

Elijah's Plea

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes that true faith and obedience to God's Word provide a firm foundation for confident prayer and assured divine response.

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:36, Isaiah 55:11, James 5:16, Psalm 37:3, John 3:16, Matthew 7:13, Mark 16:16, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Faith and Obedience", "Divine Providence"

Description

In 'Elijah's Plea,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound faith and obedience of the prophet Elijah as a model for believers today. He challenges ministers, churches, and individual Christians to examine their lives and ministries against God's Word, assuring them that faithful obedience provides a firm foundation for confident prayer and divine blessing. Spurgeon also addresses the seeking sinner, emphasizing the necessity of genuine faith and repentance to claim salvation. This sermon is a timeless call to trust God's promises and live in accordance with His truth.

Transcript

"Let it be known that I have done all these things at Your word." 1Kings 18:36.

THE acts of Elijah were very singular. It had not been known, from the foundations of the earth, that a man could shut up the doors of the rain for the space of three years. Yet Elijah suddenly leaped upon the scene, announced the judgment of the Lord and then disappeared for a time. When he reappears, at the bidding of God, he orders Ahab to gather the priests of Baal and to put to the test the question as to whether Baal or Jehovah was, indeed, God. Bullocks shall be slain and laid upon the wood without fire—and the God who shall answer by fire shall be determined to be the one living and true God, the God of Israel. We might question within ourselves what right the Prophet had to restrain the clouds, or to put God's honor under test. Suppose the Lord had not willed to answer him by fire? Had he any right to make the Glory of God hang upon such terms as he proposed?

The answer is that he had done all these things according to God's word. It was no whim of his to chastise the nation with a drought. It was no scheme of his, concocted in his own brain, that he should put the Godhead of Jehovah or of Baal to the test by a sacrifice to be consumed by miraculous fire. Oh, no! If you read the life of Elijah through, you will see that whenever he takes a step, it is preceded by, "The word of the Lord came unto Elijah the Tishbite." He never acts of himself—God is at his back. He moves according to the Divine will and he speaks according to the Divine teaching— and he pleads this with the Most High—"I have done all these things at Your word; now let it be known that it is so."

It makes the character of Elijah stand out, not as an example of reckless daring, but as the example of a man of sound mind! Faith in God is true wisdom—childlike confidence in the Word of God is the highest form of common sense. To believe Him that cannot lie and trust in Him that cannot fail is a kind of wisdom that none but fools laugh at! The wisest of men must concur in the opinion that it is always best to place your reliance where it will certainly be justified and always best to believe that which cannot possibly be false.

Elijah had so believed and acted on his belief and now he naturally expects to be justified in what he has done. An ambassador never dreams that his authorized acts will be repudiated by his king. If a man acts as your agent and does your bidding, the responsibility of his acts lie with you—and you must back him up. It were, indeed, an atrocious thing to send a servant on an errand and, when he faithfully performed it to the letter, to repudiate your sending him. It is not so with God. If we will only trust Him as to do as He bids us, He will never fail us—and He will see us through, though earth and Hell should stand in the way! It may not be today, nor tomorrow, but as surely as the Lord lives, the time shall come when he that trusted Him shall have joy of his confidence.

It seems to me that Elijah's plea is, to obedient saints, a firm ground for prayer. But to those who cannot say that they have acted according to God's Word, it is a solemn matter for question.

I. To begin with, this is A FIRM GROUND FOR PRAYER. You are a minister of God, or a worker in the cause of Christ, and you go forth and preach the Gospel with many tears and prayers. You continue to use all means such as Christ has ordained—do you say to yourself, "May I expect to have fruit from all this?" Of course you may! You are not sent on a frivolous errand! You are not bid to sow dead seed that will never spring up! But when that anxiety weighs heavily upon your heart, go to the Mercy Seat with this as one of your arguments, "Lord, I have done according to Your Word. Now let it be seen that it is even so. I have preached Your Word and You have said, 'It shall not return unto Me void.' I have prayed for these people and You have said, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much'— let it be seen that this is according to Your Word."

Or, if you are a teacher, you can say, "I brought my children in supplication before You and I have gone forth, after studying Your Word, to teach them, to the best of my ability, the way of salvation. Now, Lord, I claim it of Your Truth that You should justify my teaching and my expectations by giving me to see the souls of my children saved by You, through Jesus Christ, Your Son." Do you not see that you have a good argument if the Lord has set you to do this work? He has, as it were, bound Himself by that very fact to support you in the doing of it and if you, with holy diligence and carefulness, do all these things according to His Word, then you may come with certainty to the Throne of Grace and say unto Him, "Do as You have said. Have You not said, 'He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him'? Lord I have done that! Give me my sheaves. You have said, 'Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days.' Lord, I have done that and, therefore, I entreat You fulfill Your promise to me." You may plead in this fashion with the same boldness which made Elijah say in the presence of all the people, "Let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and that I have done all these things at Your word."

