

Prepare The Way For The Fire Of The Lord

by Brian Long

This sermon emphasizes the importance of preparing the way for the fire of the Lord by first casting down idols, rebuilding the altar of the Lord, and embracing the cross. It tells the story of a missionary who faced the ultimate test of faith, choosing to follow Jesus even when faced with the loss of his family. The sermon calls for wholehearted commitment, sacrifice, and a decision to follow Jesus, no matter the cost, as the pathway to experiencing the power and glory of God.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:3, Luke 9:23, 1 Kings 18:21, John 14:6, Matthew 16:24, Philippians 3:7, Revelation 12:11, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Preparation for God's Fire", "Wholehearted Commitment to Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Prepare the way for the fire of the Lord. In Isaiah, chapter 40, verse three, it says the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

God promises that he's going to send a revelation of his glory and that revelation of his glory will be so great that all flesh shall see it together. But before he reveals his glory, he first calls his servants to prepare the way. Prepare the way of the Lord.

So first is preparation. Then comes revelation of the glory of God. Haggai chapter two, verses six, seven and nine says, For thus saith the Lord of hosts.

Yet once it is a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land and I will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come. And I will fill this house with glory, saith the

Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts.

God promises to fill his house with his glory. And when he does, the glory of God is always greater. The latter glory is always greater than that of the former.

But before he did in Haggai, he first called them to prepare the way by building his house, preparing the house. First came preparation. Then came revelation of the glory of God.

Habakkuk chapter two, verse 14 says, For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, even as the waters cover the sea. The glory of God is coming. The glory of God is coming.

Therefore, it is high time that we be preparing for it. First preparation, then revelation. Jesus said, As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be when the Son of Man comes.

Just like it was in the days of Noah, it will be like that before Jesus Christ comes again in great power and glory. And remember what God told Noah, Noah, build an ark, prepare, prepare an ark, because I'm going to judge the whole world with a flood. And the Bible says that by faith, Noah prepared an ark to the saving of his household.

Noah made preparation. God sent the revelation. And the revelation was the salvation of Noah and his family, and also the judgment that God sent upon the wicked who rejected the warning from God.

First preparation, then revelation. Again, the Lord spoke to Moses and he said, Sanctify the people both today and tomorrow and be ready for the third day. The Lord will come down in the sight of all the people on Mount Sinai.

Moses made preparation on the first day and the second day, and then on the third day, God reigned the heavens and he came down on the mountain. And Mount Sinai was engulfed in fire, covered in smoke. It shook.

There was a great earthquake. There was a sound of thunder and lightning. God came down and Moses received the Ten Commandments.

First, there was a preparation. Then came a revelation of the glory of God. And now we turn to First Kings chapter 18, where we're going to see exactly the same thing.

Once again, God wants to visit his people. Once again, God wants to manifest his holy presence. Once again, he wants to reveal his glory.

But before he does, he has to have a man prepare the way. He calls a man to prepare the way. In this case, it was Elijah the prophet.

Elijah, prepare the way because I'm coming to answer by fire. First preparation, then revelation. Now, in First Kings chapter 18, it was a very desperate time and the days were evil because of the sins and the compromise of God's people, Israel.

The Lord had withheld rain from the land. It had not rained for over three years at the word of the Lord. So there was drought.

There was famine. The times were desperate. Israel was being ruled by an evil king called Ahab and his wicked, wicked wife called Jezebel.

Jezebel hated the prophets of the Lord, and she had as many of them put to death as she could. Jezebel was a worshiper of Baal, this idol, this false god that was empowered by demons. And Baal was considered by them the lord of the heavens and the stars and the storms.

They worshiped this idol, and that's who King Ahab and Jezebel wanted to rule over the people. Well, the worship of Baal involved blood sacrifices. It involved lewd dancing and the most perverse forms of sexual immorality and degradation known to man.

The land was steeped in idolatry, violence and sexual perversion, and nobody was taking a stand. God's people had compromised. They were going with the flow.

No one was taking a stand. They were in desperate need, this nation was, of a visitation from Almighty God, the God who answers by fire. It sounds like another nation I know.

Steeped in idolatry, characterized by violence and sexual perversion and degradation of the worst kind. In desperate need of another visitation from Almighty God, the one who answers by fire. Well, God is about to turn the hearts of his people back to him one more time.

