



Special Music: “Start A Fire”

Unspoken

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrEzr-rWwe8>

1 Kings 18:38-39

38 Then 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.

39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”

CONSUME ME

**Awesome God
When you touch my heart
Make my soul
A work of art.
Leave no blood
And leave no part
Unconsumed**

**Let those around me
See your flame
See your glory
Shout your name
Your fire burns
Stake your claim.
Upon my soul**

**I am yours
Consumed by grace.
Take my heart
And leave no trace
Of what is past.
Change my face
To mirror You.**

**Give me bread
And give me wine
Knit my soul**

**To intertwine
With your Spirit
And love divine.
Make me whole.**

**On the alter
I lay my pride
Wood and stone
Exemplify
The precious cross
Where Jesus died
To ransom me.**

**Send your fire
From the sky
Consume my soul
And purify
My heart of stone
To be rectified
To creation's flesh**

**Take and conquer
My stubborn soul
Reach inside
And take control
Fill me up
And make me whole
Consume me.**

I have fond memories of all the bonfires I have attended in my life. It doesn't matter that some occurred on hot summer nights and others on cold winter nights. In all honesty, the fires could either be too warm because of the summer heat or not warm enough because of the biting Texas cold. I remember times when my face burned from the heat of the fire while my body shivered because of the cold. I have camped in snow, and I have camped in the Texas heat. But no matter what the temperature, if we didn't have a fire, something very core to the experience of camping and fellowship was missing. There is always something mesmerizing about an open fire shared among friends, roasting marshmallows or making smores, swapping stories, and singing songs. I often had my guitar as we entertained ourselves under the stars.

But the secret formula that created that kindred spirit was the campfire. It just would not have been the same if that fire was not the center piece of the experience, if we didn't have that fire to gather around in unity. If I was going to go camping, there was going to be a campfire. When the last song was sung and the last story told, as the fire died down, we would head off to our tents or bunkhouses and settle in for the night to warm memories of bonding fellowship.

If you have never had that experience, then you've truly missed out on an experience that all humans are meant to share. It's a return to our primal nature and has been in existence since the dawn of humankind on this planet. It is a time of joining hearts, minds, and spirits under an open sky watching as the flames dance and the fire crackles creating a feeling a kinship with the rest of creation.

In the morning, if we visit the place where the fire burned, what we find is ashes. Unless someone got up in the night and tended to that fire, it consumed all its fuel until nothing remains but ash, the byproduct of wood and leaves, devoured by the flames that kindled our hearts the night before. While we don't really give it much thought, the fire that was so alive, dancing in our minds and hearts, utilized every possible bit of fuel to remain alive until that fuel was gone.

The fact that the fire had died out, does not affect our memories of the bonding that occurred while it flourished. And when we think about that time, gathered with friends, we can still sense the heat, see the flames, hear the crackle of the fire, and relive laughter that made us feel so alive and akin to one another. I know that I, for one, can still see the faces of those who gathered with me, sitting on logs or camp chairs. Those memories warm me.

As we continue with this series on Elijah, I want to continue to keep the narrative of the story in context. So, once again I want to read the story from where we left off last week. But before I continue the story, I'd like to recap what has happened to bring us to this point. Elijah, unhappy that Ahab was promoting the worship of Baal, met with Ahab and issued a challenge. In the challenge the prophets of Baal and the priests of Asherah would meet Elijah in the desert, and they would both build altars and lay out a bull sacrifice on the altars, but they would not ignite the wood for the sacrifice. The agreement was that if Baal consumed his sacrifice without any help from the prophets and priests, then the people would worship Baal. But if God consumed the sacrifice that Elijah

presented, then that would prove that the Lord was God, and the people would return to the worship of Yahweh.

Elijah gave the prophets and priests of Baal the first chance, and they danced, sang, and cut themselves all day, but could not get a response from Baal. At the end of the day, Elijah took his turn and laid the sacrifice out on the altar that he had reconstructed in the desert from the stones of an altar that had been torn down. He dug a trench around the altar. He then had the people drench the sacrifice, wood, and altar with water until it filled the trench. Our story today, picks up at this point.

The passage that I am about to read will include our scripture for today:

1 Kings 18:36-39

**36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward 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 and have done all these things
at your command.**

Rather than shouting and dancing, Elijah simply steps forward and begins to pray. First in his prayer, Elijah acknowledged who God is, that God has always been the God of Israel. God has history with these people and that history is long and full of God created events. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whose name was later changed to Israel). This is the God of their forefathers. This is the God that brought them out of Egypt. This is the God who parted the

Red Sea and the Jordan River. This is the God who provided them with Manna in the desert and brought water out of stone. This is the God who brought them to the promised land. This is the God of David and Solomon. This is the God whom the people have broken covenant with as they stubbornly sat on the fence.

The second thing of note in this verse is something I pointed out earlier in this series. Elijah takes no credit for what has happened or about to happen. He reminds the people in his prayer that he is God's servant and that everything he has done is in response to God's oversight and commands in his life. Elijah has allowed God to consume him. His purpose is to serve his Creator, not to gain any glory. He is an instrument of God's will, burnished in the fire of God's Spirit, shaped to meet the needs of the God's children. In Elijah we see total and complete commitment to Yahweh as he brings God's word to the people.

