

Coordinators Conf 1974 Pt2

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon emphasizes the need for genuine faith and commitment to God through the story of Elijah's confrontation with Ahab and the prophets of Baal.

Duration: 49:08

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:24, 1 Kings 18:38, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:28, John 3:16, John 10:30, John 14:6

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a scene on Mount Carmel where the people gathered to witness a spectacle between the prophets of Baal and the prophet Elijah. The speaker emphasizes the importance of choosing to follow the Lord rather than being indecisive. The priests of Baal perform rituals and invoke their god, but their efforts are in vain. Meanwhile, Elijah confidently calls upon the Lord and witnesses a miraculous display of fire from heaven, proving the power of the true God. The sermon highlights the significance of genuine devotion and the need to trust in the Lord.

Transcript

September 1974. Thank you for those words of welcome afresh. I'm pleased to be back again today, a bit more on time than yesterday, I'm glad to say.

And I want to turn with you to One King, chapter 18. I'm reminded of the story of a man who was a very garrulous speaker and realising he'd gone on far too long, he turned rather apologetically to the chairman and said, I can't see a clock in the hall. The chairman was very wide awake and with a touch of humor, because that's right, we're going by the calendar on the wall.

Well I've got two watches in front of me now, so I shan't need the calendar after all. I want to talk in terms of, continuing in our study of Elijah, Elijah's triumph. You will recall that God trained this man, he learned quite a bit I trust yesterday, from Scripture, on his training.

Now we learn something of his triumph, how God used this man of faith. We have to remember of course that to be genuinely used by God is not something that's going to come lightly or easily, it involves a path of sacrifice, a path of constant obedience, a path of complete dedication, it's not an easy path to walk. I'm always encouraged when I read the story of Bunyan's children, and I feel that we have to recognise that if we really want to use, it is a glorious thing, and yet it is something of a sacrifice.

Let me take it off its lofty notes and remind you by way of illustration. The story, it must have been apocryphal, was told of a pig and a hen that escaped from a local farm and went down to a local village, and there outside the restaurant there was a menu on the wall. And the hen turned excitedly to the pig and said, look, we're at the top of the menu today, ham and eggs, what has I seen? And the pig turned to the hen and said, Now in a sense that's the Christian life isn't it? It's not just giving God what we can spare, it's giving ourselves, it's a sacrifice.

And in some ways I think that's got such a tremendous truth. Humours where it may lead. So we look at 1 Kings 18.

We conclude on the note that Elijah had been hidden away in the backside of a desert as it were, he had been obscured, and not in the limelight at all. And in chapter 18 verse 1 he is told to show himself, to reveal himself at last. We read in another place in scripture that it was three years and six months after he had been away from Ahab, that had been the period of the drought.

And during this time Ahab had been searching for him high and low, it had not been easy. Ahab had sent out messengers, he had taken an oath of people in the country, in case they had seen him or harboured him or in any way sheltered him, and he was obviously anxious to find Elijah without success until God's time was right and Elijah was commanded to go and show himself. In verse 3 we're introduced to this God-fearing man Obadiah.

Now if you're not familiar with Obadiah do look at verse 3 and a few verses further on. And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. Now Obadiah revered the Lord greatly.

And when Jezebel cut off the profits of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred profits and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water. And Ahab said to Obadiah, Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys that perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive and not even some of the animals. So they divided the land between them and passed through it.

Ahab went in one direction by himself and Obadiah in another direction by himself. We're in 1 Kings 18. Obviously Ahab trusted Obadiah.

He trusted him as though he had eyes of his own. He called him Ahab. And he trusted him as a man of integrity.

He wouldn't just quarter his particular horses there but the king's horses and mules. It's interesting actually that Ahab was much more concerned for his animals to alleviate the problem than for the cause of the problem, his own misdoings. The cause of the problem, the drought, was Ahab and his people's sins.

