

Sunday, July 21, 2024 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

「"Pray Seven Times"」 Pastor : Takaaki Inoue
1 Kings 18:30~40, James 5:7~8, 13~18

① 【When the fire of the Holy Spirit falls, faith returns to man】

After three years of drought and famine, the word of the Lord came to Elijah. "Go and appear before Ahab, and I will make rain fall on the face of the earth." (1 Kings 18:1) So Elijah obeyed these words and appeared before King Ahab. Elijah suggests to Ahab that he gather the Israelites and the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel. Baal is a male god with thunder in his hand. Asherah is a goddess. The rain from heaven soaked into the earth and the crops grew, so the agricultural people worshipped both Baal and Asherah. By the way, this Asherah was introduced to India, and from India to Japan, and there is a national treasure statue called "Ashura statue" at Kofukuji Temple in Nara, but there is also a theory that it became this "Ashura". Elijah said to the assembled Israelites, "How long have you been lost in one way or the other? If Baal is God, follow him." (Ibid., verse 21). God doesn't want to serve two masters. (Matthew 6:24) To serve them means to choose the one that is ultimately in your best interest. If it is not for your benefit, you will throw it away, so you can use God. You don't want to be treated and taken advantage of like that. But the people do not answer. So Elijah suggested with the prophets of Baal that they should tear one bull apart from each other and place it on the firewood of the altar, call each other by the name of their God, and that the God who answers with fire is the God. First, the prophets of Baal call out the name of their God madly, hurting, bleeding, and screaming from morning till midday, but nothing happens. Now it's Elijah's turn. He chooses 12 stones in the shape of the 12 tribes to restore the crumbling altar. A deep trench was dug around the altar, a chopped bull was placed on the firewood, and water was poured three times over it. "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that you are God in Israel... May it be clarified. Please reply to me. Lord, answer me. Then this people will know that you are God, and that it is you who have restored their hearts." (verses 36~37). Then the fire of the Lord came down from heaven and burned offerings, firewood, and stones, and licked up the water that was in the ditch. When the people saw this, they fell down and said, "The Lord is God. I confessed and turned to God.

A long time ago, God answered Elijah's prayer with fire, but God answered Jesus' prayer with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Just as the fire of heaven descended and faith returned to the Israelites, the fire of the Holy Spirit descended and faith was born in the apostles. It was a bull that was sacrificed at the time of Elijah, but it was Jesus who sacrificed for us. In order for people

to have faith and return to God, they need the fire of the Holy Spirit.

●The other day, I was reading 1 Kings chapter 22 and an interesting scene came up. When the angels gathered before God, God asked, "Who will tempt Ahab and cause him to kill?" and "a spirit came forward and said, 'I will tempt him'" (Ibid. 22:21). The spirit sent false spirits to the prophets to prophesy falsehoods. Cult religion is indeed the work of false spirits (evil spirits). This is because they prophesy a lie, saying, "This is what God said," and make them believe in a false Messiah. But when the Holy Spirit worked, in an instant the person had the Christian faith. When Ms.M realized the Unification Society's mistake, she said, "The wind blew and blew away the Unification Society's teachings and sentences, and only Jesus remained."This is the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes, people return to their right faith.

② 【Repair a broken altar】

In order to invoke the fire of the Holy Spirit, Elijah first needed to repair the broken altar. If the altar is broken, it means that no offerings have been made to the Lord God, that there has been no communion with God, and that prayer has ceased. To repair a broken altar is to repair worship. The restoration of faith is the restoration of worship and the restoration of a life of prayer.

●E. M. Bounds said, "The failure of prayer is the failure of life." When the life of prayer, the life of worship, collapses, so does life. This is not a lie. Since I was a member of the congregation, I have not been able to pray. It still is. Influenced by Pastor Yasuo Enomoto's words, "Five minutes in the morning can change you," I started an early morning prayer meeting, and I imitated it, but it didn't last. Reading the Bible alone makes me sleepy. So I thought it would be a good idea to hold a meeting, so I decided on a time and day of the week. It's hard to concentrate at home, but at church, you can concentrate because of people's eyes. Also, even if I was doing free prayer, it would end quickly and the prayer would not continue, so I learned to pray in the "prayer book". The prayers of the ancient church take three hours just to read. The prayer book is very well made, and for the faint of heart, it is like a corset, and it trains the faith. I also look forward to burning incense during prayer. Because we know with our bodies that the place we are in is a holy place. Thus, using all sorts of methods, nailing the body, I have rebuilt the altar of prayer. I think the basis is a prayer life. If this is broken, the Holy Spirit will not descend, and if the Holy Spirit does not come, there will be no power and we will not be able to go on missions.

Elijah prayed, "This people will know that you are God" (Ibid. 18:37). The meaning of miracles is to know God through it, to repent and turn to Him. Otherwise, it would just be a magic show. So is the healing of illness. The sick are being healed and working more and more for the Lord. As soon as Peter's

mother-in-law and other children had a fever, they entertained Jesus and his entourage. If you're going to be healthy and do worse things, it's better to be sick. The important thing is that our lives, whether we are sick or healthy, are about serving God and bearing witness to Him.

③ **【Let's Pray with Patience】**

Elijah told Ahab that he could hear the sound of heavy rain, but there was no sign of rain yet. Elijah went up to Mount Carmel, crouched on the ground, buried his head between his knees and prayed. He says to his servant, "Come up and look at the sea" (Ibid. 18:43), and the servant comes up and replies, "Nothing." Elijah commanded, "Again," and he repeated it seven times. Seven is a perfect number, so there will be a time of fullness. For the seventh time, the servant reported, "A cloud as small as the palm of your hand is coming up from the far side of the sea" (Ibid. 18:44), and the sky was soon covered with thick clouds and darkened, and the wind came up, and it rained heavily.

The fire from heaven came down immediately, but the rain from heaven did not come immediately. This teaches a truth. It teaches us that salvation through Christ and the Holy Spirit came immediately from heaven, but it takes patience and time to make it our own and bear fruit. As we pray and wait, we ask Him to remove our ambitions and selfishness and transform us into something that is in accordance with God's will. I feel that even in the phrase "small clouds" there is a warning to us to expect some great miracle.

There are two things that Christians need to pray for. "For those who draw near to God must believe that He exists, and that He is the one who rewards those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

●A man named Masafumi Sato wrote a book called "A Life of Prayer", and it says the following. "Any case is indeed difficult while it is only an affair, but when it is entrusted into the hands of God, the difficulty has already lost the qualities that it should be. ... We are not afraid of difficulties. This is because we believe in the providence of God, who has done all things for good. Pray and be at peace, and pray and be at peace, and in this way demonstrate the value of your life as a servant of God."

In the kitchens of nursing homes, staff often quit. The director of the facility was always scratching his head by gathering people. However, if we leave it to a contractor, it will manage human resources, so people no longer have to worry about it. It's the same. If you pray and entrust a problem to God, He will intervene and work. First, rebuild the altar of prayer, trust in God, and continue to call His name. There is always a "time" when your wish will be granted. The

"time" has already been determined. Don't stop praying until that "time." In this way, let us be sure that we will see the fulfillment of our promises.