

Gods On Display

1 Kings 18:17-40

- Today, we tackle what is probably the most familiar section in Elijah's story.
- It is an epic story of dramatic people and events, and it would be easy for us to dismiss it as antiquated and no longer applicable to our lives.
- We are going to see this morning a battle between two Gods: the god Baal, who Israel was worshipping, and the One True God.

- At first glance, we may think that this has nothing to do with us. After all, we don't have statues or altars or idols that we worship, so this battle of the gods is nothing more than a superstitious story of an ancient people.
- It is only our ignorance and pride that says that, though.
- The battle that played out between the prophets of Baal and the prophet of God on Mt. Carmel that day is one that plays out daily in our own hearts.
- As we will see, God showed up mightily and displayed His power in an indisputable way.

- Our series has been building to this moment in some respects, because this is perhaps the clearest demonstration of God's power through Elijah.
- However, if you notice, God's display of His power has one purpose: to show Himself to those who doubted Him.
- In fact, if you come out of this message with nothing else this morning, my hope and prayer is that you will see that:
- **God displays His power through you so others will see who He is.**

- He doesn't work through you to show everyone how amazing you are or to give you everything you want; God displays His power to draw people to Himself.
- He knows that ultimately, everything else in life will leave us disappointed and wanting, and that we cannot find satisfaction in anything else.
- **Let's walk through this story and make three observations about ourselves from it:**

1) Our hearts will turn from the one true God.

- For context, remember that Elijah has been hiding from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel for over three years.
- Most this time, he has been in Zarephath, under the care of a widow.
- Now, he has come back to Israel and is face to face with King Ahab.
- Pick up with me in **verse 17-19...**
- Ahab tries to blame Elijah for the trouble caused by the drought, but Elijah points out that it is Ahab and Jezebel's idolatry that has brought about this drought.
- Ahab and Jezebel successfully led the people of Israel away from worshiping the one true God.
- Have you ever thought about all God did for Israel? He was incredible to them!
- As you read through the Old Testament, you see that God:
 - Miraculously gave a child to a couple, Abraham and Sarah, who were too old to have children.

- Orchestrated an incredible series of events to put one of their descendants in power in Egypt so the whole family could be saved in the middle of a family.
- Gave them a protected land in Egypt to grow into a mighty nation.
- Performed incredible miracles to deliver them from the Egyptians.
- Sustained them through 40 years in the desert.
- Parted seas and rivers to demonstrate His power.
- Drove out armies and destroyed kings to give them possession of the land.
- Continued to protect them from enemies, both within the country and from outside.
- How did Israel respond? By repeatedly turning and serving other gods.
- Unfortunately, our hearts do the same thing.
- God has done even more for us than Israel knew at the time. The Bible teaches that God sent His own Son, Jesus, to die in our place and give us His life.
- And yet, we are drawn away to idols.
- Our idols look different. Most of us don't have statues or shrines in our homes. We don't offer sacrifices or burn incense, but we have idols we worship just the same.
- Tim Keller described it this way:

"What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give."¹
 (Timothy Keller)

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<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2009/10/13/counterfeit-gods-tim-keller-takes-on-our-idols/>. Accessed 19 October 2016

- That means anything can be an idol: money, sex, power, politics, health, family, sleep, church, comfort...
 - We can turn any good thing into a bad thing by making it a god thing!
 - For the people of Israel, it was a god named Baal, whose sacrifices and rituals seemed better than worshipping the one true God.
 - What idols are you prone to worship?
 - Would you echo the chorus of the classic hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"?
- "O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be; Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wand'ring heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; Here's my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for thy courts above."*
- In case you're wondering, it isn't okay to worship these idols.
 - **Not only do they steal the glory only God deserves, but as all Israel found out on the day they had this confrontation...**

2) Nothing else will satisfy.

- Let's summarize what happens next:
 - Elijah sets up a challenge with the prophets of Baal. Each group will have slaughter an ox as a sacrifice and set it on an altar. They will call out to their respective gods, and the god who sends fire is the real one.
- The next part is too good to pass up. Read **1 Kings 18:25-29** with me.
- There is a lot going on, so let's look at it.
 - The prophets of Baal pick their ox and slaughter it.

