

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

and Other Sermons

by

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SERMON TWO

THE ANSWER BY FIRE

(I Kings 17:1; 18:1, 2, 17-41)

WE are living in Old Testament times. We are facing what Elijah faced. God is dealing with us as he dealt with the Jews. We must take heed to Elijah's methods and lesson.

CONSIDER OUR PROBLEMS

1. *God has been defied.*

The Ten Commandments are not even a scrap of paper. The Sabbath is desecrated. Marriage vows are denied. A tidal wave of sin is sweeping across our nation, engulfing young and old, high and low, rich and poor, philosopher and peasant. It has entered into the majority of our homes, into almost all of our schools, into our social, economic, political structures. God help us; it has even crept into our churches. Nothing is sacred to it. Godlessness has demoralized our adults and debauched our youth. The standards of our fathers have been smashed. Virtue, honor, decency, purity, have been made the jest of the streets. Licentiousness, infidelity, dishonor have been almost deified. The screen, the radio, the literary page have lent their influence to the saturnalia of corruption.

2. *Christ has been dethroned; His claims disregarded; His message disbelieved; His appeals unheeded.*

His Book has been subjected to every sort of unfair criticism, its pages blotted by every kind of dishonest calumny. His church, His fair bride, has been befouled and besmirched both by the godless lives of her own members and by the slurring disregard of a lost world.

Fewer and fewer of the followers of Jesus are giving themselves to the task of bringing in His kingdom, of carrying on and out His great commission.

Fewer and fewer are the preachers who stand unashamed for the old truths, preaching repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hell has been emasculated, heaven made vapid, the blood ridiculed.

3. America has been depressed.

God has withdrawn His hand from our nation. America is under a curse, a bitter, biting, blighting curse. Wealth such as no nation has ever seen or known parades its glamour by the side of direst poverty. Plenty such as no people has ever been blessed with flaunts its waving fields, its full barns, its bursting granaries in the face of the most bitter want. Restlessness, class consciousness, economic upheaval are hastening America to a fearful day of reckoning. There is no more patriotism, no more honor. Our leaders use their lofty offices to line their pockets, to guarantee their future, to help their friends.

4. Souls are being destroyed.

Men, women, children by the numberless thousands are hurtling at express speed on the road to a devil's hell. With all of our churches and Sunday schools, with all of our organizations and conventions, with all of our preaching missions and evangelistic campaigns, we are not keeping up with the growth in population. More souls are lost than are saved.

In many churches, Sunday schools are diminishing and young people's organizations are decreasing in numbers and in power. Crowds are growing less with every passing Sunday. More than ever pulpits are left empty for the summer vacations, the church door closed for weeks in the year. It is more difficult to get the unsaved into the house of God than ever before. Great sweeping revivals seem to be a thing of the past. Mass evangelism is derided and discounted.

Hundreds of churches are reporting no baptisms year after year. How any church can call itself evangelical, how any preacher can name himself an ambassador from God, without either church or pastor winning souls to Christ, is an anomaly difficult to fathom.

II. CONSIDER GOD'S POWER

Something must happen. We need a visitation from God. An ordinary revival will not do.

Revivals are as common as bargain sales. No one pays much mind to them anymore. Communities are not stirred by them. It is even heartbreakingly difficult to get the church-members to back up their own meetings in their own churches. We must have the unusual. We must have an answer by fire. We must have such a demonstration of God's power that the most wicked among us, the most carelessly indifferent in our midst, will know that there is a God in heaven. God alone can give us such a demonstration. God is ready for He has said, "**Behold Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have separated between you and your God.**" God is able to answer by fire.

1. There is nothing too hard for Him.

There is nothing that can stop Him. He is omnipotent.

Think what He has done for Samuel, for Elijah, for Hezekiah, for Philip, in Samaria, for Paul and Silas, for Martin Luther, for John Wesley and George Whitefield, for Finney, for Moody, for Billy Sunday, for Gipsy Smith! Bad weather, sickness, lack of facilities, nothing can block His power. Nay, there is one thing, just one thing that can dam power—unbelief! The unbelief of His people resulting in sin and surrender to the world can halt God.

2. There is no one too hard for Him.

The wickedest sinner, the lowest, vilest brute is as clay in His hands. That man whom all have given up as an impossible case, God can save. That woman who seems a total loss, God can regenerate. There is no sin too deep, no sinner too steeped in iniquity for God to save. He cleansed lepers, healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, unstopped the ears of the deaf, loosened the tongues of the dumb, lifted the hearts of the sorrowing, turned darkness into light, death to life, sinners into saints. He can do it again.

3. He has answered by fire before.

He answered by fire when He split the sea for Moses,

- When He parted Jordan and smashed Jericho for Joshua,
- When He whipped the Philistines for Samuel,
- When He slew one hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrians in one night for Hezekiah,
- When He raised Lazarus from the dead,
- When He released Paul and Silas from jail.

He answered by fire when He gave Germany to Luther, Scotland to Knox, England to Wesley, America to Moody.

4. He will answer by fire now, here.

He has promised. **“Call unto me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things that thou knowest not.”** **“Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me.”** What promises! What power! **“Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion,”** O church of the living God. Rouse, ye Christians! Rouse, ye soldiers of the cross! Claim the promises of God and batter down the gates of hell.

III. CONSIDER ELIJAH’S PROGRAM

But there are conditions—four of them—if we follow Elijah. These conditions must be fulfilled ere God will bless us, ere God will answer by fire.

1. Elijah called the people together.

Moses did that. So did Joshua. So did Samuel. So did Hezekiah. So did Ezra and Nehemiah. So did Jesus. So must we do.

