

CALL — ANSWER ME, LORD!

Text: 1 Kings 18:30–39

Greetings in the name of the Lord and Savior Jesus christ

Good afternoon Church! Praise the Lord! Today we continue our sermon series, **CALL TO ME**. Our theme comes from Jeremiah 33:3, where the Lord says, “Call to Me and I will answer you.” Throughout this series, we have been learning from some of the great prayers in the Bible. We have seen people call on God in pain, waiting, surrender, and repentance. Last Sunday, through David’s prayer in Psalm 51, we prayed, **“God, create a clean heart in me.”** David taught us that sometimes the greatest thing God needs to change is not what is around us, but what is inside us. Today we move from David to Elijah. David prayed, “Lord, change my heart.” Elijah prays, **“Answer me, LORD!”** But Elijah is not asking God to answer so that Elijah can become famous. He is not asking God to prove that Elijah is a great prophet. Elijah asks God to answer so that a nation that has wandered away will know that the LORD is God and turn their hearts back to Him. That is why this prayer is so important for us. Sometimes we pray, “Lord, answer me because I need this.” Sometimes we pray, “Lord, change this situation.” Those prayers are not wrong. God invites us to bring our needs to Him. But Elijah takes us deeper. He teaches us to pray, **“Lord, answer me so that people will see You. Work in my life so that people will know You. Use my life for Your glory.”**

The background of our passage is very important. Israel was going through a serious spiritual crisis. King Ahab had done evil in the sight of the Lord, Jezebel had promoted the worship of Baal, and many people had turned away from the Lord. The nation that belonged to God was trying to live between two loyalties. Earlier in 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah asks the people, **“How long will you waver between two opinions?”** If the LORD is God, follow Him; if Baal is god, follow him. But Scripture says the people did not answer him a word. Their silence revealed their divided hearts. Then came the great confrontation on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal prepared their sacrifice and called upon Baal. They cried from morning until midday. They shouted. They danced around the altar. They became more and more desperate. But verse 29 gives us a very sad description: **“There was no sound; no one answered; no one paid attention.”** There was plenty of noise, but no answer. There was religious activity, but there was no living God behind it. Then Elijah steps forward. His prayer will be much shorter than everything the prophets of Baal have done. Elijah does not need to manipulate God. He does not need to impress God. He simply calls upon the living God. And God answers. But before Elijah prays, he does something very important: **he repairs the altar**. That is where our message begins.

I. Repair the Altar — Come Back to God — 1 Kings 18:30–32

Verse 30 says, **“Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near me.’ So all the people approached him. Then he repaired the LORD’s altar that had been torn down.”** Church, do not move too quickly past that sentence. Before the fire fell, **the altar was repaired.** Before Elijah asked God to answer, he dealt with something that had been broken. The broken altar was a picture of Israel’s broken relationship with God. They had neglected the worship of the LORD. Their hearts had turned toward Baal. The physical altar was broken because spiritually the nation was broken. Elijah does not build an altar to himself. He repairs **the LORD’s altar.** Verse 31 tells us that Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of Jacob. Why twelve stones? The kingdom was divided at this time, but Elijah uses twelve stones because he is reminding the people who they are. They may be divided politically, but they are still the people whom God called to Himself. Those stones reminded Israel of God’s covenant and God’s faithfulness. Elijah was essentially saying, **“You have forgotten who you belong to. Come back to the LORD.”**

Church, sometimes we ask God to send fire while God is asking us to repair the altar. We say, “Lord, bless my family,” but perhaps prayer has disappeared from our family. We say, “Lord, revive my spiritual life,” but perhaps our Bible remains closed throughout the week. We say, “Lord, use me,” while there are areas of our lives that we have not surrendered to Him. We want God’s power, but God wants our hearts. Now we need to be careful here. We do not earn God’s answer by making ourselves perfect. Elijah is not teaching us that if we repair enough things, God owes us a miracle. Everything we receive from God is by His grace. But when God shows us something broken in our relationship with Him, genuine faith does not ignore it. We bring it to God. We repent. We return. We surrender it to Him.