And rather than find the remedy, he wanted to simply alleviate the suffering for the animals when he could have put the matter right. But we're introduced to Obadiah because Obadiah had something to teach us. He feared the Lord greatly and if you look on to verse 12, it was from his youth upwards.

And yet here he was in the top position, so it might seem, as Lord Chancellor in Ahab's regime. A cabinet minister perhaps, shorn of some power, but almost a number two for Ahab. Now this is interesting because he had such a senior position in court and he was a man who was God-fearing and Ahab wasn't.

And yet Ahab recognised the value of the man whose standards he opposed. Ahab allowed the worship of Dael, he allowed Jezebel for practices that people were given over to, and yet Ahab admired the

standards of Obadiah, whom he disobeyed. Now that's interesting because it means that even right at the top you will find people who admire integrity and honesty, a sense of God's presence within the person, a recognition of their worth, and might even elevate from the top of it without necessarily following it.

It might even be part of the story of Potiphar and Joseph rising prominently in Potiphar's house. And it's interesting also in verse 4 to notice that God raised up Obadiah earlier on as a friend to his persecuted people, the prophets. Just when they apparently had nobody in the senior position, God introduced the man he'd been declaring and whose heart he'd been keeping, Obadiah.

And he managed to rescue a hundred of them and hide them by 50 in caves and fed them. God provided his friend for his persecuted people. If God ever wants to, you know God has it many times in Scripture and still today.

Then we're introduced to Elijah's challenge. I think we can assume this was really rather a magnificent confrontation. Elijah said to Obadiah, go and tell the king that I'm here.

And Obadiah said, but he's been looking everywhere for you. And when I go and tell him, why you will disappear I'm sure because he's been looking everywhere for you. And then the king will, well he'll kill me though, I'm the Lord Chancellor.

My life is not worth it. He's so furious. Please don't allow this to happen.

Look, I've revered the Lord from my youth upwards. And Elijah said, don't you worry, I will today show myself to the king. So off Obadiah went and when Ahab heard, he came to meet him.

Now picture the scene in verse 17 onwards. Ahab was hot, living in a drought. He was obviously covered with dust, there was a lot of dust in that part of the world.

He was probably frustrated. Hardly believing his own eyes. He could hardly give credibility to what he was confronted with.

So here was he looking for the man, and then the man had appeared and said, I want to see you. He was rebellious, I noticed. He was still accused of it.

He was unrepentant. These years of difficulty had not happened to him. God's visitation, far from making his heart malleable, he was still accused of it.

And he put the blame on Elijah. He was unrepentant. And this was a false accusation.

Are you the troubler of Israel, he said to Elijah? You're the man who's caused all this calamity to us. It's true that God's people do get blamed when they're innocent, and sometimes blamed for when they do the right thing. Blame is a very easy thing to attach.

It usually means that the person for whom it should be attached has God's feet in the process. And I think that Christians will always find themselves being blamed by those who disagree with them, by those who reject their standards, blamed for all sorts of things which they may not have done, and therefore not given credit. But why should we imagine that credit is due to us? Recently I copied out of the illustrated Times of India, I hope to get that right, it's published by the Times of India, but it's called the Hindustan Times, and it contains the following quotations about the saga of Christian achievement.

No credit. Probably we should get blamed. We're getting the door closed to our faces for much of the interview, as we know.

But this is what an Indian paper wrote. Christian Endeavour has given India over 150 colleges, 2,177 high schools, 240 technical schools, and 150 teachers' training schools, 620 hospitals, 670 dispensaries, 86 leprosy centres, 713 orphanages, 87 homes for the aged, 44 agricultural settlements, 27 industrial centres, and several institutes for the blind, the deaf, and the handicapped. The article concludes, what community has done as much for our country? The right of Indians.

We don't have to get credited. Why should we? But we strangely also get the blame, often, for things that don't happen or go wrong. Not necessarily on a national scene, but on a local situation.

The Christians are blamed and we must accept it. But Elijah, far from allowing Ahab to get away with his false accusation, makes it rebound upon him. And aflame with righteous indignation, he said, it's not I who's troubled Israel, but you.

