

Sun., May 16 - Strange Fire #5: Answered Prayer

Series: "Strange Fire: Spring Message Series"

Memory Verse: "Yes, God is good! Yes, God's faithful love lasts forever!" -2 Chronicles 7:3b

Text: 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

Sermon Scriptures: 1 Kings 18:16-24, 30-39

Reading of Scripture: 1 Kings 18:25-29

Blurb: There are many gods we can pray to, but our key question is which one will answer us? This Sunday we go with Elijah to the top of Mt. Carmel where God as an all-consuming fire comes down in answer to prayer. Seeing this, we correct our worship and switch our allegiance wholly to this God who is real and who answers our prayers. Only the true God can be our true help.

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor Andrew

"Yes, God is good! Yes, God's faithful love lasts forever!" -2 Chronicles 7:3b

ACOLYTE & DOXOLOGY: Lighting the candle symbolizing the presence of God -Pastor Andrew

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

Consuming Fire

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Holy Spirit* -Sanctify

ACOLYTE & DOXOLOGY: Lighting the candle symbolizing the presence of God -

WELCOME -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE: -Pastor David

"Yes, God is good! Yes, God's faithful love lasts forever!" -2 Chronicles 7:3b

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

Hymn of Promise

Take Me In

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Kings 18:25-29 -Reader:

The prophet Elijah makes fun of the prophets of Ba-al. They try to get Ba-al to light a sacrifice, praying for hours, but nothing happens. 1 Kings 18:25-29,

25 So Elijah said to the prophets of Ba-al, “Choose one of these bulls. Prepare it first since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but don’t add fire.”

26 So they took one of the bulls that had been brought to them. They prepared it and called on Ba-al’s name from morning to midday. They said, “Great Ba-al, answer us!” But there was no sound or answer. They performed a hopping dance around the altar that had been set up.

27 Around noon, Elijah started making fun of them: “Shout louder! Certainly he’s a god! Perhaps he is lost in thought or wandering or traveling somewhere. Or maybe he is asleep and must wake up!”

28 So the prophets of Ba-al cried with a louder voice and cut themselves with swords and knives as was their custom. Their blood flowed all over them. 29 As noon passed they went crazy with their ritual until it was time for the evening offering. Still there was no sound or answer, no response whatsoever.

[Live Worship only] PRAYERS -Pastor David

Recalling and thanking God for answered prayers: personally (finances, relationships, special requests, job, unknown), for family/loved ones, for church, for community.

“And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.” -Psalm 9:10

“Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.” Hebrews 10:23

GENERATIONAL BRIDGE: -Pastor Andrew.

MESSAGE: Strange Fire #5: Answered Prayer

PP#1: Strange Fire: Answered Prayer

“As soon as Solomon finished praying [the prayer to dedicate the new temple], fire came down from heaven and consumed the entirely burned offering and the sacrifices, while the Lord’s glory filled the temple.” -2 Chronicles 7:1

Strange Fire: Answered Prayer

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 “As soon as Solomon finished praying [the prayer to dedicate the new temple], fire came down from heaven and consumed the entirely burned offering and the sacrifices, while the Lord’s glory filled the temple. The priests were unable to enter the Lord’s temple because the Lord’s glory had filled the Lord’s temple. All the Israelites were watching when the fire fell. As the Lord’s glory filled the temple, they knelt down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, worshipping and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, ‘Yes, God is good! Yes, God’s faithful love lasts forever!’”

PP#2: *Image for the apocryphal story of Daniel and Bel.*

The story of Daniel verses the god Bel: ever heard of it? Perhaps not, because it's not in our Bibles. It is part of what's called the deuterocanonical books, books written in between the Old Testament and New Testament times, and that are included in the Roman Catholic Bible, but as secondary in authority. Those writings include two chapters added to the book of Daniel, and one of them—Daniel 14—is the story of the contest between Daniel and the false god Bel. It begins in the court of the Persian King Cyrus. Cyrus is angry that Daniel refuses to worship at Bel's statue. Now the name Bel is actually a title, meaning "lord" and was used to address the top god of the ancient Babylonians. Daniel, however, was a faithful prophet of the true God and refused to worship the false god, a statue made of clay and bronze. Once again, it got Daniel in trouble.