Notice Elijah’s first words to the people: **“Come near me.”** I love those words. These people had wandered away from God, but Elijah does not say, “Stay far away because you failed.” He says, **“Come near.”** Why? Because God’s purpose in this entire story is not simply to demonstrate His power. God wants to **bring His people back.** That same invitation runs throughout Scripture, and ultimately we hear it through Jesus Christ. Sin separates us from God, and we cannot repair that separation by our own effort. We cannot build a bridge back to God through good works, religion, or promises to become better. But God came near to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. At the cross, Christ did what we could never do for ourselves. Second Corinthians 5:18 says that God **“reconciled us to Himself through Christ.”** That means Jesus makes possible what our broken altars cannot accomplish. He brings sinners back into a relationship with God.

Maybe someone is sitting here today and your spiritual altar has become broken. You have not completely rejected God, but prayer is not what it used to be. Worship has become routine. Your heart has become divided. You know Christian language. You come to church. People may look at you and think everything is fine, but inside you know something has changed. Elijah’s message is not, “Pretend everything is okay.” His message is, **“Come near. Come back to God.”** And Jesus gives the same invitation. He does not say, “Repair yourself completely and then come to Me.” We come to Christ as we are, and He begins His transforming work in us. Church revival does not begin with a crowd. **Revival begins in the heart.** It begins when we say, “Lord, here is my heart again. Here is my family again. Here is my future again. Here is my ministry again. Everything belongs to You.” David prayed last week, **“Create a clean heart in**

me.” Today Elijah is telling Israel, **“Come back to the altar.”** Both prayers bring us to the same place: we need God. And ultimately, the One who brings us back to God is **Jesus Christ**.

II. Trust God When the Situation Looks Impossible — 1 Kings 18:33–35

After Elijah repaired the altar, he prepared the sacrifice. Then he did something that seems completely opposite to what we would expect. He told the people to fill four water pots and pour the water over the offering and the wood. Then Elijah said, **“A second time!”** They poured water again. Then he said, **“A third time!”** They poured water again. Verse 35 says the water ran all around the altar and even filled the trench. Think about this scene. Elijah is asking God to answer with **fire**, and Elijah is pouring **water** everywhere. If you want to start a fire, soaking everything with water is normally not the first thing you would do! Humanly speaking, Elijah is making the situation impossible. Why? Because when God answers, nobody will be able to take the glory. Nobody can say, “Maybe there was already a little fire underneath.” Nobody can say, “Maybe Elijah used some trick.” The sacrifice is wet. The wood is wet. The stones are wet. The trench is full of water. **What is impossible for man is not impossible for God.**

Church, sometimes God allows us to reach places where our own strength is clearly not enough. We like situations we can control. We like prayers where we can already imagine how the answer will come. Sometimes we pray, “God, here is my problem, and here is my suggestion about how You should solve it.” But sometimes God allows us to stand before something that makes us say, **“Lord, if You do not help me, I cannot do this.”** That can become a very important place spiritually because it teaches us dependence. Maybe your impossible situation is in your family. Maybe it is your work. Maybe it is a decision. Maybe it is a relationship that seems impossible to restore. Maybe you are praying for a son, daughter, friend, or family member who seems farther from God today than before. You look at the situation and say, “Lord, how can this ever change?” Elijah teaches us: **do not measure God’s ability by the size of your problem.**

But we also need an important balance. Faith does not mean creating impossible situations just to force God to prove Himself. Verse 36 is important because Elijah says, **“At Your word I have done all these things.”** Elijah is acting in obedience to God. He is not inventing his own plan and demanding that God support it. There is a difference between **faith and presumption**. Faith says, “God, I trust what You have said.” Presumption says, “God, I have decided what You must do.” Biblical faith does not control God. Biblical faith trusts God.

And when we come to Jesus, we see the greatest reason we have for trusting God when everything looks impossible. Think about the cross. On Friday, Jesus was crucified. His body was placed in a tomb. A stone was rolled across the entrance. To the disciples, everything appeared finished. Their Teacher had died. Their hopes seemed buried with Him. But on the third day, **Jesus rose from the dead.** God turned what looked like complete defeat into the greatest victory in history. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, then we know that no situation is beyond His power. That does not mean God will answer every prayer exactly the way we want. It means we can trust Him even when we cannot see what He is doing.

