

Series: Facing the Heat  
Message Title: ***Elijah: Choose to Stand and Fight***  
Date: Sunday, July 1, 2018  
Scripture: 1 Kings 18:20-39  
Speaker: David H. McKinley  
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

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## Introduction

Today I felt it important that we do more than patronize our nation's past, but to devote ourselves to prayer—a specific prayer for our nation linked to our mission as followers of Christ.

I believe America needs our prayer more than our praise in these days. I am a patriotic citizen and I am deeply grateful for the privilege of being American. I have traveled many places in the world and I have never returned to this homeland without an overwhelming gratitude for all the blessings and privileges that are mine as an American. This is not a sign of greater "favor" of God upon America, but it is clearly a cause of great "gratitude" as an American citizen.

Yet there are many faults in our land—most of which are seen in the pages of Scripture describing nations past such as idolatry,

immorality, inhumanity, power, corruption and abuse.

Yet in and through all of these things, the purpose of God is sustained and advanced in and through His church today.

I want to tell you a story—a story about a “hot spot” in the Bible.

It is summertime and it is HOT! Two things we need are shade and hydration.

*Facing the heat* is not just a summertime experience; it is part of the journey of life. In these days of perspiration and desperation, we are going to spend time talking about some of the “heated moments of life.”

It wouldn't take us long to make a list of some hot topics in our nation today, nor to compile a list of “hot spots” in our lives: abuse, loss, relationships, finances, physical decline, etc.

As things are heating up, I want (along with members of our staff team) to help you “face the heat.” Today's story certainly does this!



## The Crisis

Heat without water is a crisis.

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.’ And the word of the LORD came to him: ‘Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan’” (1 Kings 17:1-3 ESV).

There was a drought, but not only a drought of water. There was one of worship. Idolatry had become the way of the land. God was keeping His word to the people of Israel.

“Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the

LORD is giving you” (Deuteronomy 11:16-17 ESV).

## The Characters

- **Elijah**

Elijah was a “Tishbite”—a man from the “sticks”! He was later taken up in a chariot of fire, but James 5 tells us he was a man like us.

- **Ahab**

“And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him... (There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel)” (1 Kings 16:30; 21:25-26 ESV).

- **Jezebel**

Wife of King Ahab. Idolatrous heart—1 Kings 16:31. Murderous heart—1 Kings 18:3; 19:2; 21:13. Immoral heart—2 Kings 9:30.

- **False Prophets of Baal and Asherah**

Who were the gods? Baal

“Baal worship revolved around two themes that represented the conception of Baal his worshipers held. Baal was both the sun-god and storm-god. He was worshiped as sun-god when the people wished to express thanks and gratitude for light and warmth and fertility. Worship of Baal as storm-god took place to appease the destructive nature of Baal, demonstrated by drought and storms that devastated the vegetation of the worshipers. The efforts to appease Baal whenever adverse conditions prevailed culminated in the sacrifice of human beings, usually the firstborn of the one offering the sacrifice.” —Holman Bible Dictionary

Asherah—“A fertility goddess, the mother of Baal, whose worship was concentrated in Syria and Canaan and the wooden object that represented her... The biblical writers sometimes did not make a clear distinction between references to Asherah as a goddess and as object of worship. According to ancient mythology, Asherah, the mother goddess, was the wife of El and mother of seventy gods, of whom Baal was the most famous. Asherah was the fertility goddess of the Phoenicians and Canaanites. She was

called 'Lady Asherah of the Sea.'"

## The Challenge

The summit at Mt. Carmel—choose your sacrifice and let's challenge the character of the gods/God.

"So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.' And the people did not answer him a word... 'And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.' And all the people answered, 'It is well spoken'" (1 Kings 18:20-21, 24 ESV).

Who is the god who answers by fire? Now you are starting to "feel the heat"—the God of fire! Fire is often seen in Scripture as a symbol of judgment. Isaiah 66:16; 2 Peter 3:7.

Elijah mocked the worshipers of Baal: "And

they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened'" (1 Kings 18:26-29 ESV).

The gods of this world are impotent. They can create quite a show, but fail to demonstrate power.

## **The Conclusion**

The rest of the story—

"And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water... 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. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God'" (1 Kings

18:35, 38-39 ESV).

