Study of Elijah - Part 1

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0:00] Seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to the second portion of Scripture we read, the Epistle of James.

Chapter 5, and verse 16.
James, chapter 5, at verse 16. Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.
Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.
And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth a fruit. Especially the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.
[1:28] Now the history we read in the book of Kings, 1 Kings chapter 16, takes us right back to around about 870 years before the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it takes us into the northern kingdom of Israel. Around about 60 years after the kingdom had split into Israel in the north and Judah in the south.
That happened immediately after the reign of Solomon. Now in these 60 years, the northern kingdom of Israel declined at an alarming rate spiritually.
It began with the first king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam. Now he knew he had a difficulty on his hands right away, because he felt that unless there was some rival center of worship to Jerusalem, the people's allegiance in the north would gradually be won back to the south.
And so he would lose his kingdom, and he would lose his throne. So what he did was he established two other centers of worship, one in Dan and one in Bethel. Now Dan was right up at the north of Israel, and Bethel was at the south.
[2:42] So with these two centers of worship, he hoped to keep the people of Israel to himself, and to stop them going back in their allegiance to Judah. And so he made a new priesthood.

He didn't follow the Old Testament laws exactly. He chose people whom he desired himself into the office of the priesthood. And there was a new alternative worship of Jehovah going on in Israel at Dan and Bethel, while the true worship was being observed in Judah.
Now that began a process of gradual declension into sin, and that's always what happens. When you find the church gradually becoming corrupted, you find that society becomes corrupted with it. And all restraints seem to disappear, and sin is let loose. That's what happened here in Israel, primarily through Jeroboam.
Each succeeding king appeared to be worse until the pinnacle, or perhaps I should say the abyss of sinfulness, was reached. In 874 BC, when this man Ahab came to the throne of Israel.
[3:48] We're told in chapter 16 of 1 Kings that he did more evil than all the kings who were before him. And in a terrible note, we are told that he sold himself to sin, or he sold himself to work iniquity.

It's a sad mark on any man and woman. It means that they essentially just abandoned themselves. They let go of the law of God altogether. They let go all restraint, and he was completely and entirely under the dominion of sin.
And as you usually find with people like that, there was a terrible turning point in his life when matters became worse. And that turning point was when he decided to ally himself with the kingdom of the Phoenicians.
Now the Phoenicians at this time were a powerful people. And their capital city, Tyre, was a very influential city. Tyre had trading colonies right across the Mediterranean, even as far as Spain.
And Tyre used to trade even with England, down in Cornwall at this very time. And the king was a man called Ephbal. And he was a corrupt idolater.

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[4:58] And his daughter was a beautiful young woman by the name of Jezebel. Now Ahab thought it would do himself and his kingdom no end of good to go in tow with these people.

And the usual way in those days of cementing a political alliance was through marriage. He asked Hethbaal for the hand of his daughter, and he gave it. And from that day he was yoked with a woman who did more to destroy himself and to destroy Israel than any other single person did.
And he may have made a worldly gain out of it, but like many other people who make worldly gains, he made a spiritual loss. And she became the real power behind the throne.
And like many another man, you see him driven to his ruin. Even though he is himself inclined that way, he's driven to it hard and powerfully by the woman who sits on the throne beside him.
This woman, Jezebel. Now Jezebel didn't come to Israel alone. She was brought up an idolater. She knew how to worship nature.
[6:03] She knew how to worship gods and goddesses. And she brought her own religion with her. And she brought her own priests with her. And before long there was a temple built in Jezreel, dedicated to the goddess Ashtaroth.

And there was another temple built in Samaria, which was dedicated to the god Baal. And there were 450 priests in that temple.
She paid them herself out of her own private purse initially. It's interesting how committed many idolaters are. And she maintained them in that way until they gradually began to bring their leaven and to spread it right through the kingdom of Israel.
And by this time the church had become so weak and so paralyzed that the takeover was easy. And the religion of Baal spreaded and permeated throughout the whole land.
And interestingly the religion of Ashtaroth and Baal is a very relevant one for us to consider. Because it revolved, like many false religions, around physical or sexual immorality.
[7:12] That was at its heart. Ashtaroth was the goddess of fertility and Baal was the god of fertility. And it's easy to sell a religion of that kind because that's what's at the heart of it.

