



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Confronting Idolatry

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Series: Expectant
1 Kings 18:1-40

BIG IDEA – GOD IS A GOD WHO LOVINGLY CONFRONTS

Good morning, Two Cities Church, and happy Father's Day, whether you're in here or down in Lexington. I want to tell you something: God loves Father's Day. How do I know God loves Father's Day? Because God is a dad. In fact, God has always been a dad. He was a dad before he was a creator, before he was a lawgiver, before he was a judge. He has always been a dad because he has always had a son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We love men around here, but we love dads. Here's what I think about a dad. I think a good dad is like a tailwind. Here's what I mean. I had the opportunity recently to head to Athens, Greece. What's interesting is the flight *to* Athens, Greece, from Boston was 8-1/2 hours, but the flight *back* from Athens to Boston was 10-1/2 hours. There was a two-hour difference even though it was the same exact flight path. Why? Because on the way there I had a tailwind.

A good dad is a tailwind. He helps you get to where you need to go sooner. Now, here's what's interesting. I want to take us to Malachi, chapter 4. I want you to see, men (dads, granddads), that the final word in the Old Testament is to dads. Let me show you this.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers..." Notice the order. The father's heart has to be toward the children first. ***"...lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."***

Dads, what you need is to turn your heart not toward your work, not toward the television, not toward your hobbies, but toward your kids and their hearts. Listen.

You're not going to be the perfect dad, but if you can grab your kids' hearts... By the way, here's the good news: every kid, when they come into the world, all they want to do is have the best relationship they possibly can with their parents. That's where you get to start.

So, maybe today, on Father's Day... I don't know what you've been like so far. Maybe the repentance in your life, as a dad, needs to be to say, "In a new way, I'm going to turn my heart toward the hearts of my kids." By the way, we have so many new dads around here. If you've become a dad for the first time in the last year or your wife is expecting your first kid, would you stand? We want to see all of the new dads. Just stand up and be proud. There we go. It takes a second, but then they all start standing. We love it.

Speaking of dads, speaking of families, we just had a student mission trip. We had 170-plus students and leaders head to Mississippi (the high schoolers did) and head to Virginia (the middle schoolers did) to serve people in Jesus' name. We have some pictures behind us.

There's no guilt if, for some reason, it didn't work out for your kids to go on this mission trip or a future retreat, but, by God's grace, we're trying to create these catalytic environments and events, because the average middle schooler and high schooler has been in too much air conditioning and too screen saturated, and they need to get out and taste mission and adventure.

By the way, if you give to Two Cities Church, you help subsidize all of those trips, so thank you very much for your generosity. Finally, I want to show you a picture of our college students. We have A18 going on right now, which is an intense summer discipleship program. We sent 27, I think, of these college students to three different places all over the world to be on mission trips over the next two weeks.

So, when you pull into Two Cities Church, here's what I want you to think you're pulling into: Charlotte Douglas Airport. We're like a terminal. They're coming, they're going, they're coming, they're going. Okay? So, I want to pray, particularly pray for dads this Father's Day, and then we're going to get to work in 1 Kings 18. Let's pray.

Lord, I want to pray for dads right now, that you would help dads right now, in their minds and hearts, turn their hearts toward their kids. Lord, would you help dads to be present, just like God the Father was present at Jesus' baptism and made his presence known by speaking.

We pray right now, Lord, only you can do the work of turning a father's heart toward his kids and turning a kid's heart toward the father. If there are some prodigals out

there, we pray that you would return their hearts to their earthly father and also to their heavenly Father. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. Well, I love a good battle. I love a good contest. I love a good fight. I love it no matter where it shows up. When it was...I don't know when exactly...August, September, October, in all of the political debates, I broke out my popcorn. I was like, "Let's go. I'm ready for all of these." I go on YouTube... I don't know if you ever watch these. "One Christian versus 25 atheists." Have you seen these? One Christian sits there, and then atheist after atheist after atheist debates him. I just love it.

How does every great thriller, every great villain movie, end? You know. It doesn't matter which Mission Impossible or which James Bond movie. The final scene is going to be the villain versus the hero. They finally meet. They finally match off. Right? We love this. This is Harry Potter and Voldemort. This is the Joker and Batman.