You're the troubler of Israel. You, with your double standards, and your false worship, and your insincerity, you, with your responsible position, have led others astray. You are the culpable one, because you were the responsible one.

And as a leader, you carry that responsibility, Ahab. Now, this is dangerous talk, because our thoughts, if Ahab had been prepared to kill his Lord Chancellor, because Elijah had vanished as the Will of the Wisps, surely Elijah said the wrong thing. He was quite prepared to kill Elijah.

But such courage met with a remarkable return. Having thrown down the gauntlet and the peaceful opposition, and the divine inspiration, he ordered Ahab to produce the prophets of Baal, and the other prophets, who'd eaten at Jezebel's table. Now, note Elijah's authority.

After all, he was only a wandering prophet. He probably looked pretty disheveled. I don't know how he managed to cut his hair all these years in the desert, and whether his clothes were a bit tatty.

And I don't know what he looked like, but Ahab the king recognized authority when he met him. He recognized that Elijah had authority given to him, vested in him, coming out of him. And here was this king told to summon all the prophets together.

Now, they were scattered in the various temples and groves. And also, he was told to send out an edict throughout the land and summon all the people. Well, this was a difficult thing for Ahab to do.

But he obeyed. Now, to Henry's commentary, perhaps he hoped that by gathering all the people, Elijah would demonstrate a miracle by sending rain in front of everybody, and so he was prepared to do it. Or perhaps he just recognized that Elijah had the whip's hand.

But either way, it was authority. And the man of God has got an authority, a vested authority. It's not a low-making authority, but something that God has given to him.

And it should and might well be apparent on the crucial occasions when it's needed. So Ahab, under these instructions, sent, in verse 20 of 1 Kings 18, to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people and then challenged them, how long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him.

But if Baal, then follow him. Picture the scene, if you can get your imagination to play upon it. This was going to be a very real spectacle.

The French would say, you can go and spect up. This was the daddy of a show. The whole concourse of people were to come together on Mount Carmel.

But wait a minute. It had the smell of death about it somehow, for the side that lost would be killed. Yes, it was an arena of a spectacle that one side had to lose.

Picture the scene that was following. The surly priests, very shuffling columns of dust. People moving forward.

Were they eager? Were they dull? We don't know. A huge, unconvinced of this we know, sea of unsympathetic humanity coming forward. And when challenged, they wouldn't answer.

Nobody would take the lead. They all waited for the next man to speak. They wouldn't answer in a word.

Haven't we met this so often? People not willing to expose their position, rather hiding behind the box. Not willing to come into the audience. There may well have been some sincere people there who would have liked to have said something.

But after many years of living in an alien society, as it were, where Baal was worshipped and the true God was hardly known, they weren't prepared to stick their necks out. And so Elijah's challenge got no response. How long will you live? If the Lord is God, follow him.

But if Baal, follow him. Now you would have imagined that was logic. But people don't respond to logic.

Isn't that the shame of it? You present a wonderful case of the deity of Jesus, the evidence for the resurrection, etc. And the logic falls on deaf ears. The will is not moved.

The heart is not softened. The spirit of God is needed to break down that resistance so that they wish to respond by the will in an act of commitment. And these people were not ready for it.

The logic of Elijah did not provoke them to respond. Now learn something from that. That we can be very logical, devastating, very disappointing that people had taken notice.

And it's apparent what they ought to do. You might say to people, there's only one thing that's certain in this life, only one thing, and that is that it'll end. What are you going to do after? Are you ready to have one certainty in that? You make all sorts of provisions for things that you think might happen, or you hope won't happen, and so you protect yourself against them.

But the one thing that's bound to happen, have you made any provisions for that? And such devastating logic doesn't seem to bring the response we want. And so it is there. People wouldn't answer.

And I note it also that all the adversities to which they had gone through had not stopped them then. You know, people do face tragedy, don't they, in their own domestic scenes. You meet them.

You may have had it close to your own life. I speak sensitively. And you would imagine that people would automatically do that.