Church, you can prepare the altar, but **only God can send the fire.** You can preach the Gospel, but only God can transform a heart. You can teach your children Scripture, love them, pray for them, and guide them, but only God can change them from within. You can encourage someone

and share Christ with them, but salvation belongs to the Lord. That should not discourage us. **It should make us pray.** When you have done what God has asked you to do and the situation still looks impossible, **CALL.** When your strength is not enough, **CALL.** When you cannot see how the answer could possibly come, **CALL.** And when you call, remember that our confidence is not in the strength of our prayer. **Our confidence is in the living God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.**

III. Pray for God's Glory, Not Your Own — 1 Kings 18:36–37

Now we arrive at the heart of the sermon and our priority verses. Verse 36 says that at the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah approached the altar and prayed, **“LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that at Your word I have done all these things.”** Then comes verse 37: **“Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that You, the LORD, are God and that You have turned their hearts back.”** What a prayer! After all the noise from the prophets of Baal, Elijah's prayer is remarkably simple. He does not pray for hours. He does not try to impress the people with religious language. His confidence is not in the length of his prayer. **His confidence is in the God to whom he is praying.**

Look carefully at what Elijah wants: **“Let it be known that You are God.”** Then he says, “Let them know that I am Your servant.” Then, “Let them know that I have done these things at Your word.” Finally, **“Turn their hearts back.”** Do you see the center of Elijah's prayer? **It is not Elijah.** Elijah does not pray, “Lord, make everyone respect me.” He does not say, “Lord, prove that I am the greatest prophet.” He does not say, “Lord, answer so that my ministry becomes famous.” His prayer is essentially, **“Lord, let them see You.”**

Church, this challenges us. Why do we want God to answer our prayers? Sometimes we want God to answer because we need relief, and there is nothing wrong with bringing our needs before Him. Jesus Himself taught us to pray for daily bread. Hannah asked for a child. David asked for mercy. Scripture invites us to bring our needs to God. But Elijah takes us deeper. He teaches us to pray, **“Lord, whatever You do in my life, let it bring glory to Your name.”** Lord, bless my family so my family can honor You. Lord, help me in my work so people can see Christ in me. Lord, use my testimony so somebody else can find hope. Lord, answer this prayer in the way that will make Your name known. The deepest purpose of prayer is not to make **our name great**, but to make **God's name known.**

And here Elijah's prayer points beautifully toward Jesus. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray in Matthew 6, He began, **“Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy.”** Before “give us,” Jesus teaches us to pray, **“Your name.”** God's glory comes first. And Jesus did not only teach that; He lived it. In John 17, as the cross approached, Jesus prayed to His Father about glorifying the Father through the work He had been given to do. Jesus' entire life was centered on His Father's will and glory. Even in Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, **“Not My will, but Yours, be done.”** So when we pray for God's glory instead of our own, we are learning to pray in the spirit of Jesus.

But there is another phrase in Elijah's prayer that is even more beautiful: **“that You have turned their hearts back.”** Elijah does not merely want fire. **He wants hearts.** The fire is not the final goal. Restoration is the goal. Elijah is saying, “Lord, answer so these people will come

home.” Church, this should become part of our prayers for our families. Not merely, “Lord, make my children successful,” but **“Lord, turn their hearts toward You.”** Not merely, “Lord, solve this problem in my marriage,” but, **“Lord, draw both of our hearts closer to You.”** Not merely, “Lord, grow our church,” but, **“Lord, let people meet Jesus here. Let people who are far from You come home.”**

And this is exactly why Jesus came. Luke 19:10 says, **“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”** Elijah wanted wandering Israel to return to God. Jesus came into this world to seek wandering sinners and bring us back to the Father. So what if our prayer became: **“Answer me, LORD, so they will know You. Use me so they will see Jesus. Work through my life so somebody’s heart will turn toward Christ.”** That is a prayer worth praying.

IV. God Answers So Hearts Can Return — 1 Kings 18:38–39

Then comes verse 38: **“Then the LORD’s fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.”** God answered. Notice how completely God answered. The fire did not simply touch the sacrifice. It consumed the offering, the wood, the stones, the dust, and even the water. For hours the prophets of Baal had cried out, but there was no answer. Elijah called upon the living God, and God answered. But the Church, do not stop at the fire. Look at verse 39: **“When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, ‘The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!’”** There is the real result of the miracle. Yes, fire fell from heaven, but **hearts turned toward God.**

At the beginning, Elijah asked the people to choose whom they would follow, and they answered him with silence. Now they are on their faces confessing, **“The LORD, He is God!”** At first there was silence. After God revealed Himself, there was confession. This is exactly what Elijah prayed for. He prayed, **“Answer me so that this people will know that You are God,”** and now the people declare, **“The LORD, He is God!”**