This is even why some of us, this last year, stayed up way later than we should have to watch Mike Tyson versus Jake Paul, which was horrible. It was horrible because... Didn't you just want to see someone knock someone out? You're like, "What are we talking about?" First Kings 18 is an ultimate showdown. It's between Elijah and Ahab and the false prophets. It's a showdown at sunset.

But it's a bigger battle. It's a bigger fight. It's a public fight between Yahweh, the true and living God, and idolatry. See, I tell you this again and again, but idolatry is a major theme in the Bible. That's because you and I are always only worshiping, and as the great Christian John Calvin said, our hearts are idol factories. So, the question is not if you are worshiping but what or who you are worshiping.

Here's the thing. The average American thinks they're secular, but they're not. It's kind of a badge of honor. "I'm secular." It's like, "No, actually, you're pagan." That would be the biblical word. The average American is polytheistic, and that's why they're anxious. They're worshiping gods that are in conflict. They're worshiping themselves. They're worshiping sex. They're worshiping money. They're worshiping materialism. They're worshiping consumerism.

The reason there's conflict in a lot of homes is because you have two spouses who are worshiping two different gods and their idols are fighting. But here's what Christians struggle with. We can struggle with that. We can struggle with syncretism. *Syncretism* is when we worship and we bring parts of other religions or worldviews and mingle and mix them with Christianity.

This is why some Christians have Christianity plus a form of prosperity gospel, plus some moralism, plus a little bit of self-help. So, today, I want to hopefully bring some clarity as we look at this battle, and here's the big idea: *God is a God who lovingly*

confronts. I'll show you this. I want you to see this confrontation. The confrontation starts by the calling of Elijah.

Picking up in chapter 18, verse 1: ***"After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year..."*** So, Elijah spent three years in preparation and mostly in isolation. He was in Zarephath. Before that he was at the brook of Cherith. I don't know why, but it seems in the Bible that 3 is an archetypical number. How long did the disciples have to spend with Jesus before he sent them out? Three years.

In a strange, obscure passage that we don't really know what it means, in Galatians, chapter 1, Paul goes, "Hey, when I became a Christian, I didn't immediately go and do a lot of ministry." Read this. At the end of Galatians 1, he goes, "I went to Arabia for three years." You're like, "What were you doing in Arabia for three years?" It's like the lost years of Paul's life. We have no idea. A lot of people thought, "Well, maybe he needed three years of preparation."

Anyway, here's the thing. Now Elijah is going to get the call of God again in his life to go and confront Ahab. Here's one thing I want you to understand. In your life, there's God's will and there's God's timing. Sometimes you're like, "This is God's will." Yeah, it *is* God's will, but it's not yet God's timing. Here, the will of God and the timing of God come together. Look. Here's the conflict, the fight. ***"...in the third year, saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.'"***

Now, there's a lot we're not told. I always say that reading the Bible or reading one of Paul's epistles is like listening to one part of a conversation of someone on the phone. You don't know everything that's going on. You can't hear everything. We don't know if God said any more to him than this. We don't even know exactly if Elijah said anything in response. He just goes and obeys.

But here's the question I want to ask you: Do you think Elijah was afraid to face Ahab? I would say most likely yes. Like, "Okay. Go and face the most powerful man in the world, who wants to kill you, by the way." So, here's the thing. If you're going to be the kind of person God is going to use, you're going to have to confront your fears.

Part of what we're doing in this series is we're looking at the life of Elijah, and based on what James says, you and Elijah have the same nature, so you should live your life, in part, how Elijah lived *his* life. Some of you need to have a courageous conversation with a person. It's that practical. Don't lose all this in the big story today.

We're going to see this massive confrontation and fire fall from heaven, and that's all exciting, but some of you need to hear this: you need to have a courageous conversation you've not been having. You do enough marriage counseling, and you realize, "This couple hasn't talked about anything important in a decade." Men, it's

Father's Day. Happy Father's Day. Have the conversation. Some of you have to have a conversation with your teenage daughter before it's too late.