They might open and let it go. And some are. But not all.

And here are these people up against a situation which is beyond them. Droughts and so on. But they haven't turned.

There has been a revival in Ethiopia down in the south. Tens of thousands of people have come forward for baptism. But I don't think it's connected with the drought.

There has been tragedy in Bangladesh of a great order. Three million killed in the birth of this country in bloodshed. And those people are much more open because it's now a secular state as opposed to an Islamic state.

They're not turning in droves in particular. Oh, yes, up in the north, in Ma'an and Sinjar and Korah, not the Daraa. There are people turning.

But these are largely the hill people who are animists and not the Muslims. Yes, there are groups of Muslims way down in the south, in Chandragona, next to the Christian hospital at the leprosy centre. There are a lot of people who have been genuinely regenerated and baptized.

But not thousands, tens of thousands, but nearly all of those gone through. What about the floods they just had? Up to 45% of the country inundated, those which make people realise yet again they're inadequate in front of deity. They are a religious people.

But no. Adversity does prepare the ground but does not provoke a response. So, Elijah gives them a challenge.

His challenge is, let's have a visual aid. And we'll prepare two sacrifices. And the sacrifice that's consumed by fire, let that be a demonstration of who the genuine God is.

If Baal will send fire on the sacrifice of the prophet of Baal, then we will believe in Baal. But if the Lord God Jehovah sends fire upon the sacrifice of his prophet Elijah, the prophet of God, then let us believe in him. And the people at long last responded and said, it's well said.

We'll accept the challenge. We don't mind the odds, even. This seems sensible.

The visual aid will convince us. So at last they had been brought to a position where they were prepared to take a risk. And then we read from verse 23 onwards about the prophet's useless performance.

The two bulls and the willingness of the prophet to do everything possible to enable Baal to respond. The God who answers by fire. Well said, the people said.

Oh, I do believe that the prophet's performance is impressive. They leapt around for hours. They cut themselves.

They invoked Baal. They cried unto him. They got terribly wound up.

I imagine that they were desperately in earnest. Don't let the cross fall on people who are really in earnest and looking for God. But some of them are genuine, very genuine in their devotion.

They weren't all charlatans. Know the agony of silence and modularity. Haven't you sometimes, as you've been in other parts of the world, seen the devotion of devotees to temples or other forms of divine worship? And seen the rivers which they will go through.

And been hurt by them. But they can be so devout. And yet that it can be so misguided.

Across one of those narrow rope bridges in Nepal, bouncing along. You know, you've got to get your step right or the bridge comes up and hits you on it. So you're not quite ready for it.

You know what they say, you're not. And I was thoroughly enjoying this early morning walk across this bouncing bridge. And I looked down and I saw, what was to me not a familiar sight, but a man standing in the shallow water and offering up a bowl of water to the sun, worshipping the sun in the early morning.

And I thought, I wonder if he comes here every morning. I wonder if this is his daily ritual when he could be with his family or his farm. And he comes here for hours and they sprinkle the water over him in different ways.

He went down and invoked the God again. This is his worship. Earlier this year I was in Kathmandu.

And I was with my wife and we were outside the Temple of the Living Goddess. And I was being good for it, encouraging. And then I was horrified.

Standing there in the blazing sun was a girl, I don't know how old she was, probably about 13. She didn't have a great deal on except white powder or white ash. And she was holding a begging bowl outside the Temple of the Living Goddess.

Her lips were very red and painted up. And yet her face was white. And then I looked and I saw that her tongue was protruding between her lips and was skewered.

So she couldn't put it back in her mouth. It was kept out all day long by her masters. By somebody who hoped in some way that this was going to please the Goddess.

I was appalled. I didn't know how genuine it was or how charlatan it was. But it was somebody's presumed attempt to please the God by suffering.

The agony of silence in the deity. Grouping for God can be a torment to people. And we need to be sensitive.