Daniel tells the king that Bel is not a real god. Cyrus, however, points to the massive amount of food that Bel consumes each night in his temple. The king brings in 70 priests of Bell to prove that Bel is real. They tell the king to set the pile of food offerings in the temple and then lock up the temple and seal it. The next morning, the food is gone! Bel must be real. But then Daniel tells the king to look at the floor. Daniel had scattered ashes on the floor around the food. Sure enough, there were footprints revealed in the ashes: the priests and their families had come in through a secret door and consumed the food. Bel is proven to be a false god, and his temple and priests are destroyed.

PP#3: What God are you praying to?

This story is similar to a biblical story you may have heard. It's also about a showdown in front of a king, with a lone prophet of the true God in a contest against a host of prophets of a false god to reveal who is the one true God. The one key difference is that in the biblical story, God Himself shows up as an all-consuming fire.

The question I pose for us today is, "What god are you praying to?"

You see, the stuff we face in our daily lives is real: money doesn't stretch to the end of the month...job insecurity...the slow calcifying that comes from not being able to afford a different vehicle or a trip this year or that gaming system your son really, really wants. Living in debt is real, isn't it? What god are you praying to for your daily provision?

PP#4: *Image for a person lying in bed at night worrying about life struggles.*

Bill and Melinda Gates are getting divorced after 27 years. It makes you wonder about your marriage, or of those close to you. Can you make it? Do you want to? How about your kids heading off on their own? How will they make it? Their lives are fragile and so easily derailed by foolish choices. What god are you praying to for your marriage or for your kids?

Our church is going to host a second funeral this month. You each know what it's like to lose someone in death. That's real, right? The diagnosis of cancer, or a crippling disease, or dementia, or heart failure: that's soberingly real, isn't it? What god are you praying to for your precarious life, threatened on all sides?

We can handle a certain amount. We can take responsibility for some of our financial solvency, some of our relationship stability, some of our medical health. But when we lie awake at night, we know too well that much of the real stuff of life is beyond our control. It is bigger than we are. How true as we begin to get older and our fitness and abilities wane. We realize that we must trust in a help that be beyond ourselves. Yes, others around may help, but we cannot rely on them.

And so we turn to God. We call out, we hang on, we pray for a help that comes from beyond ourselves.

PP#5: *Image of the “reveal” moment from The Wizard of OZ, when they see the Great OZ and the man behind the curtain, OR an image representing the different false gods that we modern people pray to.*

We see the temples that have been built to the various gods who might help us: gods of hard work, gods of self-help and self-growth, gods of rightly ordering our lives, gods of living carefree and releasing responsibility, gods of living for #1, gods of escapism and denial, gods of living for the moment and letting the rest go. What god are you praying to?

The temple to Bel promised help and security and healing...provided you fed it: gave it offerings and allegiance and commitment. How many mothers prayed for their children there? How many times did men make promises there trusting for aid?

The story of Daniel and Bel is terrifying, because it reveals that the gods we may pray to, the gods we may trust in, the gods we may turn to for help in our hardest times, may really be a Great OZ idol—with little men scurrying away with the food or working the controls behind the curtain. That’s the promise of self-help or putting #1 first, actually, isn’t it? It reveals that the only power available to help us is *our own!* But then we lie awake at night, terrified because the realities of life are bigger than we are, even when we are at our best.

This is why we need a God who is an all-consuming fire! We need to hear the story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. The story of Daniel and Bel unmasks the gods of human power. So we ask, is there hope in other gods, other powers, other forces? Are they reliable? Can we trust in them? Do they care about us and want our best interests?

PP#6: *Image of the worship of Baal under King Ahab in the Temple*

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel introduced additional gods to the worship of the true God. They were the local gods, gods from before: Ba-al and his consort Ashera. You know, *supplemental* to their worship, no harm done, just a little extra. And these gods let the people do more of what they wanted. It affirmed their thinking, allowed things more their way. Pretty attractive! Their worship grew in popularity. The humility required by the true God was slowly supplanted by the self-gratification allowed by the other gods. And soon that became most popular in their society.

But remember, the rains didn’t come. As they worshiped in ways that let them have things the way they wanted, the rains of blessing and new life and thriving didn’t come. Water became scarce, as did hope. People struggled more and more to eke out a living, to have abundant life.