And you had cultic prostitution and things like that around about the temples. And how easy it was to take a spiritually apathetic and paralyzed people and to soak them up and to bring them into that kind of religion.
And before long everything in Israel was crumbling and it was falling apart. And then again along with that there was this. The persecution began.
As soon as the false religion got a foothold the persecution of the true religion began. And the persecution became more open and more bold the more they progressed.
And they began eventually, well they began by destroying the altars. The old altar on the top of Mount Carmel was broken down. We'll see that one later on. It'll come back into prominence.
[8:13] Other altars belonging to Jehovah were broken down. The prophets were slain with the sword. Obadiah, he was spared. He took a few of them. And he hid them in the limestone caves in Mount Carmel.

And he fed them with bread and water at risk to his own life. The true religion was outlawed. It was progressively squeezed out. And the people of God were persecuted. To the point where only 7,000 believers were left in Israel.
And their effect nationally was so small that Elijah later on in his life didn't know if there were any besides himself. But God kept 7,000.
But in the whole of Israel, what's that? It's a drop in a bucket. But God kept them here and there. Ready to raise them and ready to revive them when the time for his revival would come.
Now, it would seem in many ways that the height, or again I should say that the depth was reached when Jericho was rebuilt. Ahab gave a grant for this man to rebuild Jericho.
[9:22] And many years ago, the Lord had pronounced a curse on any man who would try to rebuild that city. Ahab flies in the face of that curse. He's a big man. He knows how to go against the law of God.

And he says, on you go, he says, and build Jericho. And let's see what will come from it. So the charter is given. God's curse is fulfilled. When the man laid the foundation stone, his oldest son died.
And when he finished the city, his youngest son died. Because God is not asleep. And we'll see in a moment that God is not asleep. When he sends Elijah into the heart and into the midst of this situation.

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Now, when I describe a situation like that to you, it doesn't require you to tax your own imagination to try and think of what it's like. In fact, if you really think about it, you'll see that you're in the same kind of situation yourself.
We all live in it. We live in a similar type of situation. In the space of a few years, it seems that all that we've ever known and all that we've ever loved has gone. And it's on the verge of disappearing altogether and disappearing entirely.
[10:31] The law of God is smashed. It's trampled underfoot. Nobody cares about it. Nobody in the royal family cares about it. Nobody in parliament or very few in parliament seem to care about it.

One good law after another is repealed. And one bad law after another is being set on the statute book. The churches are being emptied. Mormonism comes in. Islam comes in.
The shrines, the temples, the mosques, they're all being built. They're all expanding at an alarming rate. And what is being worshipped by the vast majority of people?
The body. The body. Sexual immorality. That is what's being worshipped. Everything on the TV screens, in magazines and newspapers are focused around that.
Are they not? I don't have to argue this case. You can see it for yourself. That is what our nation is revolving around. It's what the western world is revolving around. And by and by there's a persecution beginning.
[11:29] I grant you it's slow. And perhaps you can hardly discern it. But I'm telling you my friend, it's there. The one thing that's obnoxious in the world today is true living vital Christianity.

Give me anything, people say. I'll take New Age and I'll swallow it. I'll take secularism and swallow it. I'll take worshipping the grass or the environment and I'll swallow it.
But the Christian, he is slowly being excommunicated out of the life of the nation. As ungodliness raises its head. And there's a remarkable parallel between the situation in Elijah's day and the situation in our own.
A remarkable parallel. Now my friend, when iniquity comes in like a flood, the Lord will raise a standard against it. He has a people and he will always have a witness as long as there is sun and moon.
And he sends a witness. And today, still, he sends witnesses. And in spite of this wretched situation in 1 Kings, the Lord had a revival around the corner.
[12:40] And when the Lord is reviving, he sends a messenger of repentance. He sends a messenger of the law. And he sends a messenger of the gospel.

Is that not the case? Before Christ comes, John the Baptist is sent. Before Elisha comes to awaken Israel one last time, Elijah is sent with the fiery hammer of the law.
Before Joshua brings the people into the blessing of the promised land, Moses is sent to call them to repentance and to bring them to obedience to God. And so when God has a word to do, you will find a message of repentance proclaimed.
And you will find the people of God and the dead being brought to repentance. To a concern for the holiness and the majesty of God. A turning from sin and from foolishness.
And a consecration to the Lord God Almighty. That's what Elijah was sent to do. And that's what the spirit of God is calling upon us all to do today. Do you not discern that it's a day for repentance?
[13:50] It's a day for you, you half-hearted Christian. Or me with you. If I'm lax or apathetic to say enough's enough. My life, my spiritual life is counting for nothing.