37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

I don't want to shy away from this verse. Have you ever been in this situation? You know what I'm talking about. You are speaking to someone about Jesus and His love for them. And somewhere in that conversation, the question of proof comes up. We pray that God will show up in the person's life and give them proof of His existence. Wouldn't that make things easier. "Here's your proof! Watch God burn this tree down! Boom! Now do you believe in God?" It's called "shock and awe" by the military.

I would never tell you that God can't or won't show up in this way. But I will say that we are pretty jaded here in the twenty-first century and it often takes a bit more to get us excited in this age of atomic weaponry, smart bombs, stealth aircraft, satellites, and David Copperfield. I don't mean that burning down that tree isn't impressive. What I do mean is that we are so jaded we will jump to any other possible conclusion rather than believe that God is responsible. We, are by nature, fence sitters in the space age.

No, God normally works in more subtle but distinct ways in our lives today. Personal ways. Personal miracles that cannot be denied. Healing when no healing seemed possible. Open doors where there were no doors at all. Answers to questions that appear to have no answers. Renewal out of ashes. Salvation when we believe salvation is impossible. The unquestionable nature of God's love for us in a world given to crime, disease, war, and hate. If that doesn't impress us, nothing ever will.

38 Then 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.

The very first thing we should note is that Elijah does not have to pray all day to get a response. It's as if God has been waiting for just this moment. Elijah doesn't have to do any singing or dancing. He doesn't have to cut himself and bleed all over the altar. That is because, this act of God actually, has nothing to do with Elijah. Elijah does not call down the fire. Elijah isn't trying to make God

perform. Elijah makes it very clear that he is merely the servant, and this ensuing result is all God.

The second thing we find in this verse is what sets God's miracles apart from "shock and awe" and a human's gift of slighthandedness. God consumes the sacrifice. God doesn't blow it up or slow roast it. He consumes it. In one mighty act, He consumes it until there is nothing left. If God had just burned up the sacrifice, it would have been impressive but not completely unquestionable. Someone might have called Elijah out as a magician, able to start a fire from a distance.

No, God wants the consumption of this sacrifice to be so evident that God's involvement cannot be denied, that it could not and would not be attributed to anyone else, including Elijah. This fire fell from the sky and directly hit the altar. And when it did, it consumed the sacrifice. It consumed the wood even though it was soaking wet. It consumed the rocks of the carefully reconstructed altar. It even consumed all the water in the trench around the altar. There was nothing left. Elijah didn't have to touch it. No one doubted that it was God that consumed the very rocks of this altar along with the sacrifice.

I hate it when I find myself fence sitting. When I am on the fence, I find myself turning over rocks to try to find the miracles. When I do this, I am not doing it to better people's lives but to provide ammunition for my personal theology. And that is a totally wrong way to examine this scripture. God did not consume this sacrifice to impress anyone. He did it to show the people that their faith had been misplaced. That they had allowed the wrongful nature of this

world to convince them to turn their eyes away from their Creator. He did it to get them off the fence and back to where they needed to be. This was God bringing the prodigal children home.

39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"

And God is successful. The people realize how wrong they have been to allow Ahab and Jezebel to intimidate them and lead them astray. God shows them that there was no reason to be intimidated. The God of their forefathers is the one true God. He always has been. He never left. It was the people who took to sitting on the fence because they forgot their past. They forgot that God walked beside them. They had forgotten that as God's chosen people, they had been consumed by God. God was their all in all, their alpha and omega, their beginning and end. Without God, they were nothing.

What about us? Do we understand that when we welcome Christ as our savior into our hearts and minds, we are consumed by Him. He becomes our all. We are new creatures. Old things are passed away. What we were is burned away beyond all recognition? That we are risen from the ashes as God's hands and feet in this world?

So often we want to hang onto what we were. We believe that we can sort out the good from the bad and then offer up the good to God and leave the bad

behind. But we are not best of judges nor the best filters for doing this, because God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's ways are not our ways.

Instead, we need to be offering it all up to God; the body, the wood, the stones, and the water and let God consume everything that we are, allowing our Creator to turn us into his instruments as we work to make this world a better place by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, visiting the lonely and disenfranchised, and lifting the downtrodden. It is God who will decide what parts of us are worth honing and what parts will be turned to ash. But we can't hold anything back. If we truly want to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world, we have to give it all up.

This week, I encourage each of us to check the inventory of our souls that we have laid on the altar to ensure we haven't left anything out. Are there parts of our lives that we have not laid at the foot of the cross? Things that we are keeping to ourselves because we either don't want to give them up or that we feel God doesn't want? I assure you, there is no segment of our lives that God does not want to be a part of. There is no corner of our souls that he wants us to keep to ourselves. How can God clean us up if we hide pieces of ourselves in a cabinet? Let's put everything out on the altar. Let's allow God to consume every part of our being, not just bits and pieces. Let's allow God to consume the sacrifice of our bodies, the fuel of our minds, the stones of our hearts, and the waters of purification. Let us allow God to make us anew into what our Creator needs us to be. Let there be no doubt that we are created anew in Christ, that our Creator's fire burns within us, making us perfect for God's purpose.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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