

Worship, power and blessing (1 King 18)

Part 1

Speaker	N. Packer
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[00:00:01] This is a recording of the afternoon address given by Mr. Norman Packer at Wildfellow Hall, Catford, on the 3rd of November 1962. His subject, Worship, Power and Blessing. May we read together from the first book of Kings, chapter 18, verse 17.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?

And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal 450, and the prophets of the groves 400, which eat at Jezebel's table. [00:01:16] So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel. And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him.

But if Baal, then follow him.

And the people answered him, Not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. [00:02:14] And I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord. And the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose ye one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first. For ye are many. And call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. [00:03:11] But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leapt upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. [00:04:10] And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me.

And all the people came near unto him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.

And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, [00:05:06] Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of 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.

[00:06:07] Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, 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 they said, The Lord, he is the God. The Lord, he is the God.

And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape. [00:07:01] And they took them, and Elijah brought them down to the brook Caishon, and slew them there. And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

May God see fit to bless this word to our souls this afternoon. It seems all wrong to me to be standing here and speaking, great as is the privilege, without being watched carefully and kindly by our late brother Mr. John Weston. And I suppose it will be a long time before these walls cease to resound, and re-echo some of the things he said down those 50 years. [00:08:05] The one thing I would like you to say amen to, is that these walls may often again witness sinners coming to the Lord Jesus as they used to years ago in his place. And I have a reason for saying that. And I have of course a reason for remembering our brother. And it is this, that the last time, and it was only in June, that I was here, I heard him, and one of the things that impressed me most of all, which I laid to heart, was a sort of quaint and sorrowful statement of his.

[00:09:05] He said at one time, we hardly ever held a gospel meeting in here without there being souls saved. But it's not always so now. There's been a thinning out of the blessing as it were.

And it's very much worse in some places.

The showers of blessing seem to have been held. And I don't want to be depressing this afternoon, but I do want us to look facts straightly in the face. And sometimes we say, where's the power gone?

Where is it? As it used to be.

[00:10:03] Oh now I know, and I fully appreciate and give thanks to the Lord for the fact that from time to time we have rallies and special gatherings for the preaching of the gospel, and sometimes the Lord is pleased to bless. But may I just ask you to reflect, as I do myself, upon the preaching of the gospel at home.

In your room, in my room, in your church, wherever you may have come from, and if you can say it's better and more powerful and there's more blessing than there used to be, well praise the Lord for

that. But you're in a minority. And we need not be in a minority.

[00:11:05] The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save. And that's why I've read this very well-known story, to which I'll not be able to do any justice at all this afternoon. This very well-known story of Elijah. As you know, there was a judicial drought. The showers of rain had been held for a considerable time. And there was a lack of power in the land. But there was one man, Elijah, whose very name means, the Lord is my God.

There was just one on that occasion, so perhaps we're better off this afternoon. Because there's quite a number of us, maybe all of us here, [00:12:03] who firmly say in our hearts, the Lord, the Lord is my God.

And that's an excellent beginning, but we must really mean it. And Elijah was led of the Lord to tackle this particular difficulty right at its foundation.

And at the foundation, at the base of their lack of blessing and lack of power, there was a false god, nothing less.

And they were the people of God. This afternoon I'm not very concerned with the world outside. I'm concerned with myself amongst the people of God. [00:13:02] And it was Israel who had turned aside to Baal, a false god.

Baal's name means master or possessor.

A possessive personality he was. He's only a type of the many false gods there are. But he's a pretty good type.

And the characteristics of this false god are worth just looking at for a moment.

But I want to dispose of him pretty quickly. Does your false god, don't look surprised, does that thing which tends to take your time and energy, [00:14:04] to take your life away from the God, does it possess you?

Does it claim you privately?

Is it an absorbing thing that is gradually weaning you away from the earnest following you once knew of the true God?

Well it is so with me. It has been so.

Sometimes I've awakened to the fact that this or that, sometimes a perfectly good thing, has been claiming more and more of my time, my energy, [00:15:03] claiming more and more of my attention. Of course, the false god does not suddenly sweep me off my feet and turn me to non-Christian ways.

The children of Israel were worshipping Baal and calling on the name of the Lord at the same time. They built an altar to Baal and called on the name of the Lord through the altar of Baal. That's the kind of thing that happened. I see a reflection of myself, and I see, I think, one of the destroying factors in Christianity today.