I'm having little or no influence on the world around me. And it's time to change. And the best way to change is to hear and to follow the example of this man, Elijah.
Who almost single-handedly by the power of the spirit of God turned the nation. And prepared it in repentance for the blessing that Elisha was to bring a few years afterwards.
And Elijah did that by the hand of God. Because he was a spiritually living man. And he was a spiritually strong man.
And it's into this kind of picture that Elijah comes. And he appears from nowhere. In chapter 17 you find him marching into the court of Ahab. And Ahab is probably sitting there on his throne.
[14:51] With Jezebel beside him. And Elijah doesn't make an apology. He hasn't been invited. He just makes his way through with his coat of camel's hair and his leather belt.

And he says, Ahab, there will be no rain nor dew in this whole country for three whole years, he says, until I give the word.

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And he turns round and he leaves a staggered Ahab and Jezebel behind. And he disappears for over three years. And no one sees him or knows where he is for these three years.
Until he comes back again to confront Ahab. Now that's all we see of him at the beginning of the chapter. In he marches. And he declares the word of God just like that.
And then he leaves. But he leaves an unmistakable stamp on Ahab and Jezebel and the whole court of Israel. They have known that even in this fleeting appearance that a prophet of God has been amongst them.
[15:56] And with that begins a remarkable life. A life of confrontation. A life of conflict. A life of victory on Mount Carmel. A life of depression under a juniper tree.

And in a cave on Mount Sinai. A life which culminates in this glorious ascension to God in a chariot of fire. And it's that life that I want to begin looking at with you.
Because if there's one life that we should learn from. I believe it is the life of Elijah. Now. When you think of this man.
And. Please friends remember what the court was like. This is Ahab and Jezebel. People who were killing the prophets of God. Remember that. And think of this man. Coming in.
And declaring that kind of message. Fearlessly. And then going out. And you say to yourself. Well that required no small measure of spiritual strength. That required someone who knew what he believed in.
[16:55] It required someone who knew exactly where he stood. It required someone who lived close to the Lord. It required a man of spiritual strength. And that's exactly what was true concerning Elijah.

And it was that spiritual strength that turned the nation. That spiritual strength that turned the nation. And that's the spiritual strength that we need today.
And you say. Ah yes. But you're talking here about Elijah. You're talking about a prophet of God. You're talking about a man who is unique. You're talking about a man who lives way above me. And way beyond me. A man who was bound to know more than I could never know. A man who was bound to do more things than I could ever do. And that is precisely what the New Testament doesn't allow you to say.
Because if there is one thing the New Testament wishes you to understand tonight. It's this. That the very resources which made Elijah great in God's service.
[17:58] Can make you great in the service of God also. And I'm not talking about prophets or apostles or preachers. I am talking about you.

Man, woman, child of God. The very things which made Elijah count for something in the world. Will make you count for something also.
You only need to live. And to live for the Lord. And to be dedicated to the Lord. And that will not only transform your own life.
It will transform the life of others. Now, what I'm referring to here especially is James chapter 5. And the end of verse 16.
The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are.
[19:00] And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. And it did not rain on the earth. For the space of three years and six months. Now, for the moment, just notice this.

Elijah was a man of like passions. He was a man of like passions. Or subject to like passions as we are.
That just means simply that Elijah was a man. He of himself was nothing startling. He didn't influence a people and turn a nation because he was something in himself.
That wasn't the reason why. He was just a man. That's all Peter was. That's all Paul was. That's all Elisha was.
Or Abraham. Or Noah. Or Moses. They were just men. Ordinary men. Ordinary people. Ah, it would be different if they were geniuses.
[20:01] Then I could say, well, I'll never be what they were. If Elijah was a remarkable man in himself, then I could just write it off and say, well, I'll never be like that.

And so what's the point of looking at him or looking to him as my example? But he was nothing of the sort. The New Testament goes out of its way, as it were, to emphasize the fact that he was an ordinary man.

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Subject to the same kind of emotions. The same kind of thoughts. The same temptations. The same everything. He was subject to like passions as we are ourselves.
And in fact, the fact of the matter is this. Elijah was really, speaking naturally, a nobody. And he was a nobody from nowhere. If you want to go further into it.
That is a fact. Elijah was the Tishbite. He was from Gilead. And that's not just beyond. It's the back of beyond. To be a Tishbite from Gilead is something akin to being a highlander in the eyes of a person from London.
[21:03] It means that you're not really too worthy of being listened to. It means that you're from nowhere. Gilead was a rugged land. It was full of trees and hills.

