

Prayer Is Exalting God Not Man

1 Kings 18:36-37; Isaiah 59:1-2

September 30, 2018

Greg L. Price

There are many prayers found in Scripture which teach us how we are to approach God, what should be included in our prayers to God, and what it is that will hinder our prayers to the Lord. The prayer of Elijah on Mt. Carmel is no exception.

Clearly, we all need help from the Lord in pouring out our hearts to Him in prayer. It was this very realization on the part of the Christ's disciples that provided the occasion for Jesus giving unto us the model prayer that we know as the Lord's Prayer. As they listened to the Lord Jesus cry out to His Father in prayer, it was to the disciples as if they really did not even know how to pray and needed to be taught how to pray (Luke 11:1).

Do you desire to grow in calling out to the Lord God Almighty in prayer? Do you care? The Christian will care and must care, for prayer is a means of grace whereby God grants unto you that which you need to serve Him and glorify Him in this life. To be unfamiliar with the Lord in earnest prayer is to be estranged from Him. You cannot truly claim you commune with the Lord when you are a stranger to the Lord in daily, heartfelt prayer. To know Him and to commune with Him is not to know some facts about Him, but it is to spend time with Him daily studying His Word and pouring out your heart to Him. May God's Spirit teach us today that prayer is not about getting what we want, but rather it is about exalting our Most High God. Our main points this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Prayer Exalts the God of Heaven and Humbles Man (1 Kings 18:36); (2) Prayer Is Filled with Love to Obey God (1 Kings 18:36); (3) Prayer Longs to See Souls Converted and Sanctified (1 Kings 18:37).

I. Prayer Exalts the God of Heaven and Humbles Man (1 Kings 18:36).

A. It has been a few weeks since we last were here considering Elijah standing alone for the one true living God on Mt. Carmel in this battle against the prophets of Baal. Let us pull back the curtain for a moment to briefly review what is happening.

1. The Lord God had sent Elijah the prophet to King Ahab announcing that there would be no rain upon the land until God said so (1 Kings 17:1). This was a direct attack against the god, Baal, whom Israel now wickedly served. Baal supposedly provided rain and sunshine for their crops and beasts, but Baal could not alter the drought the Lord had brought upon Israel for their gross idolatry and backsliding from God's commandments and covenant. There was no rain for 3 ½ years. This was a severe judgment from the Lord indeed. But out of God's judgment is God's mercy made know to all who will turn to Him. When a nation has all that it needs and wants in abundance, it is the sinful nature of man to reject, ignore, and forget that it is God from whom all blessings flow. The same is true of you and me. We often don't appreciate the mercy of God in supplying our needs until work is taken away, until our health suffers, until death seizes a loved one, until we are tried, tempted, or afflicted.

2. After 3 ½ years Elijah returns to King Ahab at the command of the Lord (1 Kings 18:1-2). God's word through Elijah to Ahab was to gather the prophets of Baal and the leaders of the nation to Mount Carmel for a graphic and miraculous demonstration by fire as to who the one true living God was: Jehovah or Baal (1 Kings 18:24).

3. On that appointed day, the prophets of Baal spent all morning until the evening (approximately 6 hours) trying to get their false god's attention by shouting, dancing, leaping, and even gouging themselves with spears to show forth their sincerity—but to no avail. There was no fire from heaven that consumed their sacrifice. All such who believe they must so behave themselves in order to gin up their

emotions and that this will attract the attention of the Lord God are as deceived as were the prophets of Baal. God does not delight in such emotional display, but delights in our prayers when you honor Him and exalt Him and glorify Him through trusting Him, loving Him, confessing your need of Him, and serving Him. Emotions are God's gift, but they must be guided by God's truth found in Holy Scripture.

4. Now it was Elijah's turn. The prophets of Baal had failed. Baal was silent because he was no god. Elijah repairs the altar of the Lord, places the sacrifice upon the wood, digs a trench around the altar, and pours 12 barrels of water over the sacrifice, so that it not only drenches the wood and the sacrifice, but also fills up the trench around the altar. The Lord wants it to be clear that there is no circumstance that can stand in the way of Him fulfilling His will and keeping His promises. This brings us to our text today as we consider the prayer of Elijah.

B. Let us now hear from Elijah how he exalts God in prayer while putting himself into the role of a humble servant before His Lord.

1. Elijah now reverently draws near to the altar at the time of the evening sacrifice in Jerusalem (after 3 p.m.). There are no loud shouts to get Jehovah's attention. There are no emotional gyrations or outpouring of blood to show his sincerity, for the Lord sees into the heart of His servant. And what is in Elijah's heart is revealed by the words that are offered to the Lord.

2. Elijah begins by acknowledging he doesn't deserve to be even standing in the presence of God and calling upon Him at this time. Why do I say this? Elijah's prayer begins with calling upon the "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel (i.e. Jacob)." How did Jehovah become Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Israel's God? Was it by their merit or by grace alone? God freely entered into a Covenant of Grace with them. He did not owe them anything except His wrath and condemnation, for they were sinners. But out of His infinite love and mercy through Jesus Christ, the Lord brought these underserving sinners to Himself and covenanted with them to be their God and their salvation throughout their generations. Elijah's form of address to God in prayer was no doubt intended to exalt the Lord, but also to abase Israel, His people, who had treated Jehovah with contempt and had cast down His holy and gracious covenant upon the ground and had trampled upon it, having forsaken their God and sought out another god to love and to serve. Elijah is calling the people to repentance from the very outset of his prayer. How you approach God in prayer says so much about your understanding of prayer. Why are you there? You are there because of God's grace and mercy, His everlasting covenant. Don't rush past your address to the Lord just to get to your petitions. You are in the presence of Almighty God.

