

**PREPARATION FOR FIRE TO FALL**  
**Sermon Series #3: "The Elijah Series"**  
**July 16, 2017 --I Kings 17: 2-24**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

If the things you asked of God actually happened could you handle it? Maybe one of the reasons why our prayers aren't answered is we are ill prepared to receive God's answer. We all want something spiritual to happen in our lives. We all want to be touched by the Holy in a way. Whatever is the spiritual metaphor in the story of the Prophet Elijah, when he prays and the fire falls, and the people return to God, and the Spirit of the Living God falls afresh on the people, whatever that is, perhaps the reason for the delay is that we are not ready to receive it. I'm forgetting the movie's name with Jack Nicolson in it and he's on the witness stand in a trial and he says, "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!" The story of the Prophet Elijah is all about preparation; how God prepared Elijah for that singular moment when Elijah prayed, *"Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, are God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back."* (I Kings 18: 37) And the Lord answered Elijah's prayer, and something distinctly spiritual happened, and fire fell, and the offering was consumed, and the people returned their hearts to God. When Elijah was spiritually prepared, the fire fell, and not until...It's all about preparation, friends; its all about spiritual preparation in our life...

I spend a great deal of time preparing for worship. It takes a good two hours to put together the bulletin inputs for the Sunday service. I do that early Monday morning. And I pray about an hour before I do it, getting my heart ready and my soul prepared to receive direction and guidance from God. Tuesday morning I get up bright and early and after prayer I read and re-read the scripture and I study it devotionally, expecting the Lord to show me things I've never seen in the passage before. By the way, I generally have begun thinking about that sermon and service at least six months before. I have a sermon notebook that I jot ideas and scripture passages in, many going back many years. So I am thinking about some of these things literally for years. I have a sermon squeegee folder with slots in it for each sermon and as I read I take notes and throw them into the folder. When I prepare the Preaching and Worship Schedule I generally pray over it for a couple of days before I actually write it down. I'm thinking about what I'm going to preach for Christmas Eve already. This three-part series on Elijah was generated about 10 years ago prior to my coming to The Church of the Covenant. I was asked to write an endorsement of a book that included a section on Elijah and it moved my thinking to want to preach this now. I had written: "The Elijah Series -Its all about preparation." So by the time Monday arrives of the week I'm preaching a particular sermon, I have my idea, my scripture, my illustrations, and I have been thinking and praying about it for years. You probably think I just sort of stand up in the pulpit and off the top of my head speak. No, its all the preparation in advance that makes it look spontaneous and effortless. So I get up early on Wednesday morning and pray about it and put an outline together. By Friday morning when I get up, generally at 4:00 a.m. to pray and then to finalize the sermon in about 6 hours, I feel I am ready to have an encounter with God. Now I want to tell you something and I hope you don't think I'm bragging, but by the time I get to Friday its like the message is downloaded to me. I sit at my computer and type it out with few changes, other than to edit it down and make

it a lot shorter. My problem isn't trying to come up with things to say, it is wanting to say too much! I'm not bragging but God gives me the sermon out of whole cloth. By being prepared, it is not an effort; it is God. Thank you, Dr. Macleod, my preaching professor, who said it takes one hour of preparation for every minute in the pulpit. I remember poo-pooing the idea when I was in seminary. But you were right. Every sermon takes 20 hours, every funeral takes 15, every wedding takes 12. And every day I get up bright and early and think about my entire day and I pray for the meetings of the day, and the people I am meeting and visiting. Every part of my schedule I pray for in advance. Because I want to be spiritually prepared to see the hand of God at work, to speak a good word into every encounter in the day, to be attuned to the work of the Holy Spirit around me every day. If there's no preparation, there's no holy power. No, preparation in prayer, no answer to prayer. No, daily reading of the Word of God, nothing to say to people when God gives me the opportunity to speak into your lives. No preparation, no fire falls from heaven. It's the same for you, beloved. We are so ill-prepared spiritually to face our day...