But the God who answered by fire, they said would be the real God. Let me tell you the story of Arjun. Arjun was a young man from central India who had obtained his B.A. pass from Nagpur University.

His B.A. failed at it and he lost something. But B.A. pass was even more important. So feeling very pleased with himself, he hurried back to his village, a long way away.

And as he drew near, he dusted off the dust from his patent leather black shoes, imagining the welcome he would get from his family. But as he crossed the last field, he heard a strange wailing sound coming from his village. There was a mountain's tear in his heart.

He had a premonition that it lay at his doorstep. Pressing through the crowd around his house, he went in to find that the sister of whom he wished to kill had just died. What good was his degree, B.A. pass, when his sister had been taken in death? Where was the God who had taken her? Where had this God taken her to? Mechanically he went through the ritual funeral rites of the Hindu religion, lit the butter lantern at the family shrine, went through the incantations, went through the days of mourning, following them.

But resolved to find out, he told his parents to agree that he, the new breadwinner, should suddenly go off. But he said he must look for God, and so he gone and sat on the road to the holy man of Kadi. And went on pilgrimage to look for God.

He travelled up from central India to the north. He visited all the temples and enquired of the priests. Can you tell me where God is? And the almost invariable answer he received was, you can't know.

It would be unknowable. Not that quite. He pressed on.

He went to Varanasi, the sacred city on the Ganges, and stood in the waters of the Ganges up to his neck and recited a hundred names of deities. But without effect. He continued in his search, but finally disillusioned.

After two years he started off on his return journey. He hitched a lift in a bullock cart. Two miles an hour to have a good taste of life in India.

The farmer said to him, what have you been doing? And Arjun said, I've been looking for God. So the farmer said, where did you find him? And Arjun, who by now knew the path, said no. And you can't know the unknowable.

And the farmer said, but I know God. And proceeded to introduce him to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The rest of that story on the God who answers by fire will cost you thirty-five cents.

Forgive me for telling the experts how to sell books. Or even presuming that I was telling you something you didn't know. Then we move on in Elijah having taunted them with this.

To his own part, his bold triumph. Verse thirty. Their performance was useless and accused nothing apart from exposing the genuineness of some people's agony in not getting through to God.

Do not miss that, please. And then comes Elijah's turn. He enacted a tabla, a visual aid.

And all his confidence went into this. Verse thirty. Then Elijah said to the people, come near to me.

And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob.

To whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be your name. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar as great as would contain two measures of seed.

And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. This was to be a visual aid that was a teaching mission. It was in front of a vast concourse of people.

Sheer oratory would not win. This had to have results. Some of us have a very smooth tongue.

But on this occasion Elijah's oratory was of no avail as in fact nothing happened. His faith, his confidence, everything went into this. The blood and guts of real religion.

It was fought with sinew and muscle and sweat and death. Notice, as we know from another part of scripture, that Elijah was a man of like passion as we are. He was human.

He wasn't an angel or an alabaster carving. Elijah was a real man. And I bet his hands were clammy with sweat.

And his heartbeat perhaps increased to two hundredths of a minute. His adrenaline was pumping round. This was a very crucial thing.

A great crowd. He repaired the altar. It was no new religion.

It was no novelty. This was a teaching occasion of what had been true in the past to tell tribes of Israel. Was the crowd restless or fascinated? We don't know.

But we come to a rather crucial point in the story. Would Elijah obey God all the way? The crunch was, would he in fact dig a trench and fill it with water? Wasn't his asking a bit too much? Supposing somehow it didn't come off? God had told him to, but he wasn't exactly making it easier for God. He wasn't helping God.

Some of us think you've got to help first. Because God needed helping. Why this was making it harder for God? Because he was instructed to do what he was doing.

And he was prepared to do it. He might have settled for a little convincing fire. But no, he decided it was necessary to dig a trench.

Till he wasn't committed. He put the wood in order and cut the bowl. And then he said, Fill four jars or barrels with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.

So capture the scene, it's so human, so real. I dare to say that the angels, armies of the sky were peering into this amphitheater on Mount Carmel. This great scene that was set.