One more time, he will reveal his glory. One more time, he will manifest his presence. One more time, he will demonstrate his power.

But first must be preparation. Then comes revelation. So Elijah, God calls him, confront King Ahab and everything Elijah does here, he does according to the word of the Lord.

Elijah calls Ahab, 450 false prophets of Baal, 400 false prophets of Asherah and all of Israel to meet him on top of the mountain, Mount Carmel. And when they all gather around, he issues this challenge. Verse 21, First Kings chapter 18.

Elijah came unto all the people and said, how long halt ye between two opinions? How long are you going to waver back and forth? How long are you going to compromise? How long are you going to try to have your feet in two different boats? If the Lord be God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

They didn't respond to his preaching, at least for now. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only remain a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 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 answers by fire. Let him be God.

And all the people answered and said, it is well spoken. That's a good idea. The God who answers by fire, he must be God.

We believe that. So Elijah lets the 450 false prophets of Baal go first and they kill their bull and they make their altar and they call upon Baal from morning to evening and nothing happens. They cry aloud, they get on the altar and they dance and they try to perform and they plead and no one answers.

They start cutting themselves with knives and start bleeding all over the altar and nothing happens. No fire, no power. No one answers.

And then in verses 38 through 39. It's I'm sorry, verses 30 through 37, Elijah prepares the way by preparing the altar, by preparing the wood and by immersing this offering in water, 16 barrels of water, because Elijah wants them to know that when God does answer, there's not going to be any question or doubt about who did it. This will not be man made.

This will be God sent. This will be heaven sent. And so immersing this offering in water, he then calls upon the name of the Lord and watch what happens.

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 God, the Lord, he is God. Beloved, if there was ever a time in this nation that we need such a revelation of the glory and majesty and presence and power of God, it is today.

If there was ever a time, the hour is critical. The times are urgent. If there was ever a time that we needed such a revelation of the glory and power of God among the people of God, it is today.

And I want to tell you that our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is still the God who answers by fire. Now, his means have changed.

He's not answering by fire by sending his fire upon dead offerings of dead bulls and goats and lambs on Mount Carmel. There's something better now under the new covenant. He's still answering by fire, but he's answering by letting his fire fall upon living sacrifices, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, his people.

And God wants to do it again. I'm absolutely 100 percent persuaded. I've heard from the Lord he wants to do it again.

He wants to answer once again by fire. But what is this fire of God? What is this fire that fell upon Mount Carmel? What was that fire that engulfed that burning bush on the backside of the desert that Moses saw? And when he approached it, he saw it was burning, but it was not being consumed. And God spoke to him from that bush and said, Moses, Moses, take off your shoes.

The place you are standing is holy ground. What was that fire? What was this fire that descended upon Mount Sinai and engulfed that mountain and Moses as he received the Ten Commandments? What was this fire that fell on the day of Pentecost when 120 people were praying and waiting upon the Lord, waiting upon the Father for the promised Holy Spirit? And suddenly this sound of a mighty rushing wind came in and cloven tongues of fire descended upon them and they were all baptized in the Holy Spirit. What was the fire? The fire was the very presence of God.

The fire was the holy, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit of God. This was a revelation of the glory of God, a manifestation of the presence of God, a demonstration of the power of God. And that is the fire we need.

That is the fire we need. We need God himself. We need the Holy Spirit.

And yet in so much of the church today, the Holy Spirit is ignored. He is dishonored. He is grieved, though the Bible says grieve not the Holy Spirit.

He is grieved, though the Bible says quench not the spirit. He is often quenched. He is ignored.

He is often rejected. He is often exchanged for some cheap, crazy counterfeit of false fire that has nothing to do with him. Or the Holy Spirit is never even talked about and never mentioned for fear of some counterfeit that we once saw.

Or he's never mentioned for fear of us losing control because we like to be in control. We like to be in charge. And often he's never mentioned.

Will you come reason with me for a moment and consider the pattern going all the way back from the Old Testament and see how God over and over and over is rejected by his people? If you go to the Old Testament, you see that God the Father is revealing himself to his chosen people, Israel. And he says to them, I will be your God and you will be my people. I'll be a father to you.

You'll be my sons and daughters. I will be your king. And their response so much of the time.

We think it'd be better to go back to Egypt. That's good. You want to be our king, but we want an earthly king like all the other nations of the world.