Next, I would apply this teaching to a whole Church. I am afraid many Churches of Christ are not prospering. The congregations are thin, the Church is diminishing, the Prayer Meeting scantily attended, spiritual life low. If I can conceive of a Church in such a condition which, nevertheless, can say to God, "We have done all these things at Your Word," I should expect to see that Church soon revived in answer

to prayer! The reason why some Churches do not prosper is because they have not done according to God's Word. They have not even cared to know what God's Word says! Another book is their standard. A man is their leader and legislator, instead of the inspired Word of God. Some Churches are doing little or nothing for the conversion of sinners. But any man, in any Church, who can go before God and say, "Lord, we have had among us the preaching of the Gospel and we have earnestly prayed for the blessing. We have gathered about Your minister and we have held him up in the arms of prayer and faith. We have, as individual Christians, sought out, each one, his particular service. We have gone forth, each one, to bring in souls to You, and we have lived in godliness of life by the help of Your Grace. Now, therefore prosper Your cause," shall find it a good plea!

Real prosperity must come to any Church that walks according to Christ's rules, obeys Christ's teaching and is filled with Christ's Spirit! I would exhort all members of Churches that are in a poor way just now, to see to it that all things are done at God's Word—and then wait hopefully in holy confidence. The fire from Heaven must come—the blessing cannot be withheld!

The same principle may be applied, also, to any individual Believers who are in trouble through having done right. It happens often that a man feels, "I could make money, but I must not, for the course proposed would be wrong. Such a situation is open, but it involves what my conscience does not approve. I will rather suffer than I will make gain by doing anything that is questionable." It may be that you are in great trouble distinctly through obedience to God. Then you are the man above all others who may lay this case before the Most High—"Lord, I have done all these things at Your Word and You have said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' I beseech you interpose for me." Somehow or other God will provide for you. If He means you to be further tried, He will give you strength to bear it, but the probabilities are, that now He has tested you, He will bring you forth from the fire as gold—

"Do good and know no fear,

For so you in the land shall dwell,

And God your food prepare,"

Once again. I would like to apply this principle to the seeking sinner. You are anxious to be saved. You are attentive to the Word of God and your heart says, "Let me know what this salvation is and how to come at it, for I will have it whatever stands in the way." You have heard Jesus say, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." You have heard His bidding, "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endures to life eternal." You long to enter the strait gate and eat of the meat which endures. You would give worlds for such a gift! You have spoken well, my Friend. Now, listen—you cannot have Heaven through your doings, as a matter of merit. There is no merit possible to you, for you have sinned and are already condemned! But God has laid down certain lines upon which He has promised to meet you and to bless you. Have you followed those lines? For if you have, He will not be false to you!

It is written—"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved"—can you come before God and say, "I have believed and have been baptized"? Then you are on firm pleading ground. It is written again—"Whoever confesses and forsakes

his sins shall have mercy." When you have confessed them and forsaken them, you have a just claim upon the promise of God and you can say to Him, "Lord, fulfill this Word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. There is no merit in my faith, or my baptism, or my repentance, or my

forsaking of sin—yet as You have put Your promise side by side with these things, and I have been obedient to them—I now come to you and say, 'Prove Your own Truth, for I have done all these things at Your Word.'" No sinner will come before God, at last, and say, "I trusted as You bid me trust and yet I am lost!" It is impossible! Your blood, if you are lost, will be on your own head—you shall never be able to lay your soul's damnation at the door of God. He is not false—it is you that are false You see, then, how the principle can be applied in prayer—"I have done these things at Your Word; therefore, O Lord, do as You have

said."

II. We shall go a little over the same ground while I ask you to put yourselves through your paces by way of SELF-EXAMINATION as to whether or not you have done all these things at God's Word.

First, let every worker here who has not been successful answer this question—Have you done all these things at God's Word? Come. Have you preached the Gospel? Was it the Gospel? Was it Christ, you preached, or merely something about Christ? Come. Did you give the people bread, or did you give them plates to put the bread on and knives to cut the bread with? Did you give them drink, or did you give them the cup that had been near the water? Some preaching is not Gospel—it is a knife that smells of the cheese, but it is not cheese. See to that matter.

If you preached the Gospel, did you preach it rightly? That is to say, did you state it affectionately, earnestly, clearly, plainly? If you preach the Gospel in Latinized language, the common people will not know what it means—and if you use great big academy words and dictionary words, the market people will be lost while they are trying to find out what you are talking about. You cannot expect God to bless you unless the Gospel is preached in a very simple way. Have you preached the Truth of God lovingly, with all your heart, throwing your very self into it, as if, beyond everything, you desired the conversion of those you taught? Has prayer been mixed with it? Have you gone into the pulpit without prayer? Have you come out of it without prayer? Have you been to the Sunday school without prayer? Have you come away from it without prayer? If so, since you failed to ask for the blessing, you must not wonder if you do not get it!