Forests, hills, valleys and rushing streams. It was uncultured. It was the land beyond the Jordan. There, there were ordinary shepherd people who spent their time in an outdoor life, in ordinary outdoor occupations.
And Tishbite was a small town there. It was an insignificant place. An insignificant place in an insignificant place. And Elijah is introduced to us as being a Tishbite from Gilead.
That's all. We're not even told that his mother was great or that his father was great. We're not even told that he was a spiritual man or that she was a spiritual woman. None of that.
Deliberately so. We're not told any of us to strive to identify with him. And don't think of saying tonight, I can never be what Elijah was.
[22:07] By the grace of God, you can be what Elijah was. And that is the very thrust of what James says. Do this because Elijah was a man like you and he did it. Therefore, you did it.

And so right at the outset, let's not have any forebodings that what we say is beyond us. It is not beyond us. It is the spirit of God that's required for this.
And we'll come to that in just a moment. Now, what made him strong then? Well, James tells us, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.
It's as though James is letting us into the secret of Elijah's life right at the beginning. Elijah was what he was because he was a man of prayer.
And because he was a righteous, obedient man. That's what the word righteous means. He had a life of obedience. He prayed on the inside.
[23:11] And he conformed his life to the holy law of God on the outside. And that made him great. In prayer, he lived with the Lord.

And that energized, and that word will become important, that energized his life. So that he walked fearlessly before the Lord. And when he did that, things began to happen.
Now, I want to look at these two things with you. First of all, Elijah was a man of prayer. Now, there are certain things about his prayer that I wish to bring before you.
I think, in fact, we can mention five things in connection with Elijah's prayers. First of all, he prayed in accordance with God's will.
And the shorter catechism tells us that. That prayer is to be offered up for things in accordance with the will of God. Now, that seems strange.
[24:17] Because the first prayer that we find Elijah offering up in the Bible is this. And what a terrible thing it is. He asks God for a famine upon the land.

Yes, my friend, he asks God for a famine. He asks God for what he knows will bring about starvation on the faces of men, women, and children.
He prays God for circumstances that will send people to the wells and come home empty. He prays for a situation in which he will see the skin stretched over the bones of people.
When he will see the animals starving and dying, he prays for it. And he asks the Lord to bring it about.
What a terrible thing. What a terrible prayer it would appear to offer up in the presence of God. He asks God for a famine. Now, 1 Kings 17 doesn't tell us that.
[25:18] It just tells us that he went into the presence of Ahab and says, there will be a famine. But this is the value of comparing scripture with scripture. And that's why you should search out the scriptures for yourself.

James tells us that Elijah prayed for it first. He prayed for God to bring a famine upon the land. Now, the big question is why did he pray that prayer?
And the answer is this. The answer lies in the book of Deuteronomy and in chapter 11. It's to do with what God himself had said when he gave the law.

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Deuteronomy chapter 11 and verse 16. Now, listen to this. This is God speaking to Israel.
Take heed to yourselves, that your hearts be not deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. Then the Lord's wrath will be kindled against you.
[26:26] Mark this. And he shut up heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit. Unless you perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.

Therefore you shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand. Now, there's the warning.
Don't turn from another God, from me to another God, in case I shut up the heavens and bring a famine upon the earth. And here's Elijah in Gilead.
And he's seeing the country degenerating. He's seeing the people of God slain. He's seeing the church mocked and despised. And all the time there's a harvest.
And a bounteous harvest. And he says to himself, well, as long as this prevails, people will say there is no God on the throne. People will impugn his name.
[27:28] People will say, see, where is thy God? And people will shake their fists in contempt at the heavens. Because the God who promised a famine is still sending a harvest.

And Elijah knows that desperate times are calling for desperate measures. And having the zeal for the glory of God that he has, he gets down on his knees and he asks God to send his judgment upon the earth.
And he sends God for a famine. Because he knows that only the clear, visible hand of God can shake these people from their idolatry and their ignorance and their sloth.
It's a fearful thing to pray for judgment. And I don't want to enter into that too deeply at the moment. But there are times in the Christian's experience when he prays to the God of judgment.
And prays to the God of judgment to reveal himself as a God of judgment. And I say that with care. You never say it. And you never pray it for your own glory's sake.
[28:33] But many times the true exercise child of God puts up that prayer when God's glory is being impugned. Arise.