Elijah was prepared by God to receive the fire when it fell. He fell from grace when he preached an unpopular sermon to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He had to flee for his life. He wound up at the brook Cherith being fed by ravens. God teaching him that God could even provide food from the birds of the air. Consider the birds of the air, says Jesus. Then the drought causes the brook to dry up. Always a sign of spiritual drought as well. Elijah flees to a widow and her son who are preparing to die because they have only one morsel of food left. Elijah is supposed to ask for that last morsel. God magnifies that food and like the loaves and fishes of Jesus' day feeds them day after day their daily bread. The mighty prophet, the former preacher to the king, is now begging food from a poor widow. He now has a congregation of two. And then the son dies. Great work, Elijah, now you have a congregation of ONE! The widow is accusatory –what a great prophet you are, Elijah, even my son has died! So Elijah prays to God and lies atop the son, once, twice, three times, until the son revives. Now the widow believes. She states our Bible verse for today: *"Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in our mouth is truth."* (1 Kings 17: 24) She didn't believe him when God miraculously answered prayer and provided food. But she did believe him when he raised her son from the dead. So God taught Elijah how God provides when he humbles himself and prays and is obedient. He provided blessing from ravens by the brook Cherith and food from a widow's meager table. He raised the dead to life by his Word. If God could do that why can't God take on the 450 prophets of Baal? Why can't God defeat the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel? Why not pour water on the wood, Elijah, so confident of God's provision, so confident that you know he will rain holy fire on your offering, and bless the people through your Holy Word, Elijah? The battle, you see, occurred long before the actual confrontation between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal. The battle was won in the preparation in advance, the way God prepared the prophet's heart to receive the blessing, God broke Elijah down in order to raise him up through His Word, and the people through him, to return to God once again. Elijah, it's all about preparation in advance. It's about praying. It's about not knowing how something is going to happen because it's so illogical, but it does anyway. It's about tuning your heart to God's heart, and knowing His ways, and knowing His Word, and filling your heart up with His thoughts, His Word, His love. O, that we would learn the lesson of

Elijah and take each day as an opportunity to pray and study and tune our hearts to God's will, pray the day through before it happens, and then live our day as if every day the fire was about to fall from heaven!!!! O that the fire would fall, and this people would be revived from the dead like the widow's son, that they would believe and say again: Now I know that the Word of God is truth! That they would quietly proclaim as did the people of Israel after the fire fell – *"The Lord He is God. The Lord He is God"* (I Kings 18: 39) once again!

So, say, a Steeler game is coming on Sunday. You lay out your lucky Steeler shirt you are going to wear in advance. You carefully take out your Terrible Towel and place it in the place you always place it because you believe when you place it there they always win. And you plan way in advance what food you're going to serve. And you bring your \$5 for the fifty-fifty raffle they always take (Just like church there's always an offering!). And you make sure you have your special box seat tickets that you've had for years that cost you an arm and a leg and way more than you put in the collection plate on Sunday. And you listen to sports commentators all week in advance to prepare for all the key plays and all the key players. You have memorized all the stats of the players in advance. You attend a tail gate party in a parking lot hosted by a group that you belong to and pay a princely sum in order to eat brats and drink "beverages". You get up on game day excited and energized. You eagerly drive and pay parking. The game begins and you are amped up and ready. It doesn't matter that there's a man behind you that every time they make a bad play is just sure they aren't going to make the playoffs, it doesn't deter you (there are naysayers everywhere, even in church!) And whether Ben Rothlesberger has a great day or a bad day and whether the Steelers win or lose, (whether the preacher is on or off!) it was nevertheless a great day and you are excited about the next Steeler game. Man, that's preparation in advance, isn't it?

If we know that about the Steeler game, why don't we know that about church? If everything in life is about preparation in advance, why are we so ill-prepared for the fire to fall today? Why don't we pray in advance? Why don't we invite the Lord to be at work in our daily lives? Why don't we read the scriptures? Pray for the proclamation of the Word? Ask God to bless Vacation Bible School? Etc. etc. etc.? **The fire will not fall, not in our life and not in the life of our church, until we are prepared to receive it.** When the American Church is raised from the dead by the WORD of God then and only then will we say: *"Now I know that the WORD of the Lord in your mouth is truth."* Amen and Amen.

**By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!**