

Only The Fire Can Change The Heart

by Fred Tomilson

This sermon by Fred Tomlinson emphasizes the need for wholehearted devotion to God, drawing parallels between the nation of Israel's idolatry and the modern-day distractions that hinder true devotion. Through the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, the sermon highlights the importance of allowing God's refining fire to transform our hearts completely, leading to repentance and a turning away from idols. The message underscores the necessity of yielding ourselves fully to God's power, symbolized by the fire from heaven, to experience true transformation and revival.

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:38, Galatians 2:20, Exodus 20:3, Revelation 3:15, Acts 2:1, James 1:22, 1 Kings 17:1, 1 Kings 3:16, Amos 5:24

Topics: "Wholehearted Devotion", "Transformation through God's Power"

Description

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Transcript

Hello, this is Fred Tomlinson here and before I begin my address, I just want to say something. I didn't know whether to say this at the end or at the beginning, but I'd just like to encourage those of you who are listening to these messages to consider checking out our website. The address is very simple, it's mackenziefellowship.com, mackenziefellowship.com. Some folk got a bit mixed up with the Mackenzie, but it's spelt mck, not ma, mckenziefellowship.com. It's a very simple website, we're still looking at improving it and so on, but check us out.

We really appreciate the comments that people have been leaving on the various platforms and Peter, Peter Boyle here, Pete and Sharon, they come over one day each week and they bring, because if you're not from Canada you won't understand this, but they bring Tim Hortons coffee with them and we spend a few hours together and they share with me and Sheila the various comments that people have left and we just praise the Lord together for what he's doing. I might just add that we've got no problem, no thoughts or plans to stop doing this when they say that we can all meet normally. We feel God's given us this ministry opportunity and we, by the Lord's grace, want to continue doing it on into the future.

So we invite you to share your comments as well. What I want to do in this session is to turn our attention back once again to 1 Kings, the first book of Kings, chapter 18, and Elijah's going to be somewhere in the centre of what I want to share. In reading these chapters I find a very real temptation to just work through very, very slowly and spend quite a lot of time in it because the chapters are so rich with truth and with messages that the Lord will interpret and apply to us in the benefits of the new covenant.

I don't even have the time to read lengthy sections so I encourage you to start at chapter 17 and read through chapter 19, maybe on further, but if you do that, not right now, but at some point. The fact of the matter is, without reviewing and going over too much, Elijah has been called Lord of God for a very important ministry, prophetic ministry, and in one of the earlier sessions, I think we've had two sessions on this already, we reminded ourselves of the way that the Lord called Elijah to go and stand before Ahab. The fact of the matter is, of course, Ahab was a very exceedingly wicked king and things have gone from bad to worse in Israel and the message that Elijah took to Ahab basically was that there was not going to be any more rain until he spoke again.

That's how chapter 18 opens. Now it happened after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying, go show yourself to Ahab and I will send rain. I just realised what I'm doing there.

Excuse me, I was jumping the gun there. It's the first verse of chapter 17. As I was reading, I think, this isn't right.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word. And so for the next three and a half years, there was no rain and no dew. And we can rest assured that this drought in Israel was very, very severe.

It was beyond serious, clearly. And everything would have been screaming for water, screaming for rain. And we can rest assured that this was on the minds of everyone, every member of the nation, just longing for rain.

We need rain. Well, that being true, let me remind you, if you need reminding at all, just why there was no rain for these three and a half years, the fact of the matter is the nation was under the judgment of God. Think of this, that the people that God had chosen, this nation separated wholly unto him, had chosen to forget their God.

They chose to forget the God that chose them. How about that? You know, there's a phrase in the second epistle of Peter. It's in chapter three, I think, verse five.

There's a context for it, which I'm not digressing to speak about. But there's a phrase there used in the old King James Version where it speaks about people being willfully ignorant. And this is exactly what appears to have been taking place among the people.

They had become willfully ignorant. They'd chosen to unbelieve in God. They'd chosen to move away from him and to become Baal worshippers.