And another question—Has there been an example to back your teaching? Brothers, have we lived as we have preached? Sisters, have you lived as you have taught in your classes? These are questions we ought to answer because, perhaps, God can reply to us, "No, you have not done according to My Word. It was not My Gospel you preached—you were a thinker and you thought out your own thoughts—I never promised to bless your thoughts, but only My revealed Truth! You spoke without affection. You tried to glorify yourself by your oratory—you did not care whether souls were saved or not." Or suppose that God can point to you and say, "Your example was contrary to your teaching. You looked one way, but you pulled another way." Then there is no plea in prayer, is there? Come, let us alter. Let us try to rise to the highest pitch of obedience by the help of God's Spirit—not that we can merit success—but that we can command it if we do but act according to God's bidding! Paul plants and Apollos waters—but God gives the increase!

And now let me turn to a Church and put questions to that Church. A certain Church does not prosper. I wish that every Church would let this question go through all its membership—do we, as a Church, acknowledge the Headship of Christ? Do we acknowledge the Statute Book of Christ—the one Book which, alone and by itself, is the religion of a Christian? Do we, as a Church, seek the Glory of God? Is that our main and only objective? Are we travelling in birth for the souls of the people that live near us? Are

we using every Scriptural means to enlighten them with the Gospel? Are we a holy people? Is our example such as our neighbors may follow? Do we endeavor, even in meat and drink, to do all to the Glory of God? Are we prayerful? Oh, the many Churches that give up their Prayer Meetings because prayer is not in them! How can they expect a blessing? Are we united? Oh, Brothers and Sisters, it is a horrible thing when Church members talk against one another and even slander one another as though they were enemies rather than friends! Can God bless such a Church as that? Let us search through and through the camp, lest there be an Achan, whose stolen wedge and Babylonian garment, hidden in his tent, shall bind the hands of the Almighty so that He cannot fight for His people. Let every Church see to itself in this.

Next I speak to Christian people who have fallen into trouble through serving God. I put it to them, but I want to ask them a few questions. Are you quite sure that you served God in it? You know there are men who indulge crotchets, whims and fancies. God has not promised to support you in your whims! Certain people are obstinate and will not sub-

mit to what everybody must bear who has to earn his bread in a world like this. If you are a mere mule and get the stick, I must leave you to your reward. But I speak to men of understanding. Be as stern as a Puritan against everything that is wrong, but be supple and yieldable to everything that involves self-denial on your part. God will bear us through if the quarrel is His quarrel—but if it is our own quarrel—why, then, we may help ourselves! There is a deal of difference between being pig-headed and being steadfast. To be steadfast, as a matter of principle, in the Truth which is taught by God's Word is one thing—but to get a strange idea into your heads is quite another.

Besides, some men are conscientious about certain things, but they have not an all-round conscience. Some are conscientious about not taking less, but they are not conscientious about giving less. Certain folks are conscientious about resting on the Sabbath—but the other half of the command is, "Six days shall you labor"—and they do not remember that portion of the Law of God! I like a conscience which works fairly and impartially. But if your conscience gives way for the sake of your own gain or pleasure, the world will think that it is a sham and they will not be far from the mark! But if, through conscientiousness, you should be a sufferer, God will bear you through. Only examine and see that your conscience is enlightened by the Spirit of God.

And now to conclude. I want to address the seeking sinner. Some are longing to find peace, but they cannot reach it. I want them to see whether they have not been negligent in some points so that they would not be able to say with Elijah, "I have done all these things at Your word."

Do I need to say that you cannot be saved by your works? Do I need to repeat it over and over again that nothing you do can deserve mercy? Salvation is the free gift of God. But this is the point. God will give pardon to a sinner and peace to a troubled heart on certain lines. Are you wholly on those lines? If so, you will have peace. But if you have not that peace, something or other has been omitted. To begin with, the first thing is faith. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Do you believe that He has risen from the dead? Do you trust yourself wholly, simply, heartily, once and for all, with Him? Then it is written—"He that believes in Him has everlasting life." Go and plead that! "I have no peace," says one. Have you unfeignedly repented of sin? Is your mind totally changed about sin so that what you did once love you now hate—and that which you did once hate you now love? Is there a hearty loathing, giving up and forsaking of sin?

Do not deceive yourself! You cannot be saved in your sins—you are to be saved from your sins. You and your sins must part, or else Christ and you will never be joined. See to this! Labor to give up every sin and turn from every false way, otherwise your faith is but a dead faith and will never save you. It may be that you have wronged a person and have never made restitution. Mr. Moody did great good when he preached restitution! If we have wronged another, we ought to make it up to him. We ought to return what we have stolen, if that is our sin. A man cannot expect peace of conscience till, as far as in him lies, he has made amends for any wrong he has done to his fellow men. See to that, or perhaps this stone may lie at your door and because it is not rolled away, you may never enter into peace.