PP#7: 1 Kings 18:16-39

16 ... Then [King] Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is that you, the one who troubles Israel?” [Notice how the true prophet has been labeled as the troublemaker, the problem!]

18 Elijah answered, “I haven’t troubled Israel; you and your father’s house have! You did as much when you deserted the Lord’s commands and followed the Baals. 19 Now send a message and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel. Gather the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

During that time of drought, when the society was committed to the false gods, Elijah lays out a challenge. Turn to 1 Kings 18. We pick up the story in verse 16.

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PP#8: 1 Kings 18:16-39

20 Ahab sent the message to all the Israelites. He gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you hobble back and forth between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow God. If Baal is God, follow Baal.” The people gave no answer.

“20 Ahab sent the message to all the Israelites. He gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah approached all the people and said, ‘How long will you hobble back and forth between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow God. If Baal is God, follow Baal.’ The people gave no answer. [They were thinking how they would answer the question, “Which god do you pray to?”]

PP#9: 1 Kings 18:16-39

22 Elijah said to the people, “I am the last of the Lord’s prophets, but Baal’s prophets number four hundred fifty. 23 Give us two bulls. Let Baal’s prophets choose one. Let them cut it apart and set it on the wood, but don’t add fire. I’ll prepare the other bull, put it on the wood, but won’t add fire. 24 Then all of you will call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers with fire—that’s the real God!”

All the people answered, “That’s an excellent idea.”

22 Elijah said to the people, ‘I am the last of the Lord’s prophets, but Baal’s prophets number four hundred fifty. 23 Give us two bulls. Let Baal’s prophets choose one. Let them cut it apart and set it on the wood, but don’t add fire. I’ll prepare the other bull, put it on the wood, but won’t add fire. 24 Then all of you will call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers with fire—that’s the real God!’

“All the people answered, ‘That’s an excellent idea.’”

So, notice: whichever god answers, that’s the real God.

Well, in the passage you heard earlier we see the other prophets go first. They pray out loud, over and over again, “Great Baal, answer us!” (vs 26). They prayed again and again, for half the day. They performed dances and prayed louder. They then started doing bazaar rituals, cutting themselves, trying to conjure Baal’s response. They tried all they knew, for hours and hours, with all their earnestness, to try to get Baal to do what they needed. But, as it says at the end of verse 29, “Still there was no sound or answer, no response whatsoever.”

PP#10: 1 Kings 18:16-39

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here!” All the people closed in, and he repaired the Lord’s altar that had been damaged. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to

the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob—to whom the Lord’s word came: “Your name will be Israel.” 32 He built the stones into an altar in the Lord’s name, and he dug a trench around the altar big enough to hold [four gallons] of dry grain. 33 He put the wood in order, butchered the bull, and placed the bull on the wood. “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the sacrifice and on the wood,” he commanded.

Now it’s Elijah’s turn. Verse 30, “Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come here!’ All the people closed in, and he repaired the Lord’s altar that had been damaged. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob—to whom the Lord’s word came: ‘Your name will be Israel.’ 32 He built the stones into an altar in the Lord’s name, and he dug a trench around the altar big enough to hold [four gallons] of dry grain. 33 He put the wood in order, butchered the bull, and placed the bull on the wood. ‘Fill four jars with water and pour it on the sacrifice and on the wood,’ he commanded.

PP#11: 1 Kings 18:16-39

34 “Do it a second time!” he said. So they did it a second time. “Do it a third time!” And so they did it a third time. 35 The water flowed around the altar, and even the trench filled with water. 36 At the time of the evening offering, the prophet Elijah drew near and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. I have done all these things at your instructions.

“34 ‘Do it a second time!’ he said. So they did it a second time. ‘Do it a third time!’ And so they did it a third time. 35 The water flowed around the altar, and even the trench filled with water. 36 At the time of the evening offering, the prophet Elijah drew near and prayed: ‘Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. I have done all these things at your instructions.

PP#12: 1 Kings 18:16-39

37 Answer me, Lord! Answer me so that this people will know that you, Lord, are the real God and that you can change their hearts.” 38 Then the Lord’s fire fell; it consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up the water in the trench!

39 All the people saw this and fell on their faces. “The Lord is the real God! The Lord is the real God!” they exclaimed.