Said Elijah, as these false prophets, and he was outnumbered by 450 to one, [00:16:03] said Elijah, cry louder to him.

Maybe he is talking.

Is your false god full of endless talk? My dear young brother and sister, do you love novel reading?

Oh, I don't mean at school. I don't mean for a legitimate and good purpose, but has it got you in its grip? Until it takes time, time, time, and secret time at that. No, you say, that doesn't appeal to me. Well, do you hear it talking through the box on the shelf?

Endless, endless talking.

Is it a very interesting subject which has you in its grip? [00:17:06] Talking, talking all the time, claiming your attention, occupying your powers of reasoning, your powers of observation.

Well, that was like Baal talking. Another thing, he is pursuing, forever chasing something.

Interested to the point when, as I travel on the train to business, my thoughts are not on the Lord, but on something in which my mind finds a great deal of relief.

Oh, there's nothing wrong in that until it becomes an absorbing idol.

His journeying may be, [00:18:03] I would say too that, the vultures of gods become like them, you know. Always looking for a new place, never settle down, always seeking change.

I heard of a Christian man, a very able Christian man, who for his hobby took a different subject every three years. He had a masterful mind, he was able to absorb, he was able to take it all in, to practice it, to become an expert, to take a degree in it, then to drop it and then to start again with something else. I think he was a good Christian man, with a wonderful capacity, but if I did it, I'd be more like a worshipper of Baal than a worshipper of God. [00:19:02] You see, it's possible for me to pour out my strength and energy and time and to give it that part of it which should belong to God, to give it to something else. Or as Elijah said, maybe he's just sleeping.

Maybe your God says, take it easy.

It's a day of take it easy.

The Lord Jesus said, of course, come ye yourself, come ye aside and rest a while. But I don't ever remember him calling on his disciples to fall asleep.

It is a time to awake out of sleep, the scripture says, and says it to Christians too.

[00:20:01] The most damning thing about this false god is the next one.

When these vultures of Baal had leapt upon the altar, sacrilegiously pulling it down and destroying it, in their anxiety to get something done by means of the false god, they then cut themselves with knives and lancets. And it's their own blood that flowed. The sacrifice, the only sacrifice they knew,

was their own blood as it flowed.

There's a good bit of that in Christianity today too. Perhaps I should be very brief about that here, as we are perhaps a selected company, but in case. You have been attracted by the go-getting kind of Christianity, [00:21:02] the do-it-yourself Christianity. Just let me draw your attention to this. That when they came to that moment when it was obvious blood must flow, it was their own they shed.

Do beware, my young friend, of the kind of religion which depends upon the outpouring of your life only.

It's idolatry.

It's something that freezes the showers of blessing before they fall. It's something that cuts the connection between this earth and the power of God.

But if Elijah challenged the false god, he championed the true god.

[00:22:08] Let's look at that for a moment, and let's see how he did it. The very first words he said were, Come near.

A little point may be, but I love it.

The Lord Jesus, hundreds of years afterwards, was to say the same thing, Come unto me.

But Elijah said, Now you've had to stand afar off where all that went on, now come near.

Come near so that you can see. Come near so that you can hear. Come near.

I'm going to talk to God.

And then he repaired the altar.

You see, I thought we were speaking about lack of blessing in service, [00:23:02] and lack of power as we serve.

I am. But I think I'm showing from the Scripture that the basis of blessing in service and power in Christianity is worship.

And so he repaired the altar of the Lord. The Lord knows it needed it after Baal had had a go, after the leaping upon it, the scrambling round it, the contortions gone through by those who belonged to the children of Israel, God's people. The altar of the Lord needed repairing. How did he do it?

[00:24:01] Well, he took twelve stones. I love this too. He took twelve stones.

And he built it again. There are precise instructions for the building of altars in the Old Testament. It's an Old Testament story. It's a picture for us today. But I love the thought that although there was a division in Israel, there were two tribes and ten tribes, and they were very distinctly divided, but Elijah took no notice of that. He didn't build one altar of two and one of ten. He didn't, as he built it, say,

there's the ten and now here's the two, and there's a gap between them. No, no.