And God gave them an earthly king, King Saul. But over and over again, they reject God the Father. So we come to the New Testament and God the Father sends his only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

And when Jesus came, the scripture says he came to his own, but his own received him not. They rejected the son of God and they rejected the son of God all while at the same time saying, God, God is our father. And Jesus said to them, if God were your father, you would love me.

If you knew him, you would know me. Jesus said, I and the father are one. Not only did they reject God the son, but they crucified him on a cross.

In the Old Testament, they reject God the father. In the New Testament, they reject God the son and crucified him. And Jesus died.

He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sent the promise of his Holy Spirit. And what is happening in so much of the church today? We are rejecting the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit of God. God the Father, we acknowledge.

God the son, yes, he saves us. He's our savior. But what about God, the Holy Spirit, the one who Jesus said, it's good for you that I go away.

If I go, I'm going to send the comforter, the counselor, the Holy Spirit of God. Folks, you cannot reject one without rejecting the other. We serve one God and he is he is in three distinct persons, father, son and Holy Spirit.

Listen to this verse from the New Testament, 2nd Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 14. The apostle Paul says, and you'll see the whole Trinity here. The apostle Paul says, now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God that is the father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

May the love, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do any of us have a problem with that? No, we accept the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the love of God, the father.

Anyone have a problem with that? We embrace the love of God, the father. But what about this and the communion fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all? He is the fire we need. It's his presence, it's his

power, it's his leading, it's his anointing.

It's his unction. There was a Chinese Christian that came to America and visited church after church after church. And at the end of his journey, somebody asked him, what stood out to you about American spirituality, the church in America? He said the amazing things that the church in America can accomplish without the Holy Spirit.

A.W. Tozer said if the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would notice. But if the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church in Acts, 95 percent of what they did would stop and everybody would know the difference. He is the fire we need.

And when he comes and manifests his presence and his power and his glory, what happens? Good old fashioned conviction of sin. When's the last time you saw a good old fashioned conviction of sin? I know you've seen it in this church, but how much more we need. The Holy Spirit will come to convict of sin, righteousness and coming judgment.

When the when the fire fell on Mount Carmel, there was one response from all the people. They fell on their faces before God. Good old fashioned conviction of sin.

He is God and we have sinned against him. Another thing that happens is there'll be an exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. All the people cried out and said, the Lord, he is God.

The Holy Spirit always glorifies Christ, the son, that's the fire we need. But before it came, Elijah had to prepare the way. And there were two means here of preparation that we're going to look at tonight.

The rest will look out tomorrow morning, Lord willing. We're going to look at the altar and the cross. I want you to notice when God called Elijah to prepare the way, he called him to put first things first.

The very first thing that Elijah does is repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down. Verse 30. 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. The altar of the Lord was broken down. It was lying in ruins.

What a sad, tragic, desperate day it is when the altar of the Lord is broken down. The first time God opened my eyes to that, I wept. In other words, there was a time on top of Mount Carmel when somebody, God had a people, he had someone that had an altar up there who was worshiping him in spirit and in truth.

God had someone whose heart was fully devoted to him. He had someone who loved him, someone who feared him, someone who walked with him. But it must have been a long time ago.

It was sometime in the past. Now the altar of the Lord was scattered. It was broken down.

That sacred place of worship, that sacred place of devotion to the Most High God and fellowship with God was lying in ruins. It was broken down. And there's something always about a broken altar, brothers and sisters.

A broken down altar always leads to a broken hearted God. A broken hearted God. Why was it broken down? It's because God's people made a decision to go after their idols and the idols of the world.

And they decided to embrace the worship of what everybody else in the country was worshipping. They started worshipping Baal, all the while saying, yeah, we're the people of God, but we'll still worship over here at the altar of Baal. And the altar of the Lord lied in ruins, broken down, and the heart of God was broken.

Can the heart of God really, can God really have a broken heart? In case you doubt that or wonder if that's biblical, I want you to see this scripture. Hold your place in 1 Kings 18 and go to Ezekiel chapter 6. Ezekiel chapter 6, verse number 9. This is God speaking. He says, and they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations, whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken.

God says, because I am broken. I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols. And they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.

Like a good and faithful husband whose wife left him for other lovers and began to cheat on him and then decided just to come back and forth whenever she needed something. God says, my heart is broken. My heart is broken by the idolatry of my people as they lust after their idols.