Would he? Or would he chicken out? Would he settle for a little fire? Or would he have the colossal nerve to believe that God could lick up water with fire? What if he only produced a fiasco? A nail biting fiasco. Isn't that what faith is all about? The thing may not come off. Isn't that what faith is all about? But man, you see, he's never seen this miracle done by anybody else.

You and I have heard and read of most miracles that were called upon to perform. Being performed by God in the lives of others. We may never have experienced them ourselves.

But we've heard that this happened. That Elijah had never ever heard of this happening before. So ridiculous.

He'd never seen it done before. The angel armies held their breath. Would he? Or would he not? And then the instructions.

Fill four barrels with water. Hallelujah, how they must have cheered. He'd done it.

He'd put his all on the altar with God. And then he said, do it again. Oh, they hugged their sides with glee, I expect.

And then he said, do it again. What rejoicing. The battle was won.

Before the first shot had been fired, the battle was won. Winston Churchill, it was, who said, after Pearl Harbor, at the moment of apparent tragedy and defeat, they won, after all. Many a victory can be won

before the visible battle is joined.

The victory of Calvary was won in Gethsemane. It was one easy to beat. Many of us can win a victory in a day that's full before we ever know what that victory's all about, before the day begins.

It's true in every level. Then notice in verse 36, for some reason, there's a respite. Perhaps the people were allowed to, as it were, just think over this, ponder on it.

Because we read, at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near. He'd obviously been away for a little while, leaving it to God. He couldn't make it work.

Please note that. He couldn't make it work. It was God's miracle.

The climax had been reached in his obedience to God in filling the water pot and pouring along the sacrifice. Nothing he could do now could make it work. It was up to God.

And he had chosen to just withdraw and let the whole lesson sink in. Why, all the people talked about it, probably. It was way down the line, way into the distance.

People could hardly see. What would he do? What would he do? The tension was mounting. Oh, all right.

It was God's performance. So we come to the fourth point. God's spectacular vindication.

Verses 36 to 41. Notice the place of prayer in this. Notice how Elijah turned to God in very real intercession.

At the time of the offering, Elijah came near and said, O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel and that I am thy servant and that I have done all these things at thy will. He invoked the Most High and sought his involvement in accordance with his own obedience. The place of prayer in this.

We can never underestimate the role which God requires of us in intercession. I'm always challenged when I read of Abraham in Genesis 18 when Abraham is in a soliloquy almost with God, but then we find it's a dialogue. It's not a monologue.

God is talking back to him. Will you save the city of Sodom if there are 50 people? Oh God, I'm not worthy that I should talk like this. Who am I but dust and ashes? And God said, yes I will.

So then he said, if there are 45, will you do it? And he waited earnestly and very hesitantly. God said, yes I will do it if there are 45. And so Abraham said, well I'm not worthy, O Lord, far be it from me to even talk to you like this.

But if there are only 40 of us, will you do it for 40? And God said he would. God hastily encouraged this man to go on praying by responding to him. And then you can almost hear Abraham's breath coming in gulps because he increases the interval from 5 to 10.

If there are only 30 there, would you do it? And God said he would. He said, O Lord, the man just asked again, if there are only 20 there, would you do it? And then the final summoning of his faith, he said, supposing there are only 10, would you do it for 10? And God said he would. And you might notice in this that it was an enormous exercise of faith on Abraham's part.

He wasn't repeating himself. It wasn't a prayer of repetition, but a prayer of progression. He was asking for more, a bigger miracle.

He came with the utmost reverence and gift of the presence of the Most High. He didn't crash in. He was aware of his own unworthiness.

The unworthiness of the asker himself and the unworthiness of the people for whom he was asking. Sometimes we think God almost owes it to us to listen and owes it to these people to respond. But Abraham was acutely aware of the unworthiness of all concern.

And God led him on in this progression of faith. And I find here that Elijah is really in the hot spot at the very end. He's pleading with God to reveal himself.