He went right back to the beginning. Thy Q9 must do, if we're really to worship. [00:25:04] We must build our altar for worship based upon the fact that God's people are undivided.

Undivided.

You say, I thought we did that. We do in theory.

We've got to do it in practice.

The blessing cannot rightly descend, the showers of blessing again, cannot rightly descend. The power will be lacking until I, in reality, am prepared to worship on the basis of the whole household of faith.

The twelve stones were there, representing, as the story says, the whole of Israel.

[00:26:10] And then it was Israel that he spoke of.

The whole of Israel.

Elijah went back to the beginning of God's dealings with his people for his authority. He did not cite the dates of difficulty and dissension down the years.

He went back to the beginning, just as we have in the first chapter of the first epistle of John, that which was from the beginning, from the beginning of Christianity.

And then he made a trench around the altar.

[00:27:02] I don't know an awful lot about this trench. I'd like somebody afterwards to tell me more about it. But I know it was a trench. I know that that altar was carefully erected, but that piece of ground was separated from the other ground around it by a trench. It wasn't just the covering of a footmark. It was a trench which was of a specific depth and size. It held two measures of seed. I've been reading and listening, and I've been fairly carefully for years for somebody to teach me something about that two measures of seed. I still haven't heard it. Maybe after this meeting and my appeal, you'll write to me and tell me what the two measures of seed means. [00:28:03] But I do see in it a distinct illustration and a connection with what's before me. Seed is the very forerunner of the harvest.

It's a blessing I want to crave from the Lord for all of us.

And before there can be the sheaves, there has to be the seed. Anyhow, Elijah's altar for worship had rounded a trench into which two full measures of seed could be placed.

And then he put the wood in order and the sacrifice in order upon the wood.

I never think of this, I never read it, without thinking of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:29:14] Oh, I know we say that in worship, and especially in the burnt offering, that aspect of the worship of Israel which was solely and wholly for the delight of God, there had to be no human intervention.

Nevertheless, each time we have godly men like Abraham, like the priests, making ready to worship God, they always put the wood in order upon the altar.

[00:30:02] A very common thing, wood.

Nothing very heavenly about wood.

It grows in this world.

It had to be chopped down. It had to be cut. It had to be carried. And then it was placed.

There was energy required. There was labor involved. And if you think, my dear friend, that you're going to have a good time, I really find yourself looking into the face of God and worshiping on a Lord's Day morning. If you come expecting something and are not prepared to put all you've got in energy into it, [00:31:02] you are making a mistake, you know. It isn't my energy.

It isn't my care. It isn't what I do that God receives the sweet odor from.

But he needs my full attention and my devoted labor to get into his presence, to make sure that I worship.

It's part of the worship of God for the worshiper to place the wood in order upon the altar.

Oh, what a difference between that and the sacrifice that lays on the wood. [00:32:01] Specially selected the animal was. Specially prepared and divided.

Every part in the right place.

Placed in order on the wood.

The blessed Lord Jesus is the only sacrifice, of course, that God can ever accept on our behalf.

And the memory of him, our prayerful worshiping thoughts of him as we gather together, with his name, round his name, with himself in our midst, with all the beautiful thoughts the Holy Spirit sends down from heaven into our hearts, as we gather carefully with the express purpose, not of serving, but of worshiping.

[00:33:08] God accepts all that for Jesus' sake.

He loves him more than we can ever. He knows more about him than we can ever. He's more precious. He preciousness itself to thee we sing. To us he's precious too. It's the point, I believe, this worship, this remembrance of our Savior, is the point where we really draw nearest to God collectively.

And without it, we may preach ourselves hoarse. We may pray ourselves into the ground.

[00:34:01] But unless we give God his place, unless we put the altar in order, unless we bring the proper sacrifice and it's laid in order, we're not very near God.

I'm speaking like this because I have an exercise, that if only this idea, if only this thought in the Word of God could be brought home to all dear believers on the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere, there'd be blessing, there'd be power. Why? Because we would have gathered humbly around the Lord Jesus first. We'd have come to God in worship first.

That's what Elijah led them to do. The sacrifice in order on the wood, [00:35:02] there from his head, his hands, his feet.

Today, the beauty of the person of the Savior is so great, we can think for hours, can't we, upon the glory of his head. Can we think without tears or the pierced hands?