- They start dancing around the altar they made, hoping to get Baal's attention.
- By noon, nothing had happened, so Elijah starts making fun of them (**verse 27**). In fact, he even suggests that perhaps Baal had to step out for a quick bathroom break!
- I can almost picture Elijah, laying down under a tree and watching all this take place.
- The prophets of Baal step it up a notch and start mutilating themselves to get his attention.
- By 3:00, after six hours, Baal hasn't sent fire.
- The most telling statement is in **verse 29**:
*When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but **there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.** (1 Kings 18:29, NASB95)*
- This is the sad reality of idols: they cannot and will not satisfy.
- These words ring true in our world today. We are chasing after so many things, but there is no voice, no answer, and it seems as though no one cares.
 - You try to worship your job or your schoolwork, and no matter how well you do, you still feel empty.
 - You try to find your happiness in your kids, but they never quite measure up to your standards.
 - You try to find meaning and purpose in volunteering, but you can never help enough people.
- You will never be good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, wealthy enough, successful enough to hear what your heart is longing to hear.
- Your heart is longing to hear that you are loved, cherished, desired, respected, and valued unconditionally. You need to

know that you aren't a cosmic accident; you were created in the image of God!

- Not only that, but your value and your worth is not in any accomplishment of your own; rather, you have value because God says you do!
- You matter because you matter to God.
- Do you doubt that?

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10, NASB95)

- When we try to find that anywhere else, we hear no voice, we get no answer, and no one cares.
- Your heart and my heart are so quick to turn away from the God who has done so much for us, and it will always leave us empty, just like it did the prophets of Baal.
- **That leads us to our final observation:**

3) God displays Himself through us.

- This is where it really gets good.
- In **verses 30-35**, Elijah gets everything ready.
- He sets up the altar with twelve stones, reminding everyone there about how God built the nation with twelve tribes.
- In the middle of a severe drought, he does the unthinkable: He digs a trench around the altar and commands the people to pour water over the offering, the wood, and the altar.
- They pour so much water on it that it ran off and filled the trench, which could hold over 5 gallons of water by itself!
- The stage is set, and Elijah begins to pray.

- Read **verses 36-37...**

- Notice how Elijah prays. He doesn't call on God to act so that they will all see Elijah is right and everyone else is wrong; he prays for God to respond so they will know that He is the one true God.
- Even when it seems like Elijah is praying for himself, you notice that he is actually praying for God to confirm His Word.
- How does God respond here? Look at **verse 38**.
- God immediately responds to this straightforward prayer by Elijah, and He does so in a way that was undeniable.
- Did you notice that the fire consumed the stone and all the water in the trench?!
- That would have been something to see!
- God isn't simply performing a parlor trick, though—He is showing to all who were watching that He is the one true God!
- The people understood that, so they immediately turned back to Him. Read **verses 39-40**
- Once they saw God for who He was and saw Baal for who He was, they realized the god they had been serving was no god at all.
- God used Elijah, an ordinary man just like us, to show that He was the one true God.
- There is something interesting, though, that we have somewhat glossed over. Go back up to **verse 22**.
- Elijah says that he is the only prophet of God left, but that isn't true.
- We didn't read it earlier, but look at **verse 3-4**.
- A man named Obadiah had 100 prophets hidden in caves.
- When we get to the next chapter, we see that there are 7,000 people in Israel who are still serving the Lord.

- We don't know everything about the situation, and I don't want to read too much into this, but here's what we do see: God didn't demonstrate His power through the prophets that hid.
 - Elijah valued the one true God over anything else. That gave him the courage and opportunity to put himself in a hard place, to step out in incredible faith, and to seek the glory of God above his own safety. When he did, he saw God do something through him that no one else in history has seen.
 - Our nation desperately needs to see who the one true God is. They need to see it as we, His church, His people, turn our backs on the things that will never satisfy and cry out to the one true God.
 - No matter how hard it gets, no matter how unpopular we may be, the only hope for the people around us is that they turn from their empty life and turn to following Christ.
 - God can work through you to do it.
 - Are you willing to take the challenge, to put yourself at risk, and to make the tough decisions to turn away from your idols?
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- There is one more part to this story.
 - As great as this moment is, it is only a shadow of a greater moment.
 - Like us, however, the people's hearts would again turn away.
 - That's why Elijah's obedience points us to a greater obedience.
 - On another day, another servant of God would go up on a mountain, one we call Mount Calvary.
 - This prophet was greater than Elijah; in fact, He was the very Son of God.

- Instead of an ox, He would sacrifice Himself. Instead of God's people saying, "The LORD, He is God," they mocked and shouted, "Crucify Him!"
- There would only be one Roman soldier there who turned and acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God, yet that sacrifice made the way available for you and I to be saved.
- As fire fell from heaven and completely consumed the offering, so the wrath of God fell on Jesus and completely consumed our sin, cleansing us from all our sin.
- Isaiah, as God allowed him to prophesy about what was to come, would say this,

All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. (Isaiah 53:6, NASB95)
- If you are here this morning, and you have never turned to trusting in Christ, this is your time, this is your place. He did it for you.
- If you are here today and you know you have been saved, yet your heart continues to turn back towards idols,