They were unfaithful to God. And what absolutely amazes me about our God, I would think that God being a holy God and needing nothing would just say, that's your choice. I'll cut off the nation of Israel.

I'll start over with another people. But what absolutely amazes me about our God is the absolute love that he has for this unfaithful bride, and he goes after her one more time. Elijah, prepare the way, because one more time I'm going to answer by fire in order to turn the hearts of my people back to me again.

That's our God. A God who is holy and just, but who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, rich in mercy, longing for his people to come back to him in repentance. Prepare the way, rebuild that altar that's broken down, because I want to come and meet with my people again to turn their hearts back to me.

Where do you see that? It's in Elijah's prayer, Elijah in his prayer, he says, Lord, let it be known that you are God. In verse 37, that the people may know that they are the Lord and that thou has turned their heart back again. Elijah built the altar in the name of the Lord, and so must we in order to prepare the way for the fire of the Lord.

But listen, folks, to build up the altar of the Lord, we must first cast down our idols. We must first cast down our idols. I had no idea that Brant was going to lead us in that song about these idols that lead us away from God.

What do you mean, idols? Some would say this is America and we're a civilized country. We don't bow down to statues of wood and stone. We're Christians, don't you know that, Brian? We're Christians.

We couldn't be guilty of something so serious as idolatry. Could we? And I want to tell you that we live in a nation that is steeped in idolatry. And idolatry is much, much more of a problem in the church than we may even realize.

And idolatry is much, much more of a problem in some of our lives than we even realize. It is a very real sin right now today. Remember the first commandment that God gave us of all 10 commandments.

Thou shall have no other gods before me, he said. Jesus said it this way. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.

This is the first and greatest commandment. That you love him with all that is within you. So if there's anything or anyone that you love more, fear more, treasure more or trust more than God, that is your idol.

And that's what must come down and we must take it, we must deal with them radically. It's time to repent by casting down our idols and giving Christ alone his rightful place as Lord of all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. Because when you repair the altar of the Lord and you build the altar of the Lord, the altar of the Lord only has one Lord, one master and Jesus is his name.

There is no other but the King of kings and Lord of lords. And so the question tonight to make it personal, make it plain. Is Jesus Christ truly the Lord of all your heart? Is he the Lord of every part of your life? Do you love him with all that is within you? Does he have all the keys to your heart? F.B. Meyer shared his story, his testimony one time.

He was preaching, teaching the Bible, revered as a man of God. But there was some young men that came into his life that were full of the Holy Spirit, Hudson Taylor and C.T. Studd. And F.B. Meyer was convicted every time he was in their presence.

And he said one day to C.T. Studd, he said, C.T., you too have something that I don't have, I'm missing. You're full of joy, you're full of fire. You're full of love for the Lord.

And C.T. Studd said, Mr. Meyer, we don't have anything that you yourself can't have. And F.B. Meyer said, then tell me how to get it. And C.T. Studd said, have you given yourself wholly to God? And he was quiet because he knew immediately what he was hanging on to deep inside of his heart.

He said he could often suppress it until at times when he would be at a conference and the Lord would resurface it. Or times he would be around other godly, godly people and the Lord would bring it to the surface. Or when it came time for communion and he had passed out the bread and the wine, there it was again.

And he always put it back. It was a back corner of his heart, he said, just a closet way back there. I wanted to hang on to myself, he said, but I was miserable that day.

And that night I got on my knees in my room and I determined to settle it once and for all. I cried out to the Lord in prayer. And as I did, I handed out to the Lord this key of my will, this ring of my will with keys on it.

And it was as if the Lord Jesus took it in his hand and he said to me, are they all there? And I said to the Lord, Lord, they're all there but one. And the Lord Jesus took the keys and he put them back into the hand of F.B. Meyer and he turned to walk out of the room. F.B. Meyer cried, Lord, don't go, don't leave.

And Jesus turned around and said, if you do not trust me with all, you do not trust me at all. He said, Lord, there's one key to this dark closet in my heart and I can't seem to give it up. But if you will reach in and take the key, you can have it.

And he said that day in that moment, the Lord Jesus took that key and he said, I knew what he would do. He began to clean it out and he said, I was never the same again. I could say after that, Lord Jesus, I am all yours.

