

## 1 Kings 18.20-40 'Five Things We Forget About God' Transcript

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Preaching: Rhys Lamont

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In December of 2004, an earthquake struck off the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. It triggered a huge tsunami, the impact of which remains one of the deadliest global natural disasters that has ever occurred. It claimed the lives of an estimated 230,000 people and triggered a global humanitarian response.

On that awful tsunami that hit there in 2004, even more lives would have been lost if it were not for a little 10-year-old girl by the name of Tilly Smith. Tilly was holidaying with her parents in Thailand, and two weeks earlier she had been sitting in class learning in geography all about tsunamis. On the beach that morning, 26 December 2004, she noticed that something was terribly wrong. She was looking out at the ocean and began to see all of the waves retracting out to sea, and the coral reef that was usually hidden had revealed itself.

But it's hard to get people to listen to you when you're 10 years old. Isn't that right, kids? Adults don't really listen to kids too much, do they? But she made enough of a fuss that eventually someone listened to her. By the time that the waves hit the beach, the lifeguards had all but cleared the beach, and people survived.

What's the moral of the story? If only we would pay greater attention to the signs. And this applies to all areas of our lives, doesn't it? Pay attention to the signs.

In the Old Testament, God gave the nation of Israel warning signs of his judgments in order to turn their hearts back to him. One of those signs was a famine. Hunger and a

shortage of food in the promised land was God's warning, a signpost along the way that all was not well in the land. The Psalms reflect on famine this way in Psalm 107: "He changes rivers into a wilderness and springs of water into a thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salt waste because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it."

In the context of our text here in 1 Kings, there is a famine in the land. The text describes the famine this way in chapter 18, verse 2: "Now the famine was severe in Samaria," that is central Israel. A famine for bread pointed, it was a sign of the famine in Israel's soul. God's displeasure was upon the people for their sin and unfaithfulness to him.

And what's the big problem? Well, you look at 1 Kings 16, verse 30, and we learn of their king Ahab. It says, "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him." We then read about his sin before God in chapter 16, verse 32: "So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him."

You see, the covenant people of God were steeped in idol worship. The famine was there as a warning sign, all is not well. But God's man, the prophet Elijah, is in the field. And so all is not lost, as it never is without God. And so the scene is set for a divine showdown.

We have read that section together in 1 Kings 18. The people gather to Mount Carmel, and Elijah delivers a challenge to the people. We read again in verse 21 of chapter 18: "Elijah came near all the people and said, 'How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him.'" But the people did not answer him a word.

Did you notice those last words there? The people did not answer him a word. Their silence before Elijah is indicative of the fact they had all but forgotten about the true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their memory is eroded. The God of covenant who delivered them from slavery, who gave them the law, who gave them the promises of the gospel, who gave them types and shadows of the Messiah to come, he is gone from their memories, and they are silent.

How quickly things can change. It's true in almost every area of our lives, and especially spiritually, things can change fast. How easily the true and faithful worship

of God in a church can give way to idolatry and worldliness. We must be careful, brothers and sisters.

I remember years ago in Western Australia, while I was working there, I was talking to an older man from the UK. The man was an avid reader. At some point in the conversation that I had with him, I said, "I think someday I'd perhaps like to write a book," as was the conversation. He knew that I was a Christian, and so he asked, "What do you think you would write your book about?" I said, "Well, it would be something to do with theology or the Bible."

I'll never forget what he said in response. He said, "But hasn't everything that needs to be written about the Bible already been written?" In other words, we don't really need any more books about the Bible. We've got 2000 years of books about the Bible. I've always thought about his response. The answer is no. For this simple reason, there is more to be written. Why? Because every new generation of followers of Jesus Christ must rediscover God and his word. They must re-appreciate the depths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They must study, read, learn, write, teach, preach, declare all over again. This is the true and faithful worship of our God.

They must take the baton from the generation past and run forward with it into the future. In our churches, like Israel, there are things we can so easily forget about God. And then we end up like Israel before Elijah, challenged over the truth, and we have nothing to say. There are things we can easily forget about God. We are only ever half a generation of our churches being wiped out when we drop the ball and forget these things about God. We do not want to find ourselves with nothing to say when confronted with the truth.

And so I have five things we forget about God for you. Let's move through them together. Coming from the text, we consider first of all 1 Kings 18, verse 36, and I have this heading: We forget that God's word is sufficient.

We forget that God's word is sufficient. Take a look again at verse 36 and note what Elijah says. He says, "I have done, speaking to the Lord, I have done all these things at your word." The office of the prophet in Israel was to speak forth God's words for his people. Thus, Elijah was not a man going his own way, but he spoke and served as God directed. A number of times we find this phrase in the book of Kings: "The word of the Lord came to Elijah." The word of the Lord came to Elijah, and so he spoke, so he lived. This was his life.