Let us talk this gospel. Let us talk this Jesus. We cannot all sing. We cannot all preach. We cannot all give much. But, thank God, we can all talk, advertise, invite, call the people together. Let us forget politics, business, sports, weather. Let us talk Christ.

2. *Elijah repaired the altar.*

Even so must we do with our altars. He took twelve stones, one for each tribe. We have no tribes. We have no twelve stones. But each of us has four stones he must use to erect the altar.

First comes *the stone of personal piety*. Oh, brethren, sisters, let us be sure to be right with God ourselves. If there be any unconfessed sin on our hearts, let us bring it to God in humble penitence. Let not anything in us or about us stand in the way of a single lost soul. I do not know how you feel, but personally I would rather burn in hell eternally myself than to have my life stand in the way of a single poor lost sinner.

Second, is *the stone of family worship*. How can we hope to build great Christian characters, stalwart Christian lives, unless our homes are Christian? Let us go back to the family altar, to the hour of prayer and Bible study. Let us erect an altar to God in every home in this church. Let us gather about that altar penitently, patiently, prayerfully. Let us pray through to victory in our homes.

Third, must be placed *the stone of church loyalty*. If you are a Christian; if you love Jesus, you must love His church. It is His. He paid for it. Its foundations were laid in His agony; its walls cemented with His blood. The church needs all its friends because its enemies are numberless. He that serves the church serves Christ.

There never has been, there is not now, and there never can be a revival of any magnitude not connected with the church of the living God. The church is God's evangelizing agency. Only as we back it up in its program, in the name of the crucified Son of God, can we hope to bring the world to the feet of Jesus.

Wesley said in substance, "Give me one hundred men that love nothing but God, and fear nothing but sin, and I will take the world for Christ." Beloved, give Christ, give the Holy Spirit one out of every ten of the members whose names appear on the rolls of the churches, to work, to pray, to pay the price for souls, and we shall see the greatest revival the church has ever witnessed.

Fourth, lay down *the stone of personal witness-bearing, soul-winning*. That seems to have become a lost art in our churches. Few, very few, give themselves to the task of fishing for men. Yet is this stone of the very first magnitude. It is the fundamental requirement every child of God faces. There can be no great victory without great travail for souls.

3. *Elijah stretched out the sacrifice, the bullock, on the altar.*

We have no more altars like that, no more bullocks to offer to God.

But, as we are in the presence of the Lord, each man, each woman, each child has more in value to offer on the altar of Jesus than all the sacrifices that all my people, the Jews, have ever offered in all their smoking hecatombs. We have our hands, our feet, our hearts, our tongues, our selves to give in surrender.

The fire of God will not fall on pews, on preaching, on organization, on buildings, or equipment. It will only fall on a living sacrifice stretched at the foot of the cross.

4. *Elijah prayed.*

He poured out his soul unto God. He took hold of the horns of the altar and hung on. We must pray also, pray as we have never prayed before. We must literally deluge the country with our prayers. We must give God no rest nor peace from our intercessions. We must batter down the gates of glory and set the throne of grace aswim on a tidal wave of prayer. We must pray through.

Some years ago I was in a revival in a small church in Texas. The pastor of the church was a Seminary mate of mine. Great crowds were packing the church auditorium to hear the gospel, but there seemed to be little power. Monday night—Tuesday night—Wednesday night went past. Thursday night I gave the first invitation. Six souls responded for Christ and the church. That was good, but not good enough. We had expected sixty. They were there to be saved, but there was no power.

After the service, as I started out through the door, one of the ushers stopped me and invited me to a prayer-meeting in his home. About ten o'clock that night a few over twenty men and women gathered in that humble home for a session of prayer. Hour after hour the prayer-meeting went on. Over and over again the burden-hearted Christians raised their voices in supplication, but there was no one who seemed to hear nor any voice to answer.

The pastor and myself were kneeling side by side, our knees brushing each other's once in awhile. Suddenly I felt the pastor relax. I opened my eyes and looked. He had stretched himself on his face, forehead touching the bare floor. The prayers went on. It came my turn. I prayed, but it all seemed dry and so unreal.

Then the pastor began to pray. Never to my dying day will I forget that agonized appeal. "Lord, Lord," cried the preacher, "You have led me to shepherd this church. For a year now You have been good to me. You have given me the hearts of this people. You have given me precious souls for Christ and the church. I invited this Jew to come here to help us. I thought we were ready for a great outpouring of Your Spirit. Lord, tell us tonight what is in the way of this meeting. What is blocking our power? Tell it to us, Lord! Show it to us! Make us unhappy in it! Give us the grace to put it away!"

Then that stretched-out man of God began to climb the steep ascent to heaven. He pushed open the pearly gates and walked down the golden streets. He fell on his face before the throne of grace, bowed his head on the crystal pavement, and kept on pleading:

“Lord,” came the cry of his soul, wrung out of the blood of his heart, “you know me. You know my wife, Lydia. You know my boy, Hugh Robinson. You know my seven months’ old baby, Carolyn. Lord! You can take me! You can take my wife! You can take my boy! You can take my girl! Only for Jesus’ sake, give us a revival!”

Beloved, the fire fell. We knew it. We felt it. We almost saw it. We came up from our knees shouting. We embraced each other. We danced about the room. God had heard and answered. One hundred and twenty-six people joined that little church before the two weeks’ meeting ended.

O beloved, here is our chance. Let us put God to the test.

- Let us show God is still on the throne.
- Let us, all together as one soul, give ourselves to calling the people together to repairing the altars.
- Let us stretch our lives before God in abandon of love.
- Let us pray through to victory.

The God of Abraham, of Jacob, of Joseph, of Moses, of Samuel, of Elijah, of Hezekiah, of Paul and Silas, of Luther, of Knox, of Wesley, of Moody, is our God. He will answer by fire.

~ end of sermon 2 ~

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