Can we think of his footsteps, his feet through this world, without worshipping? There's an order about it that God loves, and that Elijah knew God loved, and there he set the stage, shall we say. It's a deliberate thing. It's no use you saying to me, we'll have a communion service as often as we can make it convenient, [00:36:04] but we need our Sunday mornings for reaching the center, you know. I don't mind whether it's Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, or the middle of the night, providing we come together first for worship.

And then Elijah did a thing, which is a marvelous illustration.

He had the water brought. I often wonder where he got the water from, because it was a time of judicial drought. Ahab had spent his time with his servant up and down the land of Israel looking for water. But as soon as Elijah said, bring twelve barrels of it and pour it over, it was there. [00:37:05] He was a man of God. In a time of judicial drought, the man of God had the water. I have no doubt today that the men of God have the water, have the blessing, have the power. They know.

You may be one of them. My anxiety this afternoon is that it should be spread, that's all. He brought the water. How often the water in the Scripture is spoken of as an illustration of the Word of God. Well, he poured it on the sacrifice, and there was nothing so dousing in this world as that water. And this sacrifice was destined to be fired when they poured water on it. It made dead sure that there could be no human match struck, [00:38:01] no paraffin, not immense high octane petrols, nor false fire to whip up what seems like power and what might bring a false sort of blessing perhaps. None of that.

There's some of it today, and I'm not throwing stones, but it's easy to do. In a camp of youngsters, of course you could get 50% of them saved before they went home. You could.

They're at the age, and if you're four times their age and you can't do that, you can't do much.

But some of us go down on our knees, who have something to do with boys' and girls' work, and we ask the Lord to make sure there shan't be any false fire.

[00:39:03] Elijah made sure of the same thing. He took the water and he poured it over the lot till it filled

the trench. There was no doubt about the soaking of that sacrifice. Amen. He turned very simply, very directly to God. Everything was ready. And he prayed.

And he said three things, said many others, but three things I want to draw your attention to. Lord God of Abraham, he said.

Now Gany went back to the beginning. He didn't say the God of the king. It was impossible. The king's God was Baal. He didn't say the God of David even. He said, Oh Lord God of Abraham, the father of multitudes, giving him his new name.

Isaac, how that must have brought memories back of another sacrifice. [00:40:06] It makes us think of the supreme sacrifice, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

No, no.

Israel.

He appealed to God on the highest possible ground. He went back to the beginning, but he cited God's names for his servants, the setting up of the people of God. And having addressed God in this faithful way, he said, I am thy servant.

A confession that he, Elijah, was a servant.

Let this people know that I am thy servant, O God. Not a great man, but thy servant. And I've done all this because you told me to do it.

[00:41:06] An obedient servant.

What a plea to make. No wonder that the fire fell from heaven.

Note that it fell from heaven. It was the fire of the Lord. You couldn't have anything more powerful than that. And, of course, it is not in words. It's in deeds.

It's real power. It can be seen. It fell, and it consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones.

And it licked up the water in the trench. Frighteningly powerful.

But the people were near, and they were unscathed.

We know, don't we, that it was complete acceptance [00:42:05] by the God of heaven of what had been done. It was his approval.

Not in word, but in deed. Real power was there.

Well, it won the people over. And then I love Elijah's way. After dealing with Baal, by the way. Oh, may I ask you to go home from these meetings? Look at it again. And due to your Baal, what Elijah had done to that Baal. He had him wiped out.

There were rather nice things about Baal, perhaps. Certainly attractive things. But he just ordered his abolition.

[00:43:03] He turned on him, in the name of the Lord.

And then he said to Ahab, You'd better have a meal quickly, have something to drink, and get away from here. There's a sound of an abundance of rain. Showers of blessing.

They could still fall.

If I were prepared to really repair the altar, to really look at it and see that it's on the right line, to really be sure that I am a worshipper, not that just I belong to a church because my name's on the register, not even to take it for granted that I'm alright because I'm in fellowship. I must be there.

[00:44:02] I must be sure that I'm part of the live worship of the God of heaven.

And then turn to him and ask for the blessing. There'll not only be an sound of an abundance of rain, but the power of the Lord will be unleashed for our blessing.

The showers would follow as they do the lightning from heaven.