And this is what Israel had forgotten, that God's word is sufficient for them. That in the end, it is only what God has said that really matters. These things are a far cry, you see, from the time of Joshua at an early time in Israel when the people had said to Joshua, "We will serve the Lord our God. We will obey his voice." Now look how things have turned out. See, things can change. Israel had let the serpents lie in the garden, steal away their love for God's words. Did God really say? Did God really say that you must worship the Lord and the Lord only? How about we just bring a bit of Baal worship in here as well? You see? Did God really say?

This is the battle from the beginning. This is what professed churches can even forget, that God's word is sufficient. But friends, we must live by this word. We must train our minds to think and act according to what is written because his word is all-sufficient. This word is the basis and foundation of our gathering here this morning. You must inform your marriages by this word. You must temper your relationships to one another by this word. You must teach your children this word. Run your business, manage your household, order your life, all of it according to God's word because God's word is sufficient for his people.

His word is sure, his word is final, his word is complete. It's all you need to live faithfully for God in the world. His word never fails those who put their trust in it. His word never misses the mark. The word of God is all Elijah ultimately cared about. It's all you and I must care about in the ultimate sense. What has God spoken? Elijah had confidence in the Lord's word. He knew that the fire would fall from heaven and consume the sacrifice and prove Israel's idolatry.

So friend, never forget that the Bible is all we need. Stop adding to it. Stop taking away from it. Stop modifying it. Stop thinking it needs updating. Stop thinking that the Bible needs to get with the times. The times need to get with the Bible. It's all a lie. This word is sufficient for the Church of Christ for all time. The Psalmist says in Psalm 119, "I rejoice at your word as one who finds great spoil. I hate and despise falsehood, but I love your law."

Listen, a church that loses sight that God's word is the rule of faith, it may have the title of church, but it's apostate to the Lord. We do not copy and paste. We do not rearrange. We do not cover parts of it or minimize uncomfortable truths. When you see that happening, it is but the first sign of receding waves. When you see a church begin to lay aside the sound teaching of the word, it is a sure sign that the famine, the

tsunami is coming. That church will stumble on in the darkness, for they have abandoned their duty to the gospel and to the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon says this: "The reason why some churches do not prosper is because they have not done according to God's word. They have not even cared to know what God's word says. Another book is their standard. Another man is their leader and legislator instead of the inspired word of God."

The first heading is this: God's word is sufficient. The other ones are a little bit shorter. We move through into verse 37. We forget that God is gracious.

We forget that God is gracious. Look at verse 37. "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back again." How we forget that it is God who changes the heart of man. How we forget that it is God who has mercy on sinners. That God is the one who shows grace and brings salvation to sinners. We forget that it is God who awakens and draws the sinner to himself for salvation. That's what grace does. Grace is unmerited, demerited favor of God. It's when we get Christ, though we deserve his judgment.

Gracious is the Lord and righteous, yet our God is compassionate, the psalmist says. Only God can move a heart in repentance of sin towards him because it's only by grace are we saved. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And how gracious God is to forgive our trespasses against him and apply the cleansing of Christ Jesus to our dead souls and awaken to new life with a cry of "come forth."

At Mount Carmel, God would use this demonstration of his sovereign power to awaken the people to their falsities of Baal worship and in his grace turn their hearts towards him. We forget that God is gracious in many ways. For one, we might be tempted to think that it's all up to us to keep our churches alive, to spread the gospel in the world. Well, certainly God uses us, but this is his work. If we can't find a way to attract the masses, then all is lost.

And this leads some to tame the gospel, to cage the lion, to conceal that which is an offense to the natural man, to butter up and make more digestible that which is foolishness to the world, the cross of Christ. And so they create entertainment from worship. They turn sermons into inspirational talks. They minimize God's word. That's what happens when we forget that God is gracious, then we forget that it's his

work. They forget that it is God who is mighty to save. It is he who sends forth his word into the world through his people to bring life where there is none.

And Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it, for it, that is, the gospel is the power of salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." So Elijah prays for Israel that they might know that God has turned their hearts, that they would recognize that he is gracious. And so I pray the same for you, that you would know that God has turned your heart to follow him. And you would remember and not forget that he is gracious and be faithful to proclaim his word.

A third thing we forget is this: We forget that God is ever present.

We forget that God is ever present. Look at verse 38. "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench." Supernatural fire completely consumed the altar. The Lord provided before all the people's proof that Baal is but a fictional god of man's imagination. So supernatural fire consumes the altar just as Elijah had prayed.

You see, God is ever present. The creation is his, and his sovereignty rules. There is nothing outside the scope of his power. There are no maverick molecules. Our God is omnipresent. He is intimately acquainted with all our ways. And we forget this, don't we? We forget that God is ever present. The first sign of that is when we cease to pray. We cease to pray. We cease believing that God is present and active in his creation, working his purposes and involving his church.

Because God is ever present, we must remain confident that there is nothing that the Lord cannot do. We can approach him. We can bring before him what is our heart's cry. And we can pray, "Lord, grant it according to your word. Help me to see your will for this situation. Father, come to our aid." You see, you can pray that when you know the God of Elijah, that our God is an all-consuming fire. He is the God who is ever present.