You know, there's a difference, brothers and sisters, between being able to say I have him, then he has me. We all, if we're born again and saved, we all have the person of the Holy Spirit living on the inside of us. But there's a tremendous difference between me having the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit having me.

I know of a preacher that often when he was an itinerant preacher, when he would come home, his two little girls would run to him. Daddy's home. And he said one day the oldest got there first and he picked her up in his arms and the little one was coming from behind.

And when she got to him, she grabbed his leg and the older daughter looked down at the younger sister and said, I have all of daddy. I have all of daddy. And the little girl looked up and started to cry and he reached down and picked her up and she looked at her older sister and said, daddy has all of me.

Daddy has all of me. Does Jesus Christ have all of you tonight? This is preparing the way the altar of the Lord has to be rebuilt. Does he have all of you, every part, all the keys? How about who comes first in your life? Who has first place in your heart, in your home, in your ministry, in your business, when it comes to your time? When it comes to your money, who has priority when it comes to your thoughts? What consumes the most your conversation, who do you talk about the most? Listen carefully, what do you run to first for comfort when you're hurting? What do you run to first for security when you're afraid? For pleasure or satisfaction when you're lonely, because that is your God.

That is your idol. And it's high time, beloved, that we deal ruthlessly with the idols in our life. There's no other way to prepare the way of the Lord.

There's no other way than to return to true worship and build the altar of the Lord, but to first cast down every idol. Anything in my life that is getting in the way of my relationship with God. Anything in my life that is preventing me from a closer and more intimate walk with Jesus Christ is an idol that must come down.

And the times are critical. The time is urgent. The time is now.

It must come down. We must be radical and ruthless about taking them down. What is it in your life that you need to get rid of? Oftentimes, it's that which you get so angry and upset about when Pastor Shane preaches on it.

For some of us, it's food and see what can be an idol for one maybe is not for another. It's whatever it is that becomes your master. For some, food is a good, wonderful servant.

For others, it's a terrible master. Some of us eat to live. Others of us live to eat.

If it becomes my master and that first thing I run to for comfort, for security, for pleasure, instead of first going to the Lord, that's an idol in my life. Don't take it lightly. It can be sports.

Are they your servant or your master? Video games, hobbies, careers, that screen that stays in the middle of our room and all the furniture is faced toward it. Is it a servant or a master? How many precious hours do we waste away? How much time does it rob us from the prayer closet? What is it that dominates your mind and how about the phone? If your phone is your servant, nothing to say to you about it tonight, but

for some of us, it has become our master. You take it to bed with you.

It's the last thing you look at before you go to sleep. You take it to the bathroom with you. It's the first thing you grab when you wake up in the morning.

You can't leave it in another room for one hour to go and pray. You say, but what if somebody calls? I want to tell you somebody already called and he's waiting for you in the prayer closet. Suppose somebody texts me and I miss the text.

Somebody's already text. He's given us a text message, 66 books, and he wants you to know him. And you must put him first, you shall have no other gods before me.

And I'll tell you, for many, that phone has become an altar upon which you worship. Call it what it is. If I can't turn it off for an hour to go pray, it's an idol.

If it's robbing me of precious time in the scriptures and alone with God, it's an idol. Turn it off, put it away, leave it in another room. And get alone with Jesus and say, Lord, no interruptions here.

I give you my whole devotion, my heart, my soul, my time, because you are Lord. To build up the altar, you must cast down the idol. In the Lord's presence, the Bible says, is fullness of joy.

But some of us have exchanged it for worthless, empty entertainment. The Lord has a mighty, mighty purpose and a beautiful plan and a holy calling for someone hearing this message tonight. This I'm sure of it because I heard it from the Holy Spirit.

But you are missing it right now. You're missing it because you've given yourself to another master. You're addicted to the screen.

And some are addicted to what's on the other side of that screen. Some of you are worshiping at an altar of pornography. And it is killing you.

It is destroying your soul. There are demons behind that that want to enslave you. God has a purpose.

He has a calling. He wants to use you mightily for his glory. He wants you to know him.

And that poison is so corrupting your mind and blinding your spiritual vision and dulling your conscience and corrupting and defiling your heart. You're withering away spiritually. And God with a broken heart says, come back.

