Lord is God today then you should find yourself in that same place as these wicked men to humble ourselves before the Lord almighty because he is worthy of all our love our devotion of our praise and not only do we see their conviction but we also see their confession the Lord he is God and by their actions and by their acknowledgement they declare his glory they declare his place and their reverence for him and now as their hearts burned with that new zeal for the things of God and I really want to ask this question how long has it been since you found yourself in the presence of God for no other purpose than just to love him and to worship him and if it's been a while then don't let any more time pass honor him as he deserves to be honored sadly the zeal of the people didn't seem to last as soon as

[23 : 17] Elijah got back to Jezreel and Jezebel became angry Elijah fled for his life and there didn't seem to be any lasting move amongst the people but for this moment they acknowledged God they fell on their faces they cried out the Lord he is God the Lord he is God and so again it's we need to be reminded that it's not just a knee jerk reaction this is going to be something lasting and that is why we need the power of the Holy Spirit to move us you know we can hear a stirring sermon can't we and think oh yeah

I'm going to change I'm going to be better and it may last a little while but if it's all in our own strength if it's all in our own ability then it's going to come to nothing but if we're working alongside the Holy Spirit and allowing him to have his work done in our lives then there will be lasting change and it truly will be for the glory of God and then finally the removal of sin from among them in verse 40 we read that Elijah commanded them seize the prophets of Baal don't let anyone escape and they seized them and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and had them slaughtered there Elijah took the prophets of

Baal and had them killed he did what needed to be done these men were like a cancer working amongst the people of God and they would have destroyed it unless it was dealt with it seemed harsh but it was necessary Elijah was simply doing what the Lord commanded in the law that prophet or dreamer must be put to death because he's preached rebelling against the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery he's tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow you must purge the evil from among you you know there's no greater crime than to lead people away from

Christ and you know when we think upon sin in our own lives you know the Puritans had this expression to mortify sin to put it to death to not let it have any room and sometimes we go so far and we deal with perhaps some aspects of sin in our lives but then there's those darling sins those things that we we don't really want to forsake and we don't deal with them and they crop up and they cause trouble because we've not put them to death Elijah said make sure that no one gets away I want this cancer dealt with here and now and we have to be willing to put to death every sin

that rears its ugly head in our lives so that truly we will be the people of God that God wants us to be so to close are any of us guilty of backsliding well I'm sure every one of us could put up our hands and say to a certain extent yes we are do you want to be better Christians than you are again I can see a few nods we need to rebuild the altars then we need to make sure that we are coming before the Lord Jesus Christ knowing him as Lord and Savior in our lives we cannot allow things to creep into our lives that hinder our walk with God and again to be able to do this effectively we need the power of the [28 : 42] Holy Spirit at work in us I would hope that none of us need to prove that the Lord he is God I hope that each one of us would be able to say that in all truth let's live it out in our lives let's be effective let's be people who can challenge who can change the lives of those around us we're not weak we're not ineffectual we are the people of God Elijah stood as one man against the nation one with God is the majority let us live then to his glory and praise amen we we're we're