

THE DAY THE RAIN CAME (1 Kings 18:41-46)

His name was I. Howard Marshall. He was a first-rate theologian from Scotland and an evangelical Methodist. Along about 1987 or 1988 while I was in seminary in Fort Worth, Dr. Marshall was the guest preacher in a chapel service at Southwestern. I thought it was a bit odd that a Methodist was preaching in the chapel service of a Baptist seminary, but I was put at ease when he said, "If you Baptists will provide the water, we Methodists will provide the fire, and together we can work up some steam."

We saw last week in 1 Kings 18 that God provided the fire. Elijah proposed a contest between the 450 prophets of Baal and himself, the prophet of YHWH. Each were given a bull to prepare for sacrifice. They were to cut it up, place it on the wood, but put no fire to it. Then, they were to pray to their god to send fire to consume the sacrifice. Thus, they would know that the God who answered was the true God.

We saw read last Sunday how the prophets of Baal prayed, cried out, danced around the altar, and carried on beseeching their god to send the fire. Eventually, Elijah began to taunt them saying, "Maybe your god is deep in thought and doesn't hear you. Maybe he is going to the bathroom or out taking a walk. Maybe he is napping. You need to make more noise to awaken him." The prophets of Baal cried out louder. They even cut themselves attempting to get their god to act. Those prophets prayed for hours, from morning until past midday. The author of 1 Kings wrote, "No one answered, no one paid attention" (19:29).

Then, it was Elijah's turn. We are told he repaired the altar of YHWH that had been thrown down. He prepared the sacrifice. Then, he took an odd step. He dug a trench around the sacrifice and ordered that water be poured over the sacrifice. Anybody knows that if you want something to catch fire, you don't pour water on it. They, however, poured so much water on it that the water filled the ditch around the altar. Finally, Elijah prayed a simple prayer asking God to send the fire to show that He is the true God, and that He would turn the hearts of the people back to Himself.

At that moment, God sent the fire. In an instant, the fire consumed the sacrifice, the wood underneath the sacrifice, even the dust around the altar, and licked up the water in the trench. And when that happened, the people bowed and cried out, "YHWH, He is God; YHWH, He is God."

That was the day the fire fell.

Today, we will see what happened next. We will look at vv. 41-46. That was also the day the rain came. God sent the fire. Then, God sent the rain.

You will remember in 17:1 that Elijah strolled into the presence of King Ahab and said, "As YHWH, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there will be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." Then, Elijah left and disappeared. The King didn't see him for 3 and ½ years, and during that time, it didn't rain a drop.

I told this story Thursday afternoon to assisted living residents at the Baptist Village here in Enid. I told them they were likely too young to remember this or weren't born yet, but their parents went through it, and they likely told them what it was like. Beginning in

1930 a drought hit the southern plains. It mostly affected the panhandles of Oklahoma, Texas, and certain areas of the surrounding states of New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska. The drought covered 100 million acres of land. We call it the Dust Bowl. Between 1930 to 1936, 1.2 billion tons of topsoil were blown away. Farmers couldn't pay the mortgages on their farms. They couldn't feed their families. It is said that 2.5 million people of those Dust Bowl states left their homes. Hundreds of thousands of people migrated west to California, and when they got there, jobs were hard to find. Migrant camps sprung up; the population of those camps numbered in the 1000's.

You can imagine what would have happened in the land of Israel in the days of King Ahab when it didn't rain for 3 and ½ years. As a result of no rain, the crops failed. And since the farms couldn't grow anything, famine and starvation came upon the land. People died. Animals died because there was no hay to feed them.

In 1 Kings 18:1, God told Elijah to show himself to King Ahab. The king had been looking for the prophet. He had sent search parties throughout his kingdom and to other nations searching for the prophet, all to no avail. No one knew where he was. Now, suddenly, the king finds Elijah standing right in front of him.

The meeting is recorded for us in v. 17. "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" In other words, the King was saying, "This is all your fault, Elijah. You are to blame for all the misery we have faced."

Elijah throws it right back at the king. "This isn't my fault. It's your fault—you and your household. You are the ones who sinned by going after other gods and causing Israel to fall into idolatry. It's you who brought the punishment of God upon the land."

Let's pick up in v. 41 and see what happened after God brought the fire. After God provided the fire, He provided the rain. If there was any steam, it came from the direction of Jezebel. Like a geyser, she went off. She went ballistic. But that is in chapter 19. We'll get there next Sunday.

