



HG200: Elijah & Elisha 'Standing For God' **Great Balls Of Fire**

1 Kings 18:16-46

Home Group Study Notes

24 May 2020 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)

Ice Breaker

Has COVID19 impacted your prayer life? Do you pray more, differently, or less?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)

Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG200: Elijah & Elisha 'Standing For God' Great Balls Of Fire

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Home Group Sermon

24 May 2020 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction This HG sermon is called 'Great Balls of Fire' but like some heavyweight championship fight today it could easily have been called the 'Fight of the Century' or the 'Battle of the Gods.' It could have been called 'Which God answers Prayer?' Can you imagine what the headlines would say today? It was going to be a fight to the end in one of the greatest showdowns of all time starring one of the greatest showmen of all time, the prophet Elijah, a strange man living in strange times and surely we have never lived in stranger times ourselves. Three years before this battle God had sent Elijah to the evil King Ahab to tell him that there would be no rain for 3 years, he then went into hiding or, isolation. Under God's instruction he self distanced himself from everyone else and for 3 years he spent time in prayer and preparation for the battle of his life. Since then there had been 3 years of drought, the rivers had dried up, the land was parched, crops had repeatedly failed as the sun beat down relentlessly. In spiritual terms this was a time of complete despair, thick with demonic darkness and the chasm between God and his people was at its greatest. So to say things were bad is an understatement. God needed someone that he could use at this time in Israel's history and Elijah appears on the scene just in the nick of time. Now 3 years on from when he had last seen Ahab, God tells Elijah to *"present yourself to Ahab and I will send rain on the land."* 18:1.

God v Baal So Elijah rolls up and Ahab blames the prophet for all the trouble that had fallen on Israel, he refuses to take any responsibility for the situation they were in but Elijah soon puts him right and tells him that the drought had been sent by God because he, and his fathers before him, had forsaken God and his commandments and followed the Baals instead. Ahab needed to be shown that there is only one Living God who is supreme and through Elijah, God was ready to prove it. Elijah proposes a meeting with the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Mount Carmel and the question would be settled as to who was God. The gauntlet was thrown down, it was God verses Baal, Elijah in one corner, the prophets of Baal and Asherah in the other. God's opponents were given the advantage as the battle was to be fought on home ground and of course Elijah was greatly outnumbered with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, that is 850-1 surely it was no contest, and so the challenge was taken up. How could they lose?

Prayer and Promises Now over the last 3 years it might have looked as if God had been absent and that he had been doing nothing but behind the scenes he was working and preparing his man for this one moment and Baal's prophets didn't know what was going to hit them. God's plans continue to unfold right on schedule even when it appears that he has forgotten us. Life may seem unfair at times, we may wait and wait and nothing happens and our faith may be stretched to its limits, there might be nothing to show that makes us think that he remembers any of the promises he made in his Word and then out of the blue all of a sudden, he acts. I have seen it happen in my own life. When enough waiting has been done, when enough prayers have been said, when we have undergone enough preparation, God acts and changes occur just as he promised... but I can't say this without acknowledging what many may be thinking, that is, what about the many times when our prayers have gone unanswered? Well all I can say is that when this happens it doesn't make me question God's Lordship or his kindness or his good plans for my life...and I will always choose to trust in His love for me ...

Pete Grieg in his book *How to Pray* says: *“Lets just acknowledge that prayer can be a lot like stacking dominoes, we pray the same thing one hundred times before.. until suddenly the whole lot comes down. The breakthrough occurs. The miracle happens. It’s not that we finally found the right formula. Its simply that we didn’t give up praying too soon”*

We’ve probably all experienced it, you pray and pray and nothing happens, it’s not working, you want to give up yet we need to keep it up and be persistent. God has always worked that God way yet we still fear, we still doubt and we still wonder and worry whether he still listening. In fact it’s the other way round, he is always listening, he always remembers us and he is always waiting for us to turn to him. In Elijah’s times his people had forsaken him but God was still on his people’s side, it just that they weren’t for him any more. He hasn’t changed and in many hearts and in many places today we haven’t either. God is still for us and on our side, it’s just that we are not always for him.