And the question is, well, was this God acting to sort of say, well, all right, this is what you get. There's some kind of punishment for them in that sense. Or, and I think this is an interesting question, or was there a deeper purpose that God had? And I believe both are true, certainly.

But I believe because we're dealing with a God who is a God of generous love, there was a deeper purpose in his heart. I believe that this was intended not to be punitive or primarily punitive to them. It was intended as a wake-up call.

A wake-up call for the people of God. And it would appear that no one was interested in being awakened. They were willfully ignorant of the fact that there was a cause for there being no rain.

They longed for the rain. They pleaded for rain, I'm sure. But I'm not so sure at all that there were many that were examining their own hearts and questioning why, in fact, this word that Elijah had brought and the drought that had resulted from his word had actually been their true and living God who was speaking.

Certainly, I know this, that their king, King Ahab, he was definitely willfully dead to what might have been the cause for this going on. And you know, there's a sense in which that's exactly what's happening today. You know, there are many, this is not just a foolish or reckless statement I'm making.

I'm basing it on my own experience and my own observations. But there are many people today who are maintaining a semblance of Christian commitment. But their lives are preoccupied with other gods.

And other gods can take on a whole variety of forms. We could think immediately of things that are very gross and very terrible and very obviously wicked. But other gods, you know, I mean, here's a shocking statement.

Another god can be your own family. Another god can certainly be yourself. And, you know, so God was bringing to those people a wake-up call.

To willfully refuse to respond to God's wake-up call has consequences. And that's exactly what was taking place at this point in time in Israel. Now, I'd like to read to you or at least draw your attention to another story, which is also in the first book of Kings.

And I think it's a strange story. But I think it's remarkable in a sense. And it may provide a clue to the question of why this was happening and why God was bringing this drought upon the people.

It's actually a story I find in the third chapter of the first book of Kings. Again, only because I'm conscious that we don't have lots of time in these sessions. So let me just give you a very brief introduction to it, and then I'll read some verses.

But we're reading here about two women. They were obviously living in the same context. Another translation refers to them as harlots.

But they both had infants. And it happened that during the night, and it would appear that it was suggested that one of the women actually rolled over onto her infant child, and the child died. And the mother of that child, realizing what had happened, went in with the dead child into the room or whatever it was where the other woman was living, and she changed the babies.

And she left her dead child next to the sleeping mother and took her child away and brought it back to herself. When the woman who had the living child wakened and realized and was made aware somehow of what had taken place, she goes with the colleague, I'll call her that, I don't know what their relationship was, but the two women went to the king. That in itself is remarkable, that they had access to the king, especially if they were two harlots.

But they have access to the king, who was Solomon. And, of course, the mother of the living child is appealing to him because she wants her own child back again. And this was a very challenging dilemma.

And, of course, what takes place from here on speaks to the incredible wisdom of Solomon. So I'm going to read here. I'll break in.

I'm trying to decide where I can break into it. Then the king said in verse 23, the one says, this is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one. And the other says, no, for your son is the dead one and my son is the living one.

The king said, get me a sword. So they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, divide the living child in two and give half to the one and half to the other.

Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king for she was deeply stirred over her son and said, oh, my lord, give her the living child and by no means kill him. But the other said, he shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide him.

What a story. I'll leave the heady theologians to continue debating that story and whether it was real or whether it wasn't and whatnot. Look at all the pros and cons.

That's not my business. But I do believe this as it stirred me in reading it. I think to every attentive heart, every heart that's listening for God to speak somehow through his inspired word, there's something in the story that stirs us and stirs a deep question in our own hearts.

Let me put it this way. Could it be that today there are huge numbers of believers who are under the illusion that God is somehow content with their half-hearted response to God? Or to put it a different way, they're under the illusion that God is content with just half of their hearts. And the answer to that is he is absolutely not content with half of our hearts.

