

“Choose Only One”

1 Kings 18:20-40

5/8/22 Epicenter/BAC

Rev. Brian T. Smeal; pastorsmeal@gmail.com

All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Special Thanks to Craig Groeschel

God wants your heart – all of it – He wants you to be so in love with Him, so committed to Him, so completely devoted to Him, that nothing else even enters the conversation. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” [Matthew 22] That’s pretty all-encompassing, isn’t it? If someone were trying to lure you away from wholehearted devotion to God, that individual wouldn’t have to completely turn you away from God; they would just have to get you to split your allegiance, giving even just some small part of your attention and affection away from the true God and to the things of this world that compete with God for your attention; these are false gods, which always promise what only the true God can provide.

Around the 9th century BC, there was a prophet of God named Elijah. During his life, many people were trying to worship and serve multiple gods. Elijah challenged the prophets who were espousing this manner of empty worship, as we see in 1 Kings 18:20-40. Today, we can easily see two valuable lessons we can learn from this incident. The first is to choose God completely.

“How long” Elijah says (v.21), “...will you go limping between two different opinions?” These people were living in a very polytheistic society; that is, there were many gods and they said you could serve whichever ones you want to, and as many of them as you want to, for as long as you want to. In contrast, Elijah says, ‘Choose! Make your choice and dive in with both feet!’ Today – you have that same choice to make – either follow God completely or not at all. No matter what god (little g) threatens to steal away your full heart’s devotion to God (capital G), know this – when you allow even a small part of your devotion to be split away from God, that’s idolatry.

Thrones aren’t built for two. God wants your heart – all of it! The people Elijah was confronting seemed content to try and worship both God and Baal. God was supposed to be their first and only love, but they weren’t satisfied with that, maybe a bit like a married man who also has a girlfriend on the side. Elijah asks, ‘What’s it going to take for you to decide, to be fully committed to God?’ “And the people did not answer him a word.” (v.21.) When do you not answer a question? When you’re not sure, right? The people don’t answer Elijah a word because they were not sure what to say. Even today, there are many people who are not so sure about their faith as well; that leads us to the second main thing from today’s passage: choose God confidently!

Elijah issues this challenge – let’s prepare two animal sacrifices and you can call on Baal (say it), and I’ll call on the Lord, and whoever answers by fire, we’ll know that he is God. The people like that idea, and the prophets of Baal start to cry out and pray; ‘O Baal, answer us!’ The people sitting there watching this are into it too –maybe some of them were praying to Baal also, but after three hours, they were probably starting to give up.

At this point, Elijah just can't help himself, and he starts to mock them, saying (v.27), "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." They had called on Baal all morning, now after Elijah's noon-day mockery, they kick it up a notch, crying out even louder and cutting themselves, as was pagan tradition, for hours, "But there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention."

They had their chance – Elijah had waited while they gave it their best shot, but now it's Elijah's turn. He rebuilds the altar of sacrifice to the Lord that had been torn down, and then digs a trench around it. Then he has 12 jars of water poured over it. That seems extravagant considering they are 3+ years into the most severe drought ever, but *nothing is extravagant if it brings glory to God. After that, he does something crazy – he prays.*

v.38 – "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." This wasn't a gradual event or a freak bolt of lightning coming out of a cloudless sky. It wasn't a spark that slowly lit it up or spontaneous combustion. It wasn't Elijah's lovely assistant bringing a torch while the prophets of Baal were using the bathroom, and it wasn't same-day delivery from Amazon Prime. This fire that God sent down burned up the wood and the animal sacrifice on top of it – but wait folks, there's more – even the stone and the dirt and the water in the trench was all burnt up.

Why don't we call on God to light it up, like He did for Elijah? You'd be impressed then, right? But that's not what He wants for us. Verse 36 shows us that – "I have done all these things at your word." This showdown was not Elijah's idea; God told him to do these specific things, and so God was going to follow through on His part. v.39 – "And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." This is history, recorded through the generations for you and I to learn from and believe.

At the end of this event, there is an unusual twist. Verse 40 concludes the event with, "And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there." They were under the Mosaic Law; Deuteronomy 13:1-5 gave orders that false prophets be put to death in order to purge the community of evil influences. During Elijah's life, many people were worshipping or serving multiple gods, and sadly, the same is true today – many people worship or serve multiple gods. But blending the things of your life with your faith never elevates those things; it only – and always – cheapens your faith.

No one wants to think that they have idols in their lives, right? You don't want to confess that you've made an idol of your job, success, fame, politics, or your lifestyle, but if it's a good thing that you might sometimes focus on too much, it may be an idol. So, let's quickly give three keys for unmasking idols in your life. ^[1]

1. Examine your imagination – What do you daydream about?
2. Examine your finances – *what does the bottom-line underline?*
3. Examine your emotions – what gets you the most upset, angry, excited, or worried?

Not everything you love is an idol! James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." It would be rude and ingrateful if you were not enjoying these things. But when they absorb more of your thoughts, finances, emotional energy, or life than God

does, then they are problems. God deserves center stage in your life – He deserves to be there alone. An idol is not necessarily something that you bow down to and worship; it is anything that encroaches on God’s exclusive claim to your heart.

What is your Baal? How’s that working for you? Are you trusting in your ability to be a good person? How’s that working out for you? Good for now? Well, it doesn’t end well. Are you trusting in your church attendance to earn God’s favor? How’s that working out for you? Good for now? Well, it doesn’t end well. Are you trusting in your parents’ faith to save you? How’s that working out for you? Good for now? Well, it doesn’t end well.

What are you feeding your soul with? Politics, Pop Christianity, Pornography, Materialism? Anything that does not honor God has got to go! Once you’ve identified the idols in your life, it is time to take action! Demote them, deport them, or destroy them. Joshua told the people of Israel, “Choose this day whom you will serve.” Centuries later, Elijah asks the same question to a new generation. Today, the question is posed to you. Who will you serve?

God says, ‘Stop wavering. Stop drifting back and forth. Stop trying to find room on the throne of your life for me and for something or someone else. Pick a side.’ There are consequences, repercussions, and logical results of whatever you choose, but *choose!* God describes the church in Laodicea as being lukewarm, and He says that’s disgusting to him; maybe like that delicious, room temperature milk that you found behind the couch one day. Mmm... so good.

God wants your heart – all of it! What part are you holding back from Him? He’s ready for you to come back.

[1] <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-expose-the-idols-in-your-life/>

Takeaways from this message.

God wants your HEART – all of it

❖ ***False gods always PROMISE what only the true God can PROVIDE***

Choose God COMPLETELY

- **THRONES aren’t built for two**

Choose God CONFIDENTLY

- **Nothing is EXTRAVAGANT if it brings glory to God**

Some keys for unmasking idols in your life.

- **Examine your IMAGINATION**
- **Examine your FINANCES**
- **Examine your EMOTIONS**

God deserves CENTER STAGE in your life, and He deserves to be there alone.

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

- 1. What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?**
- 2. Why do you suppose Ahab would have agreed to Elijah's challenge?**
- 3. At the neighborhood barbeque, what are you most likely to bring?**
- 4. What preparations does Elijah make before he prays? Why do you suppose this may be significant?**
- 5. Is there any part of your relationship with God in need of repair? What? When will you take care of that?**
- 6. What did the prophets of Baal do wrong? What did they do right? What can you learn from their example? What about Elijah's example?**
- 7. What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**