Certainty v Confusion Anyway, as many of the Israelites had willingly followed Baal, and put their faith in him, they were to be present. I expect many had followed Baal out of fear of being in opposition to Ahab and Jezebel. It would have been easier to blend in and more practical and convenient to worship him because it’s what everyone else was doing but they wavered back and forth, uncertain and not being truly committed to either Baal or God. Even so, they still were God’s people and he wanted them back and they needed to see and to know who was the One True Supreme and Living God. He will not share his glory with any other. Elijah challenged them as we are challenged today when he shouted out, *“How long are you going to waiver between God and Baal, if God is God then follow him, if Baal is god then follow him.”*

Its reminiscent of Moses addressing the people when they were worshipping the golden calf they had made whilst Moses was up the mountain with God, choose the one you will worship. It’s decision time make up your mind. You can’t be a slave of 2 masters. You can’t have it both ways, but they remained silent choosing not to commit. In many ways this reflects the post modern age we live in. There are so many religions and belief systems that we can dip into and sometimes this can simply increase our confusion and uncertainty about things. With the help of Google, YouTube and the internet we can be experts on anything and everything, you have an ailment - ask Google, you want help with a DIY problem go on YouTube, you have a question, look on the internet and you will find the answer. There are millions of answers, opinions, instructions at the touch of a button. We worship at the feet of the gods of power, money, possessions, ambition, sex, celebrity, we may, like the Israelites, want to serve God, but we also want to embrace lots of other false gods, many of us feel that we don’t even need him. Being half hearted and confused will never lead to a deep intimacy with God. There is no uncertainty about the faith God’s people express, like the psalmist in Ps 18.2 we can say with confidence *“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my mountain where I seek refuge.”* There is no wavering in that statement of belief. *“If Yahweh is God then worship him.”*

Battle Lines Drawn So the scene was set, the imposing figure of Elijah stood alone vastly outnumbered but not afraid, he was able to stand his ground because he had a plan and he was confident in his God. The fight involved killing and cutting up bulls, putting them on altars and praying to their god to light a fire under the bulls, all very bloody and Old Testament. The Baal worshippers went first, they got the pick of the bulls and wood and it should have played to Baal’s strength as he was also the god of the sun so fire would be no problem, but things quickly went downhill and the scene descended into chaos. The prophets prayed, they shouted out, they danced and cut themselves from morning til evening, this was no genteel Sunday night prayer meeting, it was frenzied madness. They carried on until they were exhausted when they finally gave up because nothing happened. Then it was Elijah’s turn.

The One True God Cool as you like he stood up, he was alone and outnumbered 850-1 yet they were all silenced and intimidated by this one dedicated man of God. First thing he did was to repair the old altar of the Lord that was broken signifying Israel’s spiritual condition and their woeful departure from the Lord, the God who had looked after them and who had rescued them and

delivered them out of Egypt. Elijah built a new one with 12 stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob from whom the *“word of the Lord had come saying “Your name shall be Israel.”* He was reminding them of their fathers faith, calling them to repent and return to the old covenant with God. He then prayed a very simple prayer which lasted about 30 seconds and the response from God was immediate despite the wood having been drenched in water 3 times *“the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood the stones and the soil and also licked up the water in the trench.”* v38. One quick prayer to the One True God was all it took to defeat Baal and his followers. What happens next may be a bit shocking to us in 21 century as Elijah ordered that all the priests be killed, it sounds like the vicious revenge of a vengeful God but they had led Israel into idolatry and God was preserving Israel keeping it pure because it is through Israel that he would bring his Messiah and he could not allow idolatry to persist.

Persevering In Prayer But that’s not the end of this story because Elijah got down and prayed again, this time for rain, he prayed in line with the promise that God had made in Ch 18 v1 when he sent Elijah to Ahab and told him that he would send rain on the land and he didn’t stop praying until the promise was fulfilled and the rain came. He had tell his servant to look for rain 7 times because there was no immediate answer to his prayer but he did not give up, he had to persevere and pray some more. God keeps his promises, he is a forgiving God, sending the fire to bring his people back to him and then graciously providing the rain for his people in order to provide them with food and drink. God works through prayer, he invites us to pray in accordance with his will and his promises, sometimes its great because he acts immediately, like the fire being sent down, but sometimes we have to wait and persist as Elijah did until the rain came.

Prayer is the most effective tool we Christians have but sometimes we use it as a last resort. How many times have you said to someone you will pray about something and a few minutes later it’s gone out of your mind or how often have you tried to fix a problem only to try prayer when all else has failed? And it’s not about how long we pray for or about the fancy words we use, it has to do with having confidence in the Lord and in his promises. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6 that, *“The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.”* The reason Elijah was able to stand confidently and without fear before hundreds of opponents was because he knew he was not alone and he knew that God kept his promises. God is never fickle or contrary, he doesn’t change his mind, he always keeps his word.