And whatever it costs and whatever shaking it brings upon us, reveal thyself as a God who honors his word and who honors his law. You know what it's like to have a law in your statute book that's never enforced?
I don't know actually, to be honest, what the situation is like just now in this country. But I certainly knew that when I left it that the Sabbath law in this country was like that.
There was a law enforcing no trading of the Sabbath. People broke that law and there was no prosecution of it. There was deliberately no prosecution of that law.
Does that not make the law an ass? Does that not bring the whole law of God into contempt? The whole law of the country into contempt? And this is what Elijah is saying.
[29:33] You said this. You promised it. Come and show yourself. It is better for us to see you as a God of judgment than not to see you at all. There was one thing, in other words, in Elijah's estimation that was worse than a famine.

And that was mocking the glory of God. That was worse to Elijah. We, in our foolishness, think that human tragedies are the worst things that can happen.
They are not. The greatest tragedies are spiritual tragedies. When women, women, and children are not dying of starvation but are going to hell. That is the tragedy.
And whatever earthquake or landslide or whatever, and I don't say that lightly, and I hope and pray I don't say it stupidly, but whatever is involved to awaken people to eternity is much more important than these things.
Natural death is natural death, but spiritual death is spiritual death. And so Elijah pleads for God's will. He finds it in the Bible, and he besieges the gates of heaven with it.
[30:42] You do the same. You pray for what is written in the will of God and for what God wills. And, by the way, you may say to me just now, well, there are many things, and I'm not sure if they are the will of God.

Well, for the moment, my friend, just stick to what you know to be the will of God. It is written in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, this is the will of God, your sanctification.
It's as simple as that. I know beyond a doubt that the Lord wills for you and for me to be conformed to his image.

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Why not pray for that? Pray for it earnestly. Pray for it fervently. And then you'll find that a lot of difficult things fall into place. You know, my friends, many of the questions we have about the guidance of the Lord would disappear like that if we were more diligent just to be holy men and women.
So we have prayed in accordance with God's will. Secondly, he prayed expectantly. He prayed expecting God to answer him. Now this actually comes through in 1 Kings chapter 18 and verse 43.
[32:04] Now this puts us forward a little bit in history, and it brings us to the aftermath of Mount Carmel when God has burnt the sacrifice with fire. Elijah goes apart to the top of Mount Carmel.

He finds a place on his own, and he puts himself down on the earth, and we're told that he put his face between his knees. And here's a posture of prayer. And he said to his servant, go up now and look towards the sea.
And the servant went up and looked and came back and said, there's nothing. And Elijah said, go again. And he sent the servant seven times until finally the servant came back and said, behold, there arises a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand.
And the minute Elijah hears that, he says, go up and say to him, prepare your chariot and get down, that the rain stop thee not. Now what's happening there?
Well, James tells us. He says that Elijah prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth the fruit. In other words, not only did Elijah pray for the famine, when he knew the time was right, he prayed for the rain.
[33:22] And this is where you see him praying expectantly. Because he sent his servant to look for a cloud each single time. And even when the servant came back, the first, the second, the third time and said, I don't see a thing, Elijah would just get back to his prayer, and then he would send the servant out and said, do you see anything?

Now the fact that it was answered the seventh time means that he didn't see anything six times. Is that not obvious? Six times there was no answer to his prayer. But he still sent out the servant.
And the fact that he still sent him out meant that he expected to see signs of rain appearing. And if you don't expect an answer to your prayer, of course you needn't be surprised when you don't get one.
How could you be? You must expect the answer in order to receive it. And if you expect an answer to your prayer, all other things being equal, you shall see it.
And you shall praise the Lord for it. And how good it would be today if every man, woman and child who knew the Lord in here tonight would resolve to pray for a cloud of blessing from the Lord.
[34:40] That would be just the harbinger of a rain, a spiritual rain that would fresh, refresh our dry and our weary land. That's what Elijah did.

He went down on his knees and he expected it. And because he expected it, he saw it. And along with praying expectantly, there's this, he prayed persistently. Again, that comes through in the seven times.
Now this ties in a bit with what I mentioned last week. The Lord praying three times in Gethsemane. Paul praying three times for the thorn to be removed from the flesh.
Here we find Elijah praying seven times for the advent of the rain. Now both these numbers, three and seven, are well recognized symbols in the word of God for completeness or for fullness.
And what that tells us is this, that they prayed as often as was needed to actually receive the answer from the Lord.
[35:48] Ah, how often you give up your request without a yea or a nay. It's not so much whether it's a yea or a nay you get, but that you get one of them.