3. After Elijah's address to Jehovah, these petitions follow.

a. First, "let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36). Elijah's chief concern is not that he himself be exalted in the eyes of Israel, but that the Lord God be exalted. His heart was filled with a holy zeal that God vindicate Himself before Israel (in the immediate context by sending fire from heaven). The many ways in which Israel had brought shame and contempt upon the holy name of God by idolatry, blasphemy, false religion, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, murder of children offered to Baal, and the gross immorality and temple prostitution associated with Baal worship was grievous and heart-breaking to the honor of Jehovah. The heart of one whose prayers will be heard by the Lord is the heart that cares most about the glory of God above all other considerations. "Lord God, glorify thyself." Was this not the chief desire of the Lord Jesus (John 12:28; John 17:4)? It is only when we get beyond our needs and first earnestly plead with the Lord that whatever He decides to do in response to our prayers that He would glorify Himself that our prayers will be as sweet-smelling incense unto the Lord. Is that what motivates you chiefly and supremely in prayer: "Glorify, honor, and exalt thyself, my God and Savior."

b. In the next petition we see that exalting the glory of God in prayer will humble you to be His servant ("let it be known this day... that I am thy servant" 1 Kings 18:36). It was not Elijah's will that he desired be done, but God's will. Elijah had not the idea that God existed to serve him (as has become

increasingly the perspective that is seen and heard from those on TV and radio and in many churches). Let's get this straight. There is no reverence for God where man demands from God what man wants. It is blasphemous to act as though you can order the one true living God to hear you, to answer you, to do this or that. Elijah wanted Israel to know that he was God's servant, not God's lord or equal. As the Lord Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). If you do not begin by calling out for God to glorify Himself, you will never arrive at being His servant. And if you do not truly understand and confess that you are God's servant saved by the grace of God and that is your chief occupation as a Christian, you will never arrive at glorifying God in or out of prayer. When you are offended, mocked, slandered, or persecuted for standing for Christ and His truth, whose honor are you first and foremost concerned about that has been drug through the mud? Yours or God's?

c. What is missing in prayer so often is the holy fear of the Most High God. The holy fear of God is an inward grace that entirely changes the way you understand and view God and man, life and death, heaven and hell, and all the circumstances in this world. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of God is the grace to take God seriously in His promises made to you in the Covenant of Grace and the grace to take God seriously in His warnings made to you in His commandments. It is to honor God with supreme reverence, faith, love, and obedience because He is your Creator, Provider, and Savior. It is to exalt God above all (including your own desires, wishes, plans, accomplishments, others, and self). You will not learn to pray as you ought if there is no holy fear of God. Elijah's life manifested that holy fear of God, and it is evident in His prayer. God delights in the prayers of those who fear Him, exalt Him, and serve Him. Are your prayers mechanical, insincere, mere words, and not answered because of the way in which you approach the Lord your God?

II. Prayer Is Filled with Love to Obey God (1 Kings 18:36).

A. Elijah prays that God would be exalted before Israel, that he would only be seen as the humble servant of Almighty God before Israel, and that all that he had done would be known by Israel to have been in loving obedience to the will of God.

1. Dear ones, not only will God not hear and answer the prayers of those who do not chiefly honor and exalt Him and humble themselves before Him, but likewise their prayers will be set aside and spurned by the Lord where there is no sincere desire and endeavoring to show Him love by obedience to His commandments (Isaiah 59:1-2). Loving obedience is the evidence of saving faith (James 2:26). And how do you practically evidence that you love the Lord? You show forth your love by keeping His commandments (John 14:15; Luke 6:46).

2. It is hypocrisy to talk about faith in and love for Jesus Christ, and yet to ignore, procrastinate, or rebel against His holy commandments. The Lord often waits for you to get serious about your faith, love, repentance, and obedience before He sends fire from heaven in answer to your prayers (1 John 3:22).

3. Dear ones, it is not that any of us can merit the favor of God in answering our prayers by our good works. We are and continue to be sinners saved by the grace of God alone. But even in your sins, failures, and disobedience to the Lord, is your heart broken? Are you made obstinate in your sin, or humbled by your sin? Do you seek the forgiveness of the Lord and renew your obedience to please Him? Do you exercise yourself to godliness? That is what the Lord seeks in you.

III. Prayer Longs to See Souls Converted and Sanctified (1 Kings 18:37).

A. Finally, we see in the prayer of Elijah that he earnestly desires that God hear him and send the fire in order that the hearts of Israel might be turned back again unto Him.

1. Here we see how the detestable state of God's people, Israel, living in wickedness, in

idolatry, murder, prostitution, and separation from God's people in Judah wrenched the heart of Elijah.

2. Before the drought ended and their physical needs were met, Elijah prayed that Israel would be spiritually broken before God so that their hearts would be turned to God by His grace and power.

3. Who is it that turns hearts unto the Lord? God or man? Consider the words of the Prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 5:21. God opened the heart of Lydia in Philippi as Paul preached so that she believed the gospel.

B. What I find so telling in the prayer of Elijah is that he was willing to see the suffering of Israel if it meant their turning to the Lord. When you hear, "God bless America", the prayer of Elijah ought to ring in your heart—there is no promised blessing apart from turning to the Lord Jesus Christ alone in faith, repentance, love, and new obedience. Are you willing to undergo suffering if through it you might grow in grace and be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ? For family members and friends whom you love, what is most important to you, their souls or their bodies? Dear ones, your prayers are not to be considered successful based upon whether you get that for which you sought the Lord in prayer. Rather your prayers are to be considered effective based upon the exaltation of God, the humiliation of man, the holy fear of God, the care for the souls of man, and the loving obedience to the Lord that evidences your faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Copyright 2018 Greg L. Price.