The child, and this is what comes out of this story, the child must be whole or not at all. And the true mother of that child, of course, with such love for her child, she would gladly, in the context of what was going on, she would gladly forfeit the child and her enjoyment of that child if it meant the child could continue to live. And that, of course, emphasized the tremendous wisdom of Solomon there.

But you know, I believe this is the heart of God toward us. It's as though God is speaking today and he's saying the devotion of my people to me must be entire or not at all. In other words, half-hearted devotion is not devotion.

That's the bottom line, isn't it? We remember the first commandment going back to the book of Exodus in chapter 20. There we find the absolute bedrock of God's, the foundation of God's dealings with man. And he demanded that he be first and he be only for his people.

And this same position is taken up by each of the three synoptic gospel writers as they have Jesus quoting these words when he said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. It's got to be all or nothing. It was only last week, I think, that I read to you from the book of Revelation.

It's where Jesus is there speaking to the seven churches. And this is to the last of the seven, to the church in Laodicea. And we read Jesus saying, I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot.

They were half-hearted. And I would that you were either cold or hot, one thing or the other. He said, So then, because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

That's the King James translation there. Amen. And this is the heart of God toward his people today.

He cannot be content with his people being devoted to him in some part, for that devotion to be compromised in some way or another. And I emphasize that word when Jesus was speaking. It was a commandment, and it comes through in that commandment from Exodus as well.

It's what God requires. You can say, Well, that was the Old Testament. Well, you can be sure it's going to be taken to a new height in the New Testament.

And that is so true. And that's the heart of God today. I believe this is what God would be saying to each one I'm talking to.

And I assure you, I feel it challenging my own heart again as I speak to you. God cannot be satisfied. He cannot be content with a half-hearted response to him.

And perhaps it could be that he can use even my stuttering words here to be some kind of wake-up call to your heart that God is speaking to you. There's something that needs to be addressed in your heart. And he's loving.

He cares for you. And that's why he's speaking. He wants to draw you fully and completely to himself.

Granted, the nation of Israel needed rain. But quite evidently, Elijah knew from his own dealings in waiting upon God and with what God had spoken to his own heart already that the need of this nation was for more than rain. So in fact, as they were preoccupied with the search for rain, they were actually seeking for the wrong thing.

And I could digress a little bit, which I'm not going to do just now, but we could try to share with one another some practical things where it may be that we're actually chasing the wrong thing. We're looking for God to do one of a whole series of different things, some of them very legitimate things, just as the rain was a legitimate need for that nation. But so far as God is concerned, we're seeking for the wrong thing because we need to get first things right first before anything else can be made right.

So I'll leave you at this point with this thought. Could it be that you yourself, in some way or another, perhaps unwittingly up until this moment, have been seeking for the wrong thing? Rain was a pressing outward need, and it was legitimate, but they had confused priorities. They were ignoring a deeper need.

The fact of the matter is that rain would never change the heart of man. Rain has no ability to change the human heart, and God knew it. God could have opened the windows of heaven at any point.

He could have called a downpour at any moment, but he was seeking to accomplish something on a deeper level in the heart of his people. Frankly, I believe this is always the heart of God, even though we may be able to look back and say, well, I know that God has done this whole list of things for me and blessed me in so many ways, but the reality is, and I've lived quite a long time, and I know this to be true, he's always, always, always calling us forward. There's always more to be known.

There's more to be experienced, more of God to worship. Amen. And I believe that God could have given the nation rain at that point in time and answered their longings, and they would have sort of retreated into

their smugness and into their idolatry, and sadly that's exactly what happens for so many of us.

We may be stirred. A person could be stirred even now as we're talking and thinking about these things, and yet before you know it, we've just slid back into the old way. I shouldn't do this, but I'm thinking of something that James was sharing earlier.

He mentioned someone called Gene Paisley. He was a dairy farmer, as you gathered from what James was saying. I remember one of Gene's sons who had been in a particular meeting.

Before I go any further, let me tell you, I'm not telling you you have to do this. I'm using this story as an illustration of God speaking to someone and that someone responding. That's my only purpose in this.