That's what matters. You should never stop your petition until you get a yea or a nay from the Lord. Don't just be content with silence.
Never be content with silence. What would silence have got the Syrophoenician woman? When she besought the Lord Jesus Christ to help her and he was silenced, we're told that he answered her not a word.
What would that have got her? Nothing. She spoke again until she got a yea or a nay. She spoke until she was satisfied. She spoke until she knew that the Lord had revealed his will and revealed his mind to her.
And is that not what this is telling us? Keep going until the Lord speaks to your soul. Because he will speak and he will honor persistent prayer.

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[36:52] Ah, my friend, who have long ago ceased on your knees. And you who are more backslidden tonight than you could ever bring yourself to tell anyone.

Get back to this at once before the case of your soul is urgent beyond description or despairing beyond description. Get back to praying to God until there is communication between yourself and heaven.
And the Lord, how gracious he is, he encourages you to that. In one of his parables he says, Men always ought to pray and not to faint. Ask, and it shall be given you.
Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. If your fathers, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?
Do you think you will plead with the Lord in vain? I assure you, you will never plead with the Lord in vain. You betake it often enough. And you will find that the Lord will answer you one way or another.
[38:03] The Lord will answer. And he is still the Lord who can answer by fire. I don't know if there is any promise that we've forgotten as much as that. Listen to it.

Taste it. And let it sink into your heart. Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and you shall find. How much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?
Ask, ask, and it shall be given. Seek, and you shall find. And then again, not only did he pray according to the will of God, not only did he pray expectantly, not only did he pray persistently, but he prayed fervently.
The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. And that word fervent means literally in the Greek energetic.
And energetic means that it is spirit inspired. Here is a man dependent upon the Holy Spirit in his prayer and in his life.
[39:06] He knows in his life that he can do nothing without God. Nothing. And the whole of his spiritual life is energized. It's energetic because of the Spirit of God at work.

When he prays, he means it. It is a fervent prayer. It is not a muttering and a mumbling of a vain repetition. It's not a mantra or a ritual or a superstition when he comes out of bed or goes into it.
It's not just a mumbling of some few words that you have heard from somebody else and repeat as though that avails. That avails nothing. That avails nothing in the presence of God.
But a fervent prayer avails much. That just means that he meant it. It just means that he felt it. Spiritual things mattered to Elijah.
He wasn't playing games in his Christianity like so many people are playing today. It wasn't just an easy thing observing something here and observing something there. His whole life was caught up in it.
[40:08] It all mattered to him. The glory of God mattered to him. The country mattered to him. The people mattered to him. The children. The parents. The husbands. The wives. It was all important to Elijah.

And he prayed fervently to God that God would change it. Change it. And when he did, God changed it. Any conception of what the Lord can do if we return to him. Turn to me and I will turn to you.
Return to me and I will return to you. That is the order in which it's spoken. That is the order in which it's spoken. Return to me and I will return to you.
And he did it all fervently because he believed in it and because it mattered to him. My friend, there's nothing that disgusts the world as much as the ECOC Christianity that has got the ascendancy today.
Offer a little reality. For a little depth. That would convince the world. And that would do great things in the church of God.
[41:10] And last of all, in connection with that, he prayed with a single eye to the glory of God. What else would anyone pray for a famine for?

Do you think he enjoyed it? Was he not himself a victim of it? The only reason he prayed for a famine was because God's glory was more dear to him than anything else in the world.
That's why he prayed for a famine. That's why when he stood at Mount Sinai in the cleft of the cave, we'll come to that later, he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts for they have forsaken, they have torn down thine altars, they have forsaken thy covenant.

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I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. And that is why his prayer was answered. James tells us, and it's actually in the chapter before this, chapter 4, verse 3.
Perhaps we can read verse 2. James 4, verse 2. You lust and you have not. You kill and desire to have and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you have not because you ask not.
[42:22] And then he says, you ask and you receive not. Because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts, you adulterers and adulteresses. Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God.

