

(Meditation for THE SECRET PLACE)

August, 1960

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

Thought for Today: "I tell you, do not be anxious about your life."
Matthew 6:25

Our plane was almost three hours late leaving the Philadelphia airport. So, unexpectedly, I had an opportunity to visit the control tower through a "chance" acquaintance I made during the time of waiting. This control tower was an amazing operation of radar screens and clear, detailed instructions going from the tower to the approaching ship. This is a "nerve center" where keen, alert men guide great airliners onto the right runways.

Much later that night our plane, loaded with 62 passengers, could not land at the Chicago Midway Airport because of the thick, soupy fog. Finally after some maneuvering and seeking for a place where we could land, we cautiously made our way through the fog and found an open runway at the South Bend airport. Needless to say, all through this experience the picture of that control tower back in Philadelphia kept coming back to my mind. We came safely through that dangerous night because of those watchmen who guided our pilots.

Then my mind would keep moving gratefully to that much greater reality--the daily care and guidance of God. Behind all human circumstances, in darkness and death as well as in sunshine and life, there is the concerned, loving Father who watches over His own. Our greatest problems come because we have not learned to trust ourselves into His keeping. Perhaps today our deepest need is simple trust in the God who can bring us through every day and finally into the home port.

PRAYER: Oh, Father, help us to trust Thee this day. Let us not be anxious because we know we are secure in Thy everlasting love. May we commit all the hours of this day to Thee in the name of Jesus Christ.

Sent to "United Prayer
Tower" on Jan. 31, 1960

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ROLL CALL

NAME

Spencer Husbore

Visitor?

yes

ADDRESS

D. H. Husbore Home

Phone

4-4911

Member of this church:

Yes

No



Ext 207

If not a member here:

Where

Trent Baptist

Will you consider uniting with us?

RESERVATIONS—Wednesday Fellowship Dinner:

Adults

Children

(Use back of card to record information for the Pastors)

THE FIRE OF THE LORD

It was at a time of inner personal crisis and need that I had the awful experience of feeling in the early part of a Sunday morning worship service that I could not go on. A terrible sense of blackness and fear came over me which left me shaken and weakened. I was about to turn to our youthful Student Assistant and suggest that he handle the rest of the service when two things happened which came like a tide of faith and strength. One of these was seeing a young widow come into the service of worship with her two young sons. She had lost her husband, a 32 year old man, suddenly and terribly only two weeks before. And it was about this time that our choir sang a strong, lifting anthem, "Be not afraid, saith God the Lord. Be not afraid, thy help is near. Though thousands languish and fall beside thee and tens of thousands around thee perish, yet still it shall not come nigh thee." The sheer power of that music and the words came like the very grace of God. I shall always be grateful for that experience.

I discovered after the service that the choir anthem of the morning was a part of Mendelssohn's great oratorio, "Elijah." It is a strange thing--but ever since that day, I have had depth of feeling and intimate feeling for Elijah which is almost like knowing a personal friend. I speak of this here because of all the things that mark Elijah's life, it is the power of prayer that stands out.

In many ways, Elijah was a radical, uncouth man. He was also a man of great strength. The story of his life and ministry is told in the last part of the First Book of Kings and in the opening chapters of Second Kings. He wore a coat of hair and a belt of leather. He ate very little food, and yet it is said that he could run ahead of horses for

18 miles. It is significant that no Old Testament character is referred to any more often in the New Testament than Elijah.

It should never be forgotten that Elijah knew God intimately. He did not know about God, but he knew him intimately as a friend. There is a memorable account of Elijah fleeing for 40 days after his encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Then he came to a cave. Here he began to pity himself, believing that he was all alone. In the midst of this monologue of misery, God asked him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Then we are told that the Lord passed by. There was a great wind that tore the mountain, an earthquake that broke the rocks and then a consuming fire. But it was in a still, small voice that followed all this that Elijah heard and knew God. It was in that moment that this prophet knew that God would share with him everlasting strength and resources as long as Elijah lived. So many of us who are overawed by the great power of our age need to know that the might of God comes in quietness and solitude more than in crashing thunder or flame.

It fell the lot of Elijah to resist the evil of his day. Ahab, the king of his country, had been married to Jezebel of Sidon. She was an aggressive, strong-willed and ambitious woman who was jealous of the place of her gods. She insisted that the gods of Baal must have the central place of worship. Even though Ahab built a temple for her gods, this was not enough. She tried to shove Jehovah to one side by bringing in 850 of her own prophets and by cutting off the prophets of Jehovah. The king and the people vacillated between the God of their fathers and the gods of Baal.

Every time Elijah met the king or his queen, there was sharp resistance because of the evil into which they had led God's people. This can not be looked upon as an ancient story which has no meaning for us. It has fallen

our lot to resist all the evils of false worship and idolatry in our time. We live in the midst of countless gods, and we are urged to fall down and give ourselves to their demands. These are the gods of pleasure or sex or power. We cannot make an easy armistice with any of them or our faith will die.