Let it be known that I have done this, O Lord, simply in accordance with your instructions. And then he asks for another thing. Answer me, O Lord.

Answer me. That good people may know that thou, O Lord, art God and that thou hast turned their hearts back. In other words, he was anxious that the people might respond in answer to what they saw.

He didn't just want a victory. He wanted a turning of the people. He didn't want a cheap victory at their expense.

He wanted their repentance and turning again to God. I suppose it would be possible sometimes to be very hard without knowing who we are. So long that we should come out right, even if other people were rather exposed to being stupid in the process.

We want to show that we are with God and that we are saying what God is saying and that we are standing with God in his promises. And sometimes forget that it's all really so that other people too may enter into the mercy of God with us. Not so Elijah.

He wanted them to return as a result. He wanted God to demonstrate his immanence, his power, his uniqueness, his singular distinctiveness, his ability to intervene instantly, his personal involvement with people. He wanted a God whom he knew to demonstrate who he was, that God might be known.

And then in verse 38 it happened. This awesome sight, this frightening phenomenon, this fearsome spectacle of fire falling from heaven. We've grown so accustomed to this biblical truth that we've almost forgotten what terror it must have struck.

Fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. Just like that. Burnt up the wood.

Burnt up the water around it. And then to make the matter complete, actually burnt up the stones of the altar. Consumed the light.

What a frightening phenomenon. What an awesome sight. What a fearsome spectacle to behold.

What did the people do? They responded on their faces. The only thing they could do, they just went straight on. They said, the Lord, he is God.

They were awestruck. They were convinced, but according to Matthew, Henry, not necessarily converted. They acknowledged God as God, but were not prepared necessarily to commit themselves to Him as their

King.

Even in the face of this remarkable demonstration of God's power, they were not necessarily prepared to walk with God in future. They simply acknowledged that He was God. What else could they do? They were afraid.

Now, that's understated. They were terrified of what God had done. Convinced very early that God was God, but not yet ready, perhaps, to follow Him.

We do notice in all of this how much God used this man of faith. And what a lot of faith it did require on Elijah's part. The question confronting us all is, as Christians, would we be willing to risk our all on God? That's quite an answer, really.

Here is Elijah, stepping out, further than he'd ever been before. Would we be willing to risk our all on God? Secondly, would we be willing to capitulate, really, to God's voice of command, as it came to Elijah, and surrender our security? That was Elijah's problem. He was all right hidden away.

Now God said, all right, for the days of security are over. Come into the open and confront this man, and I'll tell you what to do. You've got to perform this miracle, which I will do.

You've got to set the scene. He had to surrender his security. And thirdly, are we willing to trust God with the unknown, and into the unknown? Because that's what Elijah had to do.

It was all an uncharted sea that he was about to enter. And he was afraid to trust God in it. We have to trust God with the unknown, and into the unknown.

It's an expression of our obedience, of our experience of his love. And we have to ask ourselves, are we really willing to risk our all on God? Are we committed in this way? Is Operation Mobilization committed in the same way? What is it committed to, and you who work within it? In the BM&F, we believe that we have been committed and called afresh to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We believe that some of us have been too involved in other things, and at our recent United Conference in Delhi, which was carried in two parts in Lahore for political reasons, which you'll understand, we felt the pressure of God upon us to return to our mandate to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

And this we believe we are now committed to. We want to try and run training courses in this country to help people to understand what it's all about, making disciples of Jesus. We presume that evangelical Christians know, but do they? We presume that Bible colleges teach it, but it's a biblical curriculum.

Do people know how to make disciples of Jesus? We presume because we are disciples that we know how to make other people disciples, but do we? We believe we are committed to this, and you're going to give this a lot of prominence. We believe that we're committed to teach theology to students and leaders, to recruit personnel for Bible schools in Asia. We believe we're committed to engage in medical work, to undertake student evangelism in Pakistan, which we've never done before.