But Gene's son had been in a meeting where God had spoken to him very clearly, and we lived at that point in a house that was on their property just across the lane from this young man I'm speaking about. But after the meeting, that son went home and he got his TV set and he brought it out into the driveway of his house. He too was a dairy farmer.

And he got a huge sledgehammer and he smashed the thing to pieces. The point is, when God speaks to us, when he gives us that wake up call, it's so crucial that we act upon it, and we act upon it quickly and promptly. The longer we delay, the cloudier our convictions become, until in the end we excuse ourselves and carry on in our smugness.

So I'm encouraging you, if you hear God speaking to you, whatever it is that he's saying to you, it was Mary who gave some of the best advice ever in the world. Remember the setting to it, that she said on one occasion, whatever he, her son, Jesus, whatever he says to you, do it. And I only add to that, and it's not my right to add anything, but I just simply say, and do it promptly, because it's so important to do that.

But Elijah the prophet, back in this story, he knew that this nation needed more than just another prophetic utterance. And what he was about to do was clearly not some kind of brainchild of his own. I will never believe that he just dreamt this up and came up with an idea or a plan.

I believe he was expressing and putting into action that which God had told him to do. And so this that will now take place, which we'll make some references to but can't deal in real detail with it, this was God, no one but God could have devised such a response at this stage in the history of this nation, this people. What would take place would be, it would be transcendent, it would be astonishing, and it would be effective.

It would be, even beyond that actually, it would be prophetically symbolic. I hope I can tell you what I mean more clearly about that in just a moment. The fact is that the need that existed then in the hearts of those people is the need that exists today.

And God's response to that need then was outward, it was dramatic, and it was effective as I'm saying to you. And that right there is the need that exists within the professing company of believers today. It's for an act of God, and therefore transcendent, something supernatural, that would accomplish something that nothing else could.

And God chose on that occasion to use fire, fire coming from heaven. You remember, we haven't talked about the altar and all those things in this session, but you remember what took place I'm sure. After Elijah had prayed his prayer, fire came from heaven.

And fire was an element God chose to symbolize his own presence. It would be something dramatic, it would be something from beyond the boundaries of our confines, and beyond our human limits. Fire coming from heaven.

You know, think of it this way, if one's Christianity is limited to human effort, and human attempts at discipline, and learning the dogma, and learning the doctrinal information, then our experience of Christianity is not the true new covenant biblical Christianity that the New Testament presents to us. Christianity of the New Testament is transcendent. It's God doing something that we couldn't do ourselves.

It's power that transforms. There's that through the redemptive work of Christ that had to do with what someone has called the paperwork in heaven, where justification was settled because of his redeeming blood. Absolutely.

But when it comes to our lives, our real lives, here and now, we can't live the way God wants us to live. We have no capacity. But God, under this new covenant arrangement, has provided a dynamic means whereby he can accomplish in our lives what otherwise would be humanly impossible.

Because the Christian life is not just trying to live in a certain way that we deem to be Christ-like. You know, to add another feature to this, which is very important, let me put it this way, if we think about Pentecost, which was the section in the text which speaks of that fire coming from heaven, and we know what happened in the upper room to those who were gathered there, that was dramatic and it was powerful and effective, was it not? But there could have been no Pentecost had there not been first a Calvary. And the fact of the matter is that the fire of God would only come down upon the altar.

Now let me pause there. This is kind of complex and it needs more time. I'm very much aware of that.

But I read here in this passage that when the prophets of Baal had been given their chance to call down fire from heaven upon their offering on their altar, and it all had come to nothing, then it became Elijah's time. And the Scripture notes that the altar of the Lord was broken down. That's interesting.

And they repaired the altar before they went any further and before this dramatic thing would occur. Well, you know, when we read about the altar in the Old Testament, it forever points toward that great altar, to the cross of our Lord Jesus. And we must remind ourselves that the cross of Christ is in no way broken down today.