Now the central struggle of Elijah's whole ministry took place on Mount Carmel. It was the showdown between the God of Elijah and the gods of Jezebel. It was a spiritual battle to the death. This is one of the most dramatic scenes in all scripture. Elijah began by crying out to all the assembled people, "How long can you go limping with two different opinions?" He insisted that the people could not serve both Jehovah and Baal, for the God of Israel is one sovereign Lord who demands obedience. Jesus insisted centuries later that no one can serve God and mammon. A great American president facing the intense struggle of the Union over the question of slavery said simply, "A house divided against itself can not stand."

One of the deep problems of our age is that we "halt between two opinions." We want peace, we say, but we spend billions on the god of Mars. We say we believe in racial brotherhood and understanding, but we segregate and push away those who are not of our race and social standing. We call ourselves a Christian nation, but we live like pagans. When will we stop halting between two opinions?

Is it not true that many of us have lacked creative power because we have found no single loyalty for our inner lives? We have not become obedient to the demands of the kingdom of God. Yet we want to be Christians, so we are weak and vacillating. Our personal lives go to pieces because we have no central core that holds us together. It is only in the surrender of our total beings to a single loyalty that we discover our deepest strength and fulfillment.

It should also be pointed out that in the struggle of Mount Carmel so long ago it was one single man, Elijah, who faced the crowd of 450 false prophets. Elijah took the stand on what he knew was right. This was not the result of committee action nor was it a group decision. How badly we need to remember that the majority is not always right. This is an age of tragic conformity and of mass media that will pour us into one mold if we let it. We need to recover the majesty of the single, solitary life that stands for righteousness. This can only come when a man has wrestled with God as Jacob wrestled through the night. There comes from such prayer an integrity which makes it possible for a man to stand alone.

This story of his encounter at Carmel is an account of the awful failure of inadequate gods. Notice the humor and the sarcasm which Elijah heaps on the heads of the false prophets when their gods do not answer their prayers. He says, "Perhaps your gods are sleeping or maybe they are on a vacation or perhaps they are just day dreaming." All this reads like an account of our own century. All about us are the broken pieces of gods who have failed. Our towers of Babel have not reached the sky, and our false optimism which was rooted in man and what he could do has turned to dismal pessimism because of abject failure. The more loudly we cry and the more we beat ourselves, the clearer it becomes that God does not come through the ingenuity or the ideas or the accomplishments of man.

Finally, in the account of the scripture the shouting of the prophets of Baal was ended. Now Elijah's moment came. I find a deep response in my own heart to the great prayer he uttered that day: "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back." This is not the weak prayer of a little man. This man is not divided against

himself. He has made up his mind which way he has set his life. Here is a strong, righteous man who brings the whole power and concentration of his life into the presence of the Almighty. How different this is from so much of our praying. We ask for little things because we lack an audacious faith in a great God who can supply all our needs.

The prayer is centered in God and not in man. This is the mark of all real praying. Its central, agonizing request is that the Lord of all history, that the God of all the nations and that the Father of all men will make his name known. When prayer is rightly understood, this becomes the heart of the matter--that the will, the name, the purpose of God might come among men. As the Book of Revelation states it, "And God shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people." If anyone is to learn to pray, he must dare to open his life to God in such a way that the very glory of God will shine through the humblest part of his life.

On that day so long ago, it was this simple powerful prayer that brought the fires of God from heaven. It is a dramatic spectacle to see fire fall. It happens every evening during the tourist season at Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park. Someone shouts, "Let the fire fall," and the embers of the fire, hundreds of feet up, come crashing over the edge of a precipice. There is a gasp from the crowd because of the sheer beauty. But in the case of Elijah, it was divine fire that came, more powerful than the atom. It was God stooping to the weakness of man to bare his arm.

In the midst of so much spiritual lethargy and barren emptiness we stand desperately in need of the kind of prayer which will open our lives to the fire of God. Whenever this has happened, faith has once again become a movement. It was true on Resurrection Sunday when the disciples on the way to Emmaus spoke of a fire that kindled within them, and it was true on the

day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. Every man seemed to have tongues of fire on him. This was true on George Müller who literally prayed an orphanage into existence in Bristol, England, and it was true of David Livingston who died on his knees in the dark interior of Africa. When we learn how to pray like this again, "justice will be enforced, kingdoms will be conquered, weaklings will become strong men and armies will be routed."

Surely our lives need the cleansing and power that the fire of God's Spirit can bring. So many hardly seem to have enough strength to get through the day. We are eaten up with worry and fears. We need to know the healing power of God's fire. This can only come when we pray as Elijah prayed. Certainly our tragic, broken world stumbling from one crisis to another stands in need of a divine fire that will light its heart and lead it home.

Let us pray that the cleansing and the power of God's spirit may fall on his people again. Then the world will know that this is God whom we serve, and we are his people.