We believe we're called to work, committed to work, amongst Asian students in this country, committed to work amongst Asian immigrants in this country, and have brought over our first Indian pastor to work in Bolton in conjunction with the churches in Bolton, committed to provide funds for literature, committed to step up recruitment of short-term and long-term workers, committed to form a consortium of missionary societies with others engaged in the same work, the Regions Beyond Missionary Union, the International

Christian Fellowship, the United Fellowship of Christian Service. We believe ourselves to be committed because God has called us to this point. Now, I'm sure you are committed in different ways.

I've simply enumerated ours, because I believe that this level of commitment is what Elijah's story is all about. He was committed. He was on the spot.

He was in the hospital. He was prepared to go through with it. He was committed to what he was doing, and if he didn't, he was a failure, and the end was death.

So we are confronted with the question, are we willing to use our own breath? Our aim in our society, and I'm sure in yours, is to meet human needs with the love of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that involves total commitment. Back we go to the chicken and the pig. The pig and the hen.

Total commitment. Shall we conclude with a moment of prayer, really asking God to show us individually where our commitment is either insincere or inoperative, in other words, merely words. We thank you, Father, for this story of Elijah.

We thank you that he was such a man of faith. We realize that he was also human, a man of like passions as we, with blood in his veins, and we thank you that he was prepared to stick his neck out and trust you in an area he'd never been in before, and with such dire consequences if it didn't work. We thank you for this very humoring yet very profound and thrilling story.

Lord, we want to trust you more. We want to know something of the thrill of victory. We want to know something of the power of God flowing through us and through our situations.

And I, and we, O Lord, want to be so committed as to be used. We want to demonstrate your power for the blessing and mercy of other people entering into your forgiveness. We want to, O Lord, not shine as victorious for our sakes or for any misdirected credit for us, but that you may be glorified.

O Lord, we don't know individually what it is you might be saying, but we pray that we may know, that we may be prepared, because of today even, to take a step of faith further than we've ever been before, to recognize that this life you've called us to is a life of commitment, and that there must be fresh commitment, new areas of victory yet to be won. We thank you that the victory of each day can be won before it begins, the victory of a crucial fight which can be assured before it's ever begun. Help us to enter into these victories, but help us, Lord, to make progress day by day within our commitment, within our obedience, within our acceptance of your will.

Make us active participants, we pray. And Lord, rather than multiply words, we simply want to say, today may there be some fresh area in which we shall experience you not only, but that we're prepared to go along with you more than we've done before. May this be real for us, we pray.

And may it result in Christ being formed in us more perfectly. May it result, O Lord, in us being so filled that we are a living example of the sort of things that you want to make known and win an interest in. May today be a day of victory, Lord, and a day of pleasure to you.

Guard our thoughts. Guard our words. Guard our attitudes.

Guard our prayers. Guard us, O Lord, we pray, in such a way that you are glorified thereby. We can ask for nothing else, and we ask for nothing less.

So hear us and accept our thanks for giving us. Let me sing number two. I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art.

I am finding of the greatness of thy loving heart. Tonight may we gaze upon it for thy life-transforming power thou hast made me whole. Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art.

I am finding of the greatness of thy loving heart. Let's stand and sing this. Great thy loving kindness God's are broader than the sea.

Oh, how marvelous thy goodness lavish o'er me. Let my rest in thee, beloved, know the wealth of gracious thine. Know thy certainty of promise and hath made it thine.

Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art. I am finding of the greatness of thy loving heart. Jesus, I behold thee as thou art.

And thy love, so pure, so chaste, satisfies my heart. Satisfies its deepest longing, resupplies its every need. From the depth we rise in blessing, thine is love indeed.

Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art. I am finding of the greatness of thy loving heart. Ever with thy face upon me as I work and wait for thee, fervently meet thy smile, Lord Jesus, earth's dark shadows flee.

Brightness of my Father's glory, sunshine of my Father's face. Keep me ever, trust me, resting, fill me with thy grace. Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art.

I am finding of the greatness of thy loving heart. We have a greater chance to pray for the great work that they are involved in.

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