Come back, my people, deal ruthlessly with that idol and do whatever it takes to lay the axe to the root of it. Crush it. Flee from it like you're fleeing from the plague.

Bring it to the light. Do whatever it takes to smash it to pieces. Flee temptation.

Crush these idols. Deal ruthlessly with it and return to God with all your heart, because mark this down in red, my brothers and sisters, underscore it, nail it down. Listen, no purity, no power.

No purity, no power of the Holy Spirit. That's why we have to plow the ground tonight to prepare the way God wants to come and manifest his presence. And demonstrate his power and reveal his glory.

But no purity, no power. No casting down the idols, no faithfulness to God, no fire. If we refuse to forsake our sin, we will never know the fire of God in our life, except for that day under the fire of God's judgment.

That's the only kind of fire you will know if you refuse to turn from your sin and come to Christ. If this is the Lord's altar, there can be no mixture. There can be no other master.

Look at what he says in verse 21. How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him.

Jesus said no man can serve two masters. You will love the one and hate the other. You'll be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and Mammon. For some, money is an idol. Money is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master.

And if it's consuming your thoughts, it's a master. You cannot serve both. You cannot have both.

The idol of Mammon has to come crashing down and all of Jesus have my heart. If Jesus is Lord, follow him. If money is your God, go build an altar for it and continue to worship it.

But please take off the mask or whatever else the idol is. It's all of him. He's worthy of all of our heart, every part of it.

No faithfulness, no fire, no purity, no power. But here's the good news, beloved. Beloved, if you are willing to cast down every idol and to repent, thanks be to God.

God made a way for the purity of his people. He made a way for purity so that we can know power of the Holy Spirit. He made a way for us to be clean and forgiven.

Notice the next thing that Elijah does after he repairs the altar of the Lord that was broken down. He repaired that altar in verse 33 says, and he put the wood in order. He put the wood in order.

Now, Elijah is just arranging the wood for the offering that he's going to place on that wood to get it ready for the fire. He put the wood in order to place the sacrifice upon it. But that wood simply points us to some more wood.

Two big beams of wood that were fastened together. And on that wood, God placed his perfect sacrifice, his spotless, sinless, holy, precious, undefiled, perfect son. And Jesus died on that wood and that wood must be put in order.

The only way for me to have a clean heart is to go by way of the cross. The only way you and I could be forgiven was that Jesus Christ, the perfect lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, would die on that wood, would be crucified on that wood, would shed his precious and holy blood on that wood. And when he did, he died for the punishment of your sin that you wouldn't have to come under that punishment.

He died for the payment of your sin, so your sin debt is paid in full for those who believe. He died for the purifying of your heart and your soul. There is a way for the people of God to come before God with pure hearts and clean hands, and it's by way of the cross.

Hallelujah, it's the way of the blood, the precious blood of Jesus. And through faith in Christ and his precious blood, you are totally forgiven. You are totally set free.

You are washed clean. You are washed whiter than snow. It's because of that cross that my past sins are blotted out once and for all.

Hear that, someone who has their past always haunting you, the weight of past guilt, the weight of past sin and past regret. Once you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you transfer your trust upon him and what he did at Calvary when he died on that cross and shed his precious blood. God the Father says, now you are forgiven and your sins and iniquities I will remember no more.

You are clean. You are forgiven. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Hallelujah. That's good news. Purity is possible.

And at that cross, Jesus broke the power of sin so it no longer has to be my master. He broke the power of canceled sin, he set the prisoner free, his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me. Hallelujah.

There's no other way to be made clean, to be made pure, to be made forgiven, but by way of the cross. First, purity, then power. And thanks be to God that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God says in Isaiah 118, come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. What is so clean and pure as freshly fallen snow? And though we may sit in here tonight, defiled and stained by sin and darkness, terrible things that we've committed against the holy God, by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, you can be made clean, pure as a spotless virgin, clean, pure, holy, forgiven.

That's the power of the blood. What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus. The wood must be put in order.

Remember, we cannot know the power till we go by way of the cross, till we have our sins completely forgiven and we're made, we're reconciled with the holy God through faith and the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah. First, forgiveness of sin, then the fire of the Holy Spirit, first the cross, then Pentecost.

And at the cross, not only is this wood that's put in order, not only is that cross where Jesus Christ died for us, but it's also where Jesus Christ calls us to come and die with him. He calls us to come and lay down our lives. This is how he said it.