Here's how you know if you have to have a conversation with somebody: Are you having imaginary conversations with them in your mind? Gotcha. We all do that. And in those conversations they bow down. "Oh, wise one." Right? Here's another thing: Are you resentful? If you resent somebody, it's usually because you have something to say to them that you have not said. It's so simple, but this all starts with Elijah being willing to have a courageous conversation with somebody he needs to talk to.

Okay. We'll see what happens here. Verse 2: **"So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab."** Immediate obedience. **"Now the famine..."** Now, famine is bad enough. You hear the word *famine*, and you're like, "I don't ever want to experience famine." Then it says, **"Now the famine was severe in Samaria."** Guess where Ahab's headquarters was. Samaria.

It gets more interesting, because we're introduced to another guy. **"And Ahab called Obadiah..."** Who's Obadiah? This is not the same Obadiah who wrote the book of Obadiah. I guess *Obadiah* was a popular kid's name at some point in human history, because there are 13 "Obadiahs" in the Bible. There are a lot of Obadiahs. This guy shows up. He's going to be in the scene for just a few verses and disappear, but he plays an important part in the story.

So, Ahab and Obadiah. When I read that, you go, "Obadiah must be a bad guy because he's hanging out with Ahab. Ahab is a bad guy, so Obadiah must be a bad guy." It says, **"...who was over the household."** So then you're like, "Oh, he definitely had to be a bad guy, because who could work in a government like *that*?" He was like the COO and the chief of staff, so you think he's bad.

But then it says, **"(Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly...)"** Okay. This is a teaching in Scripture: God always has a remnant. God always has godly people in important places for his purposes. Oftentimes, people read the story, and they go, "Could somebody godly work in that government?" Yes, if they feared the Lord.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? It means I believe sin has consequences. It means though sin can be forgiven, sin is never safe. The only way you can make it in an ungodly government like that is to genuinely fear the Lord. Here's another way to think about fearing the Lord. Fearing the Lord says, "I will one day stand before God, and basically, every day I stand before God."

If you think, "One day I'm going to have to give an account for everything done in the body whether good or bad..." If you really meditate on that for an hour, that'll put the fear of God in you. Then you realize, "Wait a second. Every day of my life I stand

before the true and living God, and one day we're going to have a face-to-face meeting."

It says he fears the Lord. Then look at what it says. We're told about something he did. ***"(...and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.)"*** He used his position in, what we would say, the secular world for God's purposes.

Guys, here we're trying to be a church for Monday. We've even come up with phrases like, "Wherever you live, learn, work, and play." We want what we do *here* on Sunday to affect you on Monday, because here's the truth: there are very few Elijahs; there are many Obadiah's.

Elijah is somebody who is in full-time vocational ministry. Obadiah is somebody who's in full-time marketplace ministry. Here's what I mean. I looked this up. In America, what percentage of American Christians go into full-time vocational ministry? Answer: .02 percent or 1 in 500. That's not a lot. Now, how many people are in the marketplace and can use their...?

Basically, he's able to use... We don't know how he did it. We don't have the whole story. He was able to use maybe his knowledge of what Jezebel was doing. He was maybe able to get food and water from the king's court. Maybe he had plans that no one else had so he knew where the caves were.

We've seen in human history great godly men and women be used for God's purposes in their unique position. William Wilberforce with the abolition of slavery when he was part of British Parliament. On a real practical note, Truett Cathy and all he has done for Chick-fil-A, putting forward kingdom values.

Every time Chick-fil-A is closed on Sunday, don't you have the same thought? "I'm really hungry. Why is it closed on Sunday?" But after you have that thought and you repent, then you're like, "Kingdom purposes." He has used it to disciple and raise up a generation of leaders. He has used it to be unbelievably generous to a ton of kingdom nonprofit purposes all over the world.

I hear stories every once in a while of lawyers who are godly lawyers and are like, "I'd better get in the court system, and I'd better figure out the best arguments for free speech and religious liberty." Well, thank God for them. Honestly, in our church, a lot of times we hear stories... This happens all the time. "