They're asking for things in their prayers, and they're not receiving them because in their heart they have the friendship of the world. That's why. That is what it means for them to consume it upon their lusts.
He says, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Therefore, your prayers are not answered. If we had this desire for the glory of God, ah, how we would see answered prayers in the lives of our families, our churches, and our nations.
And that brings me to the second, and this is more briefly, the second great characteristic of Elijah's life, he was a righteous man. Now look again at the text in verse 16 of chapter 5.
The effectual, fervent, prayer, of a righteous man, avails much. Now that word righteous is obviously important.
[43:39] You can't just take it out and forget about it. It's there. In other words, it's not just the fervent prayer of anyone that avails much, it's the fervent prayer of a righteous man.

Now we sang in Psalm 66, and I think I referred to this as well last week. In Psalm 66, verse 18. Now listen to what the psalmist says here. If in my heart I sin regard, the Lord me will not hear, but surely God me heard, and to my prayer's voice give ear.
If I cherish or nourish or nurture sin in my heart while I put my petitions before the Lord, he will not hear.
It is only the righteous, repentant man desiring to please the Lord with his whole heart who will see this answer to his prayer. I'll take a New Testament text as well just to demonstrate this to us in 1 John and in chapter 3.
[44:51] verse 22. Now listen to this carefully.

1 John chapter 3, verse 22. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.
Now, I'm not saying that you have to be perfect to get an answer to your prayer. I haven't said that. And if the devil wishes to make you interpret it that way, so be it.
But that is not what I say. What I am saying is this, that you must have full respect to the commandments of God from the least to the greatest. Full respect unto them.
And in your heart, you must have a wholesome endeavor after obedience before the Lord will hear and answer your prayers. But when that is there in your life, when you can honestly say, O Lord, I desire thy glory above my own and above anything else, then you will find that the heavens will open, that the stairway to heaven will again be filled with angels ascending and descending, and that your communion with God will be enriched through the Son of Man.
[46:13] The effectual prayer, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Now, if you turn to 1 Kings chapter 17, notice how remarkably this is brought before us.

1 Kings 17. It seems as though the Holy Spirit has written everything here to impress upon us that Elijah is an obedient man.
Chapter 17. Now, follow these verses with me. Verse 3. It opens with the Lord speaking, Get thee hence and turn thee eastward.
And look at verse 5. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord. Verse 9. Arise and get thee to Zarephal.
Verse 10. So he arose and went to Zarephal. Verse 1 of chapter 18. It came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself to Ahab.
[47:29] Verse 2. And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. Now, do you see the pattern? Again and again, the Spirit of God has seen fit to inscribe, God says, Elijah does.

The Lord says, Elijah does. In fact, there's only one exception to this. And that's when Elijah ran for his life to Beersheba and into the wilderness.
That's the only solitary instance we have of Elijah not looking to what the Lord was requiring of him at the time. We'll see that when we come to it.

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But it stands out all the more clearly simply because it was solitary. As a rule, Elijah heard and did. And that is the kind of obedience that the Lord wants in our own life.
It was at the heart of Daniel's life too. At the beginning of his experience we're told that Daniel purposed in his heart to do something. That's it. He set his face to be the Lord's and he set his face to do God's will and so indeed he was.
[48:36] And let me just close by saying this that when Elijah stands before Ahab he says as the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand there shall be no dew nor rain these years but according to my word.

Is it not significant that he says the Lord before whom I stand. What a lovely testimony that is. May it be true of yourself that you stand before God.
Elijah saying to Ahab I'm not afraid of you. I don't give my account to you I give my account to God. And I stand before him like an ambassador or like a messenger ready to listen to what he says and ready to do it.
Like Psalm 123 like the servant's hand I upon the hand of the master when the hand moves the servant moves ready always to do the will. That is what Elijah said before whom I stand and before whom I must give account.
That's what made Elijah great. That's what made him spiritually strong and that's what would make us vertebrate Christians as well and give us a backbone and would make us strong indeed in the cause of the Lord.
[49:50] Next week we'll see Elijah in a different place. We'll see him beside the Baruch Cherith but for the moment let's take with us that God builds a church and a nation through strong prayerful and obedient men, women and children.

Let us pray. Eternal God be pleased to visit thy vine and be pleased to inspire us with thine own strength and with the power of the Holy Spirit.
O grant us that we may ask for that spirit for it surely will be given to those who ask it. Take away anything that may have been inconsistent with the truth.
Cover all the blemishes and bless thine own word for the Redeemer's sake. Amen.

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