It may be, my Friend, that you have neglected prayer. Now, prayer is one of those things without which no man can find the Lord. This is how we seek Him and if we do not seek Him, how shall we find Him? If you have been neglectful in this matter of prayer, you cannot say, "I have done all these things at Your word." May the Lord stir you up to pray mightily and not to let Him go unless He blesses you! In waiting upon the Lord, He will cause you to find rest for your soul.

Possibly, however, you may be a Believer in Christ and you may have no peace because you are associated with ungodly people. You may go with them to their follies and mix with them in their amusements. You see, you cannot serve God and Mammon! Thus says the Lord, "Come out from among them: be you separate: touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." I know a man who sits in this place—he is probably here tonight. And concerning him I am persuaded that the only thing that keeps him from Christ is the company with which he mingles. I will not say that his company is bad in itself, but it is bad for him—and if there is anything that is right in itself, yet if to me it becomes ruinous, I must give it up.

We are not commanded to cut off warts and excrescences, but Jesus bids us cut off right arms and pluck out right eyes—good things in themselves—if they are stumbling blocks in our way so that we cannot get at Christ. What is there in the world that is worth keeping if it involves me in the loss of my soul? Away with it! Therefore many things which are lawful to another, perhaps to you may not be expedient because they are injurious. Many things cause no harm to the

bulk of men and yet to some one man they would be the most perilous things and, therefore, he should avoid them. Be a law to yourselves and keep clear of everything that keeps you away from the Savior.

Perhaps, however, you say, "Well, as far as I know, I keep out of all evil associations and I am trying to follow the Lord." Let me press you with a home question—will you be obedient to Jesus in everything?—

"For know—nor of the terms complain— Where Jesus comes He comes to reign."

If you would have Christ for a Savior, you must also take Him for a King. Therefore it is that He puts it to you, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Will the baptism save me? Assuredly not, for you have no right to be baptized until you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ! But remember, if Christ gives you the command—if you accept Him as a King—you are bound to obey Him! If, instead of saying, "Be baptized," He had simply said, "Put a feather in your cap," you might have asked, "Will putting a feather in my cap save me?" No, but you are bound to do it because He bids you! If He had said, "Put a stone in your pocket and carry it with you"—if that were Christ's command—it would be necessary that you take the stone and carry it with you! The less there seems to be of importance about a command, often the more hinges upon it.

I have seen a rebellious boy, to whom his father has said, "Son, pick up that stick. Pick up that stick." There is no very great importance about the command and so the youth sullenly refuses to obey. "Do you hear, Son? Pick up that stick." No. He will not. Now, if it had been a great thing that he had been told to do—something that was somewhat beyond his power—it would not have been so clear an evidence of his rebellion when he refused to do it! But when it is but a little and trifling thing and yet he refuses to obey—it glaringly shows his rebellion! Therefore, I lay great stress upon this—you who believe in Jesus Christ should do according to His Word. Say, "Lord what would You have me do? Be it what it may, I will do it, for I am Your servant."

I want you, if you would be Christ's, to be just like the brave men that rode at Balaclava—

"Yours not to reason why; Yours but to do and die" if it need be, if Jesus calls you to do it. Be this your song—

"Through floods and flames if Jesus leads, I'll follow where He goes."

That kind of faith which at the very outset cries, "I shall not do that, it is not essential"—and then goes on to say, "I do not agree with that and I do not agree with the other"—is no faith at all! In that case it is you that is master—and not Christ. In His own house you are beginning to alter His commands. "Oh," says one, "but as to baptism—I was baptized, you know, a great many years ago, when I was an infant." Oh really? You have heard of Mary when her mistress said, "Mary go into the drawing room and sweep it and dust it." Her mistress went into the drawing room and found it dusty. She said, "Mary, did you not sweep the room and dust it?" "Well, Ma'am, yes I did—only I dusted it first and then I swept it."

That was the wrong order and spoiled the whole! And it will never do to put Christ's commands the other way around, because then they mean nothing! We ought to do what He bids us, as He bids us, when He bids us and in the order in which He bids us! It is ours simply to be obedient and when we are so, we may remember that to believe Christ and to obey Christ is the same thing—and often in Scripture the same word that might be read, "believe," might be read "obey." He is the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him—and that is to all them that believe on Him! Trust Him, then, right heartily and obey Him right gladly!

You can then go to Him in your dying hour and say, "Lord, I have done all these things at Your Word. I claim no merit, but I do claim that You keep Your gracious promise to me, for You cannot run back from one Word which You have spoken."

God bless you, Beloved, for Christ's sake. Amen and amen.

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