This battle is monumental but what it comes down to is prayer, it's about a man of prayer and about which God answers prayer and like Elijah we cannot grow in prayer without some measure of effort and self discipline, our spiritual growth will be determined to a very significant extent by the prayer exercises we choose, or don’t choose to establish and sustain. Elijah’s faith and composure came from his relationship with the Living God, the God of the covenant, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the same God we call Father and it was out of his relationship with God that he was able to pray with confidence.

Lessons in Prayer There are several lessons we can learn from how Elijah prayed too,

1. He sought the glory of God, it was not about himself and drawing attention to how good *he* was, it was all about God.
2. He prayed that the people would return to God, that they would know the truth and turn away from false gods.
3. It was important for him to get away by himself to be with God, we see this in his preparation before this battle and when he was praying for the rain.
4. He prayed in line with what God had promised, God had said he would send the rain, and he did.
5. And when it came to the rain, he kept on praying, he was persistent and despite how things looked, he did not give up.

The God Who Answers Prayer There are lots of gods out there but none of them can answer your prayers. There are the gods of money, power, sex, ambition, there are demonic gods that people bow down to and worship, none of them answer prayer. The gods of materialism may make us fleetingly happy but they have no power to answer any of your prayers. There are plenty of false religions, their gods wont answer your prayers, we can pray several times day, sitting, kneeling, standing, fasting, we can light incense candles, bow down and prostrate ourselves to any number of false gods and none of them will answer your prayers none of them can save us. Only the God of the Bible can answer our prayers and it is only through our relationship, given by His grace through faith in his wonderful Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

We are called to put idolatry to death in our hearts because we are made for relationship with the Living God. We are made in his image, we are chosen, loved, known to him by our names, each one of us special in his eyes so don't waiver in your loyalty to him, don't share your heart with false gods that would lure you in, don't let them become functional saviours because they cannot satisfy your heart, you will always be restless, you will always be searching. There is only one hope, one Lord, one Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, only He is the answer *to* your prayers. It's easy to read this story and think that Elijah was in a different league to us, that he was a spiritual giant, but James in 5.17 simply says, "*Elijah was a human being, with a nature like ours,*" so take heart and encouragement. Elijah was flesh and blood. He got anxious and depressed, he got worried and fearful, he got things wrong and suffered huge disappointments but he was confident in the God he served and he wasn't too busy to wait on Him, or too sure of himself and in his own ability. There is a lot we can learn from him and a lot to admire about him, he serves us as a mighty example of prayer as well as faith. But above all what we can take from reading about Elijah is that we serve the same God that Elijah served and we can trust the same God that Elijah trusted, he is the same yesterday and today and will be the same tomorrow, he is the same God who makes promises and who keeps them and he is the God who answers prayer.

2020 Vision Like me you might be hopeless at remembering dates, but 2020 is one date that most of us who are living through will remember. If in the future you are asked what were you doing in 2020, all over the world people will say the same thing. We were stuck indoors, we were fighting a virus, we were self isolating, we were grieving, we were in lockdown in 2020. In all that the world has been through in 2020 I pray that God will give us 2020 vision, that we will come out of this time with a clarity that we have never had before, that we will use it to put new choices into actions. That we will truly realise what is, and who is important, that we will prioritize what it is that we pursue in life, that the small things we have found pleasure in whilst locked in, will remain and become the things we cherish and become what is important to us, that the voices that have been shouting at us for so long about saving our planet and life on it will, at long last, be listened to and the millions of prayers that have been said will continue to be offered to the One True Living God, and may the same question that Elijah put to the Israelites be put again to us, loud and clear,

"If Yahweh is God then worship him, if all those other gods of materialism are god then worship them".... but with the full knowledge... and accepting responsibility ... that only One of them can answer your prayers.... and His name is Jesus.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

*"The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing."*

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. When Elijah prayed, his prayers were tied to the promises of God, e.g. God said he would send rain, (18.1), so Elijah prayed for rain. Do you ever pray using any of the hundreds of God's promises? Is this something that you think might encourage and bless your prayer life?

2. Elijah scolded the people and told them to choose between Baal and God. Can you hear him say this to us? What can this teach us about discipleship?

3. Elijah was confident in his relationship with God. Do you ever doubt God's faithfulness in your own life?

4. We can pray anywhere but there is something about setting aside a time and place to be with God. Do you have a prayer routine? If not do you feel you need one? What stops you from having one?

5. Elijah repaired the broken altar, is there any part of your personal relationship with the Lord that needs to be repaired? If so, what needs to be repaired and what steps will you take to repair it?

6. People pray in times of crisis and we have probably all prayed more since the start of the pandemic. How committed are you to continuing to pray as the lock-down eases or do you think you will waiver once other pressures and interests creep back into your life?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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