And so, friends, I would urge you to never forget this doctrine that God is ever present. It is a dying church that forgets the immediate presence of the Lord when he is contrived as some abstract, non-interested, non-personal deity with no real interest in the world or in his church or no real interest in you. Might we pray with the force of Nehemiah, who prayed against all odds for the rebuilding of his city? "I beseech

you, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who preserves the covenant and loving kindness for those who love him and keeps his commandments. Let your ear now be attentive, your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant."

Or you could pray as Hezekiah and declare, "O Lord of hosts, Lord of Israel enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone of all the kingdoms of the earth, you have made heaven and earth." The Bible is full of such prayers because they know that God is ever present.

A fourth heading is this: We forget that God is to be worshipped.

We forget that God is to be worshipped. When the people saw it, the text says, they fell on their faces and they said, "The Lord, he is God, the Lord, he is God." Do you remember the silence earlier in the narrative? Elijah challenged the people, and they said nothing. They had no response to the challenge. And now what do we see? The fruit of worship coming from their lips. They behold the glory and power of the Lord as fire falls from the heavens.

And from their lips we hear, "The Lord, he is God, the Lord, he is God." Yahweh, the great I Am, it is he who is God, not Baal. The famine of their souls comes to an end. The waves are no longer receding. Their worship is directed towards the only one to whom it is due. They begin to worship and confess his glory, his name, his sovereignty.

We can easily forget that God is to be worshipped in many ways. I'm reminded of the words of our Lord in Matthew 7: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven, will enter." In other words, there's an external element to worship that can be faked.

Oh, you can sing as we have this morning. And you can pray, sure. But does your heart adore the one that you sing to? Is your heart overflowing when you pray of love for the Lord Jesus Christ and all that he has done for you? You can worship without really worshipping, you know. How God has sent the Son into the world to be your Savior.

And we can forget to worship. How tragic is that? To worship is to surrender to the absolute sovereignty of God, to posture yourself beneath him. Worship is a conscious fixation of God's love shed abroad in Christ, Christ crucified in his place, and our

affections towards him. My sin was exchanged for his righteousness, and from that comes my worship. From that comes a life of obedience to God.

We forget that God is to be worshipped when we go through the motions without the heart present. When church becomes an add-on and not an essential component of our faith. When we really don't appreciate the great privilege it is to be named among God's people and called by the Lord together as a church. Friends, take joy in your worship of God. We can easily forget that is our calling, to be worshippers of the most high and everlasting God.

We have a final heading. You can probably maybe guess it, I'm not sure. Verse 40: We forget that God is holy.

We forget that God is holy. Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Do not let one of them escape." So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and they slew them there. Israel was a theocracy, which means that the land was governed by the law of God. It was a land under God. It was a unique time.

According to the law, idolatry was punishable by death. This will only seem harsh, excessive, or cruel when you do not understand the holiness of God. You see, we are often surprised when we read of God's justice in the Bible, and we seem to take his mercy for granted. But in the Bible, it is really the other way around. We should be surprised at his mercy and take for granted his judgments.

All you need to do to understand that is understand sin in the human heart and understand the holiness of God. The fundamental truth about the being of God is his holiness. God's holiness speaks to the separateness of God, to all that is holy and undefiled. A sinner coming into God's presence to worship, in a poor illustration, is akin to you coming off the farm after the September that we've had with your muddy gumboots.

Perhaps it's kids, and mum's been at home, she's got the house spotless and spectacular, everything is nice and clean, the carpet is clean, and the kids all come running in with their muddy gumboots over the clean carpet. If you use that illustration to picture the holiness of God and sinners with dirty, unclean hearts coming into his presence, you see we cannot. God is holy, and sin must be punished.



God's holiness demands that he must meet sin with divine justice. Ezekiel 18 says, "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father is the soul of the son; the soul who sins will die." And thus, according to the law of God in Israel, idolatry was punishable by death, and it was a reminder to Israel that God shall be treated as holy.

We forget that God is holy ourselves when we treat sin casually and unrepentantly, when we make friends with the world in our minds and in our hearts, when we entertain that which God detests. We forget that God is holy when we are not concerned with that which pleases him in the way we live. We forget that God is holy when we do not order our churches according to what is written and not by what we think is pragmatic or practical.

The scripture says, "But like the holy one who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior." Do you want to know where we see the holiness of God most on display for us to see? It was 2000 years ago when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was crucified in the place of sinners. Do you know why it is there that we see the holiness of God most powerfully? It's because there we learned that there was no other way for us to be reconciled to God or saved to eternal salvation but that the spotless, holy one of God be crucified in our place.

And so it is only by Christ can we enter. It is only by Christ we can be saved. What does the song say? "Not by our human endeavor." See, we can't do it. We can't bring ourselves to a holy God, but God has done it. God is gracious. And so Christ came, and He died in our place that all who may believe on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

You see, we can forget that God is holy.

We're all done. Consider these final thoughts. Consider Elijah's words, my charge to you this morning: If the Lord is God, then follow Him. You can live by that, you know. If the Lord is God, follow Him. Do what is right before Him and let God work out the rest. Shall we pray?