We need to understand this passage carefully. We should not read 1 Kings 18 and think, “If I pray strongly enough, God must give me a spectacular miracle.” Mount Carmel was a unique moment in Israel’s history. Elijah was God’s prophet confronting national idolatry. The lesson is not that we should demand fire from heaven. The deeper lesson is that **the living God reveals Himself so that wandering hearts may return to Him.** Every generation has idols. Our idols may not be called Baal, but anything that takes God’s rightful place in our heart can become an idol. Money can become an idol. Success can become an idol. Career can become an idol. Approval can become an idol. Comfort can become an idol. Even good things can become idols when we love God’s gifts more than we love God Himself. Elijah’s question still speaks to us: **“How long will you waver between two opinions?”** God does not want a divided heart. **He wants us.**

And now we come to Jesus Christ. On Mount Carmel there was an altar, a sacrifice, and fire. The sacrifice was placed on the altar, and judgment fell upon the sacrifice. Many years later, outside Jerusalem, there was another place of sacrifice: **the cross.** But at the cross, Jesus Himself gave His life for our sins. First Peter 2:24 says that Jesus **“Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.”** The judgment our sin deserved was borne by Christ. Jesus died in our place, was buried, and rose again so that sinners like us could be reconciled to God. Elijah repaired a broken altar, but **Jesus restores broken people.** Elijah called wandering Israel back

to the LORD, but **Jesus opens the way for sinners to come to the Father**. Elijah prayed that people would know the LORD is God, and the Gospel calls every person to confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**.

And notice something beautiful about Jesus. In Luke 9, when a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, James and John asked whether they should call down fire from heaven. Jesus did not send them out to destroy those people. He continued toward Jerusalem, where **He Himself would suffer for sinners**. That is the Gospel. Instead of judgment falling upon us, Christ willingly bore judgment for us at the cross. God does not merely want to impress us with His power. **He wants to save us through His Son**. The greatest need of the human heart is not simply to see a miracle. It is to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Church, look at the journey of this passage. The altar was broken—Elijah repaired it. The situation looked impossible—Elijah trusted God. Elijah prayed—but he prayed for God’s glory. God answered—and the people turned their hearts back. And all of this points us beyond Elijah to Jesus Christ. Elijah could repair an altar, but Jesus can restore a life. Elijah could call people back to God, but Jesus is the way by which we come to the Father. Elijah could pray for God to reveal His power, but Jesus is God’s greatest revelation of His love and saving power. Elijah saw fire fall upon a sacrifice, but at Calvary Jesus gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Elijah wanted Israel to confess, “The LORD, He is God,” and one day Scripture tells us that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Maybe today the altar of your heart needs repair. Maybe prayer is not what it once was. Maybe something else has taken first place. Maybe outwardly everything looks fine, but inwardly you know you have moved away from God. Hear the invitation today: Come near. Come back to God through Jesus Christ. Maybe you are facing something that looks impossible. Remember the soaked altar, but also remember something greater: the empty tomb. If God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, we can trust Him even when we cannot understand what He is doing. Maybe God needs to change the purpose of our prayers. Instead of only praying, “Lord, make my life easier,” let us pray, “Lord, let my life make Your name known.” If You bless me, let people see Jesus. If You carry me through suffering, let people see Jesus. If You restore me, let people see Jesus. If You answer my prayer, let people see Jesus. Lord, whatever You do through my life, let people know You.

And above everything, let us pray for hearts: “Lord, turn my heart back to You. Turn my family’s heart toward You. Turn our children’s hearts toward You. Turn our church toward You. Turn people who are far from You toward Jesus.” Elijah’s prayer was short, but its purpose was enormous: “Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that these people will know that You, the LORD, are God and that You have turned their hearts back.” When the altar is broken—CALL. When the situation looks impossible—CALL. When people you love are far from God—CALL. When you want your life to bring glory to Jesus—CALL. But do not only pray, “Lord, show Your power.” Pray, “Lord, turn our hearts.”

The greatest result on Mount Carmel was not simply fire falling from heaven. It was people falling before God and saying, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!” And the greatest answer God has given to this broken world is not fire from heaven. He gave us His Son. Jesus

died for our sins. Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus brings us back to the Father. Jesus changes hearts. Jesus saves. So Church, may our prayer be: "ANSWER ME, LORD—not so that people will see how great I am, but so they will see how great You are. Turn our hearts back to You, and let our lives point people to Jesus Christ."

CALL — ANSWER ME, LORD!

Amen.