37 Answer me, Lord! Answer me so that this people will know that you, Lord, are the real God and that you can change their hearts.’ 38 Then the Lord’s fire fell; it consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up the water in the trench!

“39 All the people saw this and fell on their faces. ‘The Lord is the real God! The Lord is the real God!’ they exclaimed.” And then, the rains came.

[Pause.] It is easy to start following the Bels and the Baals. It is convenient. It is popular. We get to live the way we want, to do what we want. And we’re being religious. We are good people. Things seem to go well enough.

PP#13: *Image of being in the desert of fear and hardship.*

But the drought comes. Life dries up. Hope shrivels. The car breaks down. Your kids goes off to college. Your spouse of 27 years announces that “we no longer believe we can grow together as a couple in this next phase of our lives” (from Melinda and Bill Gates’ announcement). Your doctor tells you that it’s terminal.

You rush to the gods that let you do what you wanted. Can they help? If they are Bel, then you soon realize that it’s some form of trusting in human power, trusting in people. Yet your realities are bigger than what people can fix. If they are Baal, then you soon realize that they are not interested in your welfare. They were promising you what you wanted but cannot deliver what you need. At the crucial moment, when you need them most, they are terribly silent. Your role is to *serve them*. They *use* you. They enslave you. You serve them.

PP#14: Strange Fire: Answered Prayer

1. God hears you and answers you

But a simple and soft-spoken prayer reaches the ear of the one true God. The power of heaven is opened for you. Fire comes down. This is the one true God. This is the One who knows your need, who cares about you, who is listening to you, who has His eye on you. When you whisper a prayer—perhaps in fear, perhaps in doubt, perhaps in defeat—He hears and He answers. He comes to be who you need Him to be. He comes to give what you need. He shows up to lift you. The true God does not use you or fool you. He loves you and helps you. He is the God of your provision, the God of your protection, the God of your salvation.

PP#15: Strange Fire: Answered Prayer

1. God hears you and answers you
2. God loves you and helps you

We see God here as an all-consuming fire! Notice how the Fire burns the offering, the wood, the stones, the water and even the ground! All-consuming! You know, if God had just lit a small fire on the altar, it would have been total victory. But that’s not who God is. The lighting of that sacrifice is not about God getting a sacrifice that He wants. It’s about lighting a sacrifice to demonstrate who is true, who is real, who is trustworthy, who we should call upon in our moment of need. It is a demonstration of power to build our confidence, built our hope, build our allegiance. “All the people saw this and fell on their faces. They exclaimed, ‘The Lord is the real God! The Lord is the real God!’” (18:39).

PP#15: Strange Fire: Answered Prayer

1. God hears you and answers you
2. God loves you and helps you
3. God restores your life

And then, the rains came. Life returned. New beginnings started. Flowers bloomed in the desert and birds squawked and sang. New life returned to the land, when the people called upon the one true God.

What god are you praying to? “How long will you hobble back and forth between two opinions?” Is it a god who offers you what you want but is deaf to your need? The Lord is the one true God. He is not limited by human strength. He is not self-serving and silent to our need. He is an all-consuming fire. He is able to consume whatever power that has a death grip on you.

No, He will not give you whatever you want. He will not let you do things all your way. No, He loves you too much for that. He will not always answer your prayers the way you desire or choose. But He does answer! And He answers by giving you what you need to live, to flourish, to thrive, to grow. This is our God! “The god who answers with fire—that’s the real God!”

He is the God of burnt offerings. The burnt offerings of our lives—that mean nothing and are good for nothing—He takes them, consumes them, and returns to us life abundant and eternal.

In real life, you need a real God! And the Lord, He is an all-consuming fire!

What god are you praying to?

Amen.

[Recorded Worship only] PRAYERS -Pastor David

Recalling and thanking God for answered prayers: personally (finances, relationships, special requests, job, unknown), for family/loved ones, for church, for community.

“And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.” -Psalm 9:10

“Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.” Hebrews 10:23

[LIVE WORSHIP ONLY] CLOSING SONG: *Consuming Fire* -Sanctify

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God’s work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the “square” on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Next Sunday’s message: Pentecost! “The Fire Within”

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

“Yes, God is good! Yes, God’s faithful love lasts forever!” -2 Chronicles 7:3b

BENEDICTION -Pastor David

ACOLYTE: God’s light leads us out into the world.