It is in no way reduced of its power and its purpose. But today that altar, that cross of Christ, is misunderstood. That cross of Christ is neglected.

In fact, in many cases it's rejected completely by people who would profess to be Christian. They just simply see it as something that took place years ago and has no real significance to us. And so today we find that so many preachers, they're telling us that the gospel needs to be reinvented.

We need a new message for this new generation and so on, which sounds bizarre to those of us who are true men and women of God. But that nevertheless is taking place at this point in time. I know that in a very real way.

So we need to come again and allow the Holy Spirit to refocus our attention on the authentic, true cross of Christ and that which was accomplished there and that which is made available as the result of it. And the

fire of God never came down onto just a repaired altar, did it? But there had to be an offering that was placed on the altar. In the truest sense, the fire of God came down upon the offering.

The fire of God came down on the day of Pentecost not because there was a wooden cross, but because of the offering, because of the one who hung upon the cross, because the one who hung upon the cross was the Son of God. And of course the result of that was the very foundation of redemption. He died in my place.

He died instead of me. And the fire of Pentecost fell as the result of that which he accomplished. Now then, for that salvation to become realised and experiential in our lives, we must experience the incoming of that fire of God.

That fire of God which is the spirit of life, as Paul will call it on another occasion. That fire of God which is the power from on high. It must fall upon us.

I was thinking this morning a totally different set of thoughts were going through my mind. Maybe at some point I need to just try and describe who I am and where I'm coming from because I'm sure there's a lot of people who listen to me who are trying to figure out who I am and where I am coming from with some of this. I'm not presenting some kind of Pentecostal message here.

I'm not presenting a Baptist message. I'm not presenting a Christian brethren message. We want what the Bible is saying.

At the end of the day it's not whether I'm Reform or whether I'm Dispensational The question is what is this Bible saying and what is the spirit of God saying to me through it at this point in time? And I want to know the answer to that and I want to experience that as fully as I possibly can. As fully as a man this side of eternity can experience it. That is my heart.

I hope it's yours also. Amen. For that holy fire to fall upon your life my dear brother or sister we must allow him, we must be prepared for him to apply that slaying power of the cross to our lives, to my life.

The Apostle Paul said in that famous verse, a wonderful verse, he said I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live yet it's not I that liveth but it's Christ who liveth in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Amen. Am I willing, this is the emphasis at this moment in my address Am I willing, are you willing to allow him to do a complete work in your heart so that he has all of your heart for himself? This will mean changes, it can mean painful changes but the necessary, the crucial changes the change where we let go of our idols, whatever they are let go of ourselves and yield ourselves to the power of the cross.

Back at Carmel the moment came when the fire fell I'm looking in chapter 18, I read in verse 38 then the fire of the Lord fell and it consumed the burnt offering 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 they said the Lord, he is the God, the Lord, he is God. What an incredible thing. Amen.

The rain could never have done that but this act of God on this occasion this that was described to Elijah, carried out by Elijah and the result which was entirely of God was prophetic, it was prophetic symbolism which was clearly effective at that time for these people because look what happened, the whole nation repented at that point in time the nation changed their gods and they turned from their idols in that one moment this act of God's transcendent power had been so effective, it accomplished in their lives what

God needed to happen it changed who they were on the inside and they changed from their idol worship and Baal was dethroned and the people turned to God only fire can change the heart will you bow before him today? I talked about those who willfully rejected God I used the somewhat obscure word, they unbelieved they unremembered God, they chose rather their own gods but the question is, and I believe this is the spirit of God is putting his finger on lives even in this moment will you be prepared to bow before him and willfully yield yourself to him? Charles Wesley wrote this and I close with this refining fire go through my heart illuminate my soul scatter thy life through every part and sanctify the whole do it today beloved tell someone you've done it if you like tell me God bless you, amen Peter Amen and I think we should pray brethren Amen I wish there was the opportunity that we could pray individually but pray in your heart if you find that this word is is for you, receive it with all of your heart brethren God might have his way, Hallelujah

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