Luke chapter nine, verse twenty three. Jesus said, if anyone will be my disciple, if anyone will come after me, let him deny himself. And take up his cross daily and follow me.

If Jesus is Lord, follow him. And know when you follow him, it involves putting the wood in order, taking up the cross, denying yourself and dying with him so that we might be raised to newness of life and know his resurrection power. No cross, no Pentecost, no purity, no power.

Let him take up his cross daily and follow me. And what does that cross mean? That cross means wholehearted commitment tonight. Wholehearted commitment.

I think it was A.W. Tozer that said one thing about it. When you saw a man take a cross and carry it up a hill, you knew one thing. He wasn't coming back.

When Jesus Christ opened his arms up, spread his arms on that wood and opened up his hands, there was no turning back. What is this cross an emblem of? Wholehearted commitment. When you call to follow Jesus, you're called to not look back.

Set your hand to the plow and no looking back, but know it. This is what it means. The cross, it's all of him.

It's all for him and for his glory. But look at the one who bids you come. He is the one who forsook his all for you.

He is the one who laid down his life for you. And the question is taking up that cross, is it worth it? Look at him. Is he worth it? Is he worthy? Wholehearted commitment.

Yes, Lord. What else does it mean? It means suffering. You will suffer.

All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. It's not going to be a bed of roses this side of heaven. We'll have seasons of comfort.

We'll have seasons of pleasure and rest, but we're also going to suffer persecution. And Jesus said in this world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer because I've overcome the world. That cross is an emblem of pain.

It's an emblem of rejection. You will be hated by the world. Jesus said the world hated me.

If it hated me, it's going to hate you. The world loves its own. You're not going to be liked everywhere.

You're not going to be accepted everywhere. If you follow Jesus, if you take up the cross to follow him, it speaks of sacrifice. But what is sacrifice again, when love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life and my all.

The cross means death, death to my self-centered living, death to all selfishness, death to bitterness and unforgiveness. That has to die. Why? Because I've been forgiven for so much.

When you take up that cross, my brother, my sister, there's no room for you to hold a grudge anymore. Wholehearted commitment, I choose to forgive because I've been forgiven much, regardless of what's happened to me. God is just.

God is the judge. You leave it to him, but you forgive because at that cross, you have to die to your unforgiveness, die to bitterness. That cross is above all an emblem of love.

It points in every direction. It points upward, which tells me that God's love for us is higher than the highest heavens. It knows no end.

It points down, which says God's love is deeper than the depths of the deepest sea. It points to the east and the west, which says God's love for us is farther than the east is from the west. If you go east, you'll always be going east.

If you go west, you'll always be going west. There is no end to this love of God. It's a boundless love.

It goes beyond reason. Beyond understanding, beyond comprehension. And God calls us when you take up that cross, I'm calling you to love those I died for, just like I love you.

Starting in your home, it's an emblem of love. When I was a young man and struggling with letting go of some things, knowing the Lord was calling me, I'm not a poem writer at all. But at this point, the Lord gave me some words and I jotted them down and I've never forgotten them because it was such a personal message to me.

It was simply this, his very own disciple, Christ invited me to be, he'd lead me in a way I could not clearly see. His invitation was spoken so very lovingly as he said, my child, follow thou me. I said, but Lord, where are we going and how can I know the way? He said, my child, the cross is the way and the day is today.

For it's in dying that you live and in losing that you gain. Follow thou me, my child, and you will never be the same. To be my disciple, you must follow me.

Now look into my face, my child. Tell me, which way will it be? Only the way of the cross, my Lord. That's the only way for me.

For how can I say no, my Lord, to you who set me free? For when I look into your face, it's love I truly see. Only give me eyes. Give me grace to keep my eyes ever fixed on thee.

His invitation was given so very lovingly when he said, my child, follow thou me. Yes, Lord, I will follow thee. Just give me grace to keep my eyes ever fixed on thee.

Jesus calls you to follow him with wholehearted commitment, complete abandonment to him. Take up that cross, the wood has to be set in order, and when you do, my dear brother and sister, you will know the fire of God. First comes preparation.

Then comes revelation of the glory of God. Build the altar, cast down the idols, put the wood in order, come before God tonight and be clean at the cross and then embrace that cross. And say, Lord, yes, I will follow you because you are the only true and living God.