A wet altar becomes a raging fireplace.

God is trustworthy and every human idol is impotent. Only God can deliver people from the drought of powerless idols.

**1. When *facing the heat*, who or what you trust will determine whether you stand or fall.**

If you affirm this exclusive truth, don't be surprised when the world blames you. We can expect to face the heat when people think our faith is the cause of their problems.

False gods will fail you in life's heated moments. 1 Kings 18:26, 29.

**2. When *facing the heat*, you will always have to choose between conviction and comfort.**

Who will you serve?

Everyone likes the choice of options, but few enjoy the choices of conviction.



Elijah stood alone in the face of 450 prophets of Baal. How often am I a coward? I want to find the “cool” with numbers when God wants me to stand alone in the heat!

“Strong convictions precede great actions.”  
—James Freeman Clarke, clergyman, 18th century

“When the principles that run against your deepest convictions begin to win the day, then the battle is your calling, and peace has become sin. You must—at the price of dearest peace—lay your convictions bare before friend and enemy with all the fire of your faith.” —Abraham Kuyper

God chooses and uses people who are willing to stand in difficult days.

“The pursuit of comfort is not compatible with the pursuit of Christ.”

“I am not a Christian because God changed my life; I am a Christian because of my convictions about who Jesus Christ is.”  
—Josh McDowell

### **3. When *facing the heat*, you can prove God's power and promise through prayer.**

1 Kings 18:36b-37. "The reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was a reminder of the covenants and promises of God to Israel. He was relying on God as the One who revealed Himself to the nation through Moses and the Law, and who had redeemed His chosen people for a three-fold purpose: (a) to be the custodians of the Word; (b) to be the channel for Messiah, the Savior of the world; and (c) to be a light to the nations."

—J. Hampton Keathley

America is not Israel actually or spiritually, but we are followers of Christ and we pray in the name of Jesus for the name of Jesus to be exalted among us in this nation.

What happened? Prayer, then fire!  
Remember the contest was not between Elijah and Ahab, but God and Baal. The issue was the demonstration of the power of God, not the platform of the man.

"What is desperately needed in our society today are more men and women who, like

Elijah, can have an Elijah-like impact on this society. Elijah was used to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord (18:37). But what was so special about this man? James reminds us that he was a man of like passions with us, but then James goes on to show that the thing that made him effective in his day of spiritual and moral decadence was his prayer life.” —J. H. Keathley

This prayer focused on recognition of the sovereignty of God. He did this publicly because the people had just observed the deaf and delinquent action of the false gods. They needed to be gathered and to collectively see and share the power of the living God.

We know that the needs of our nation are not political, but spiritual. Only God can restore and rule over rebellious and ruined peoples. And only God can move through leadership—both good and evil. This is to be a public part of our practice of worship.

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are

in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV).

While it is customary to celebrate and give praise for our nation on the 4th of July, it seems to be of even greater significance that we would pray for our nation.

This prayer required a return and restoration of the altar. 1 Kings 18:31-32a. In the New Testament, Romans 12:1-2 calls us not to partial, but total sacrifice (devotion to Christ). Restore the altar that God’s power might be seen in the place and upon the people that are uniquely His. I don’t want to build fires under my sacrifice, but to have God show His grace and power in the places of sacrifice in my life. His fire, not mine!

Prayer addressed the issue of repentance— “turning their hearts back to the Lord” (Isaiah 59:1-2). God will not simply bless our mess, Psalm 66:18. Prayer is all about the condition of the heart.

Elijah was not a prophet of reform, but of revival. He was a man like us and yet, what

made this moment unique was prayer.

James 5:16-18

**4. When *facing the heat*, remember while God's plan includes you, it is bigger than just you.**

The chapter that follows this great, grand display of power is one of weakness and fear. It is hard to believe we are looking at the same men, but Elijah runs to flee the wicked Jezebel. 1 Kings 19:3

Just because you stand to fight in one moment doesn't mean you won't want to flee in the next. Elijah fled with fear and had to be restored for future ministry.

God's patience and grace are seen in Elijah's life even as in our own. Yet in the end, let's be sure to remember 1 Kings 19:14, 18.