The Rain Came the Day the Prophet Trusted

In v. 41, Elijah said to the king, "There is a sound of the rushing of rain." At the time Elijah said this, there was not a cloud in the sky. The sound of rain could not be heard with physical ears. The prophet heard rain with the ears of faith. At the beginning of the chapter, God told Elijah, "Go show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." The prophet knows he has done his part, and now, he is fully expecting that God is going to do His part. He believes God is going to send the rain.

What things do you believe without having seen them? Let me ask some rhetorical questions that I am not looking for you to answer aloud: Have you ever seen God with your physical eyes? Have you ever stood face to face with Jesus? Have you ever seen heaven and interacted with its residents? Do you know that your sins have been forgiven? What evidence do you have to show that is the case? Do you know that you have a place reserved in heaven? Has God provided you with a reservation, confirmation number?

These are things you know without having seen them. There are many things we know without having discerned them or detected them with our five senses. Elijah heard

the rain the same way you and I hear the voice of God speaking to us. We hear his voice deep inside, and we just know.

The Southern Baptist Convention, of which we are a part, was formed in Augusta, Georgia in 1845. I am told there is a plaque or monument at the FBC of Augusta which honors the founding fathers of our denomination. Of them it says, “Men who see the invisible, hear the inaudible, believe the incredible, and think the unthinkable.”

May we be counted among their number.

The Rain Came the Day the Prophet Prayed

We see something interesting. God told Elijah in 18:1, “I am going to bring the rain.” Then, in v. 42, Elijah bows to pray for the very thing that God promised to bring. Does it make sense, is it necessary to pray for what God has already promised? To that question, I would answer, “Absolutely!” This is how God works. When God wants and chooses to do something, He sets His people to praying.

It has been said that there are only two things that God has done part from the prayers of His people—creation and redemption. There were no people around to ask God to create the world. He did that all on his own without any counsel or help from anybody else. Also, before God created man, God knew man would sin, that His creatures would fall, and He chose to send His Son to be their Savior. We read in Revelation that Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God chose to redeem man apart from our prayer, but just about everything else God has done, He has done in response to the prayers of His people. That may be an over-statement of the case, but I want to emphasize the fact that when God wants to do a work, He puts it on our heart to pray. Then, we pray. And then, God acts.

That burden you have to pray for your lost friend, from where did that come? God put it there. That desire you have to see God act in a certain way, what is its origin? God implanted that desire in your heart so that you would pray, and then once you did, He would act in response to your prayer.

It was God’s good pleasure to send rain to Israel; so, God placed His prophet on the top of Mount Carmel and had him pray for the rain.

I believe God wants to send revival and awakening to our land, and God is raising up people to pray for that very thing. Let’s join them in praying that God would do the very thing He wants to do. When we know what God desires, we can pray for it, and we can pray in faith. Those are the very prayers God answers.

John told us in his first epistle, “And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

The Rain Came the Day the Prophet Watched

It just so happens that Mount Carmel sits to the east of the Mediterranean Sea. When

you stand on the top of Mount Carmel, you can look to the west and get a beautiful view of the Mediterranean.

As Elijah was praying, he instructed his servant, “Go take a look.” The servant went and looked and came back with the report that skies were clear. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky. The prophet continued to pray. Then, he said, “Go look again.” Again, the servant came with the report, “Nothing.” Seven times Elijah sent his servant to look. Finally, on the seventh time, the servant came back and said, “Well, I saw a little cloud, about the size of a man’s hand. That’s all.”

That was good enough for Elijah. In triumph, he told his servant to go tell the king that he better get going on back lest the rain stops him. When he heard that, King Ahab may have thought, “What rain? I don’t see any rain. There is just a little cloud out over the sea.”

We who live in Oklahoma know that the weather can change quickly, and it changed rapidly that day. Look at v. 45. Have you ever seen the sky grow black with clouds? Sure, you have.

I remember back in 2015, not long after I moved to Enid, I went back to Stillwater. It was probably a musical event my son where my son was playing his trumpet. My daughter came from Edmond. After we ate at a restaurant, it was getting late. As I started back to Enid, it started raining. The rain came down harder and harder. Before long, I couldn’t even see the road. I had to slow down and keep my eyes on the lights in front of me. It was scary.

The point I want to make is that Elijah did not pray once and then go on his merry way. On the night Jesus was betrayed, before Judas came with a band of guards, Jesus told his disciples, “Watch and pray.” While there are times we are to watch and pray, we are also to pray and watch. In other words, we are to pray and then look to see what God is doing.

So often, we pray and then we go about our day forgetting what it is for which we prayed. We need to pray and watch to see what God does in response to our prayers. We are to pray expectantly. Expect God to answer your prayers.

The day the prophet trusted, prayed, and watched was the day the rain came.