There's a true story. Is Brother Brandt here? Come on up, brother, if you would. There's a true story.

Many, many years ago, there was a great, great revival in Wales, the Welsh revival, one of the greatest revival this world has ever known. And there were missionaries, many missionaries that were born during that revival. God called them to the mission field.

There was one missionary that God called to go to northeast India. He had a burning heart and a clear call from God to go. The problem was he was going to some tribal people who were known as cannibals, who were known as headhunters.

But this man knew he had heard from God and he picked up his cross, denied himself, and he went all the way. When he got there, he began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And soon there was a man who

was converted, who came to Christ.

Soon after that, that man's wife came to Jesus. Then their two little boys, the whole family was saved. This man was so on fire for the Lord, he began to preach the gospel to his own people.

And many of them began to come to the Lord and be saved. Then the tribal chief heard about it and he saw what was happening and he became very, very angry because all these people are now following this Jesus and leaving their custom and leaving their own gods. So the tribal chief found this first convert and he had them capture him and his wife and his two sons.

He brought the whole family out on public display, gathered the whole village around them. And he said, now I'm giving you one opportunity to renounce your God, this Jesus Christ, and to follow our gods. If you don't do it, we're going to kill both of your sons.

And the archer stood out there with bow and arrows ready to go. But this man had already had an encounter with God one day, and he wrote down some words, kind of like I wrote down when the Lord gave him to me. Only these words were, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.

So he said to that tribal chief, even though his heart was breaking because he loved his children so much, he said, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. The archers drew back their arrows and they shot both of his little boys and they died right before them, him and his wife. The tribal chief said, we're going to give you one more opportunity to renounce this Jesus and keep following our gods.

If you don't do it, your wife will be next. And his response, though he loved his wife and his heart was breaking, he said, I have decided to follow Jesus, though none go with me, I'll still follow. No turning back, no turning back.

And the archers drew their bows and they shot his wife. Grieved as he could be, but knowing he's going to see them again, the chief said, you've got one more opportunity to renounce this Jesus and follow our gods or you will be next. And he said, I have decided to follow Jesus, the cross before me, the world behind me, no turning back, no turning back.

And they drew the bow and they shot this man and he died. But something incredible happened. The preparation was made.

Now the revelation would come that tribal chief under so much conviction, the Holy Spirit fell upon him with such conviction because he just saw this man give his life for the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, this man's God must be God. And he fell on his face and cried out to God for mercy.

And the tribal chief was saved. And he got up and said, I have decided to follow Jesus. He began to preach the gospel.

The gospel spread throughout all those. These were headhunters. These were people that prided in killing their enemies and cutting off their heads and holding their heads for trophies.

And the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ spread through that tribe and multitudes came to Jesus. But first there was preparation. Then came the revelation.

And I want to call tonight knowing, brothers and sisters, you may give your very life. Do you understand that this is not a game, but is he worth it? Is there anyone here tonight who maybe hasn't made the decision yet that will say, I have decided to follow Jesus? I'm making that decision. No turning back.

No turning back. Decisions have to be made when the word of God is proclaimed. It demands a response.

Not to respond is to respond. To hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and to hear I must cast down my idols because God says I shall have no other gods before him. That demands a response.

What will you do with it tonight? Perhaps there's someone here tonight that says it's time. I'm throwing it away. I'm flushing it down the toilet.

I'll break it if I have to. I'll do. Listen, this is what it is.

I'll do whatever it takes. And God, I'm asking you to do whatever it takes, because no purity, no power. For someone else tonight who is wearing the weight of your sin, you've heard the good news that Jesus Christ died on that wood, that cross for you.

And this very night, if you will call upon him, you can be completely 100 percent forgiven, clean, washed whiter than snow if you will come to him in faith. For many of us. It may be that we need this very night to say, Lord, I've been holding back this key, but no more.

I have decided to follow you and I'm giving you all the keys to my heart, no turning back, no turning back. Will you make that decision tonight? Will you say I have decided to follow Jesus? This is the preparation. And believe me, brothers and sisters, we're going somewhere.

You'll be here tomorrow morning. We're going somewhere. We've got to prepare the way.

And this is the only way. There are no shortcuts. There's no plan B. This is the way absolute surrender, total repentance.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/fl42zr-AAEg.mp4>

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