The Rain Came the Day the Prophet Ran

Look at the last sentence of v. 45 and v. 46. It appears that the king didn’t offer Elijah a ride in his chariot back to Jezreel nor did Elijah ask for one. Jezreel was about 17 miles from Mount Carmel. According to the text, Elijah “gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (v. 46). Wearing long robes was not conducive to running; so, people tucked the edge of their robes into their belts, and that allowed their legs to move freely. We will see in the next chapter that Elijah was adept at long distance running.

What is impressive is that Elijah beat King Ahab to Jezreel. Humans don’t often outrun a horse, but that is what Elijah did that day. Maybe King Ahab’s chariot was getting mired in the mud. Maybe God gave Elijah the ability to run fast as well as far.

Instead of answering the “how” question, I want to focus on the “why” question. Why did Elijah feel it necessary to get to Jezreel?

When we have a mountaintop experience, our tendency is to want to stay there and bask in the glow of that experience. We want to stay on the mountain. If anybody has ever had a mountaintop experience, it was Elijah. God showed up in a big way that day. God did exactly what Elijah prayed He would do. God gave Elijah a great victory. In addition to sending the fire, God sent the rain. Both came in response to Elijah’s prayers. Wouldn’t you want to kick back and just enjoy what God did for a couple of days at least? Hadn’t Elijah earned a long weekend to rest, relax, and reflect?

That’s not what Elijah did. He had work yet to do. Since the king was going to Jezreel, that’s where Elijah went. Maybe he thought that since Abah witnessed first-hand what God did and how God showed Himself to be the real God, not Baal, just maybe, the King is ready to turn back. He wants to be on-hand to do a little follow-up. The king is going to need and likely want some godly counsel as to what to do next.

You have heard the phrase “put feet to your prayers.” Elijah did that literally. He put about 17-miles worth of footwork to his prayer.

In his study course *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby taught, “Watch to see where God is working and join Him in His work.” He also wrote, “You cannot stay where you are and go with God.”

Elijah saw God working, and he saw that as his invitation to join God. What is God doing around you? Join Him in His work. Pray. Look to see what God does. Then, join Him.

His name is Henry Luke Orombi. He was a former Archbishop of the (Anglican) Church of Uganda. I came across a sermon he preached from 1 Kings 18. Let me share a portion of his message. This minister from the African nation of Uganda said:

In 1987, I went to a place where I found a power of wickedness so tangible you could feel it. The place was depressing. People walked around looking so inferior. You could not see joy in anybody’s face. The place was run down. There were wizards everywhere. I don’t know if you know about wizards, but these are men who are so full of evil spirits they can do many evil things. In that area, about 8:00 or 8:30 in the evening, you could see lights where there is no electricity. Our house was opened twice at night—nothing was stolen. So many strange noises were in the house.

Let me tell you: I was frightened, even though I am six feet, five inches. I was so frightened because I had never known these things. They were so bad; they were so serious. But the Holy Spirit spoke to my wife, spoke to me, and spoke to five more of us: “Pray.”

Let me tell you, we were praying out of desperation. I was frightened. But if fear takes you to prayer, you are going in the right direction. So, we covenanted to pray from 9:00 to 6:00 in the morning every Friday. And we would cry to God, “Lord, save us! God, you are more powerful than this bondage among the people. You can release these people.” As we prayed and as we preached and as we

testified, let me tell you something: the dark cloud of oppression began to run away from us. Sunshine began to break into the place. Salvation fire began to be lit in every area and the people began to come to Jesus Christ. I tell you, if you go today to that place, God has transformed the place! People are so joyful; people are so confident; people love Jesus Christ; people love one another because the true God lit a fire in that place.

I would add that God not only lit a fire, He also let the latter rain of revival fall upon that place. I pray that God would do that in our city, our state, our nation, our continent, and our world.

Back in 1997, a Christian recording artist named Robin Mark released the following song:

These are the days of Elijah
Declaring the word of the Lord
And these are the days of Your servant Moses
Righteousness being restored

And though these are days of great trial
Of famine and darkness and sword
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying
“Prepare ye the way of the Lord!”

Behold, He comes riding on the clouds
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call
Lift your voice, the year of jubilee
And out of Zion’s hill, salvation comes

And these are the days of Ezekiel
The dry bones becoming as flesh
And these are the days of Your servant David
Rebuilding a temple of praise

Oh, these are the days of the harvest
For the fields are as white in Your world
And we are the laborers in Your vineyard
Declaring the word of the Lord!

Behold, He comes, riding on the clouds
Shining like the sun at the trumpet call
Lift your voice, the year of jubilee
And out of Zion’s hill, salvation comes

May these be the days we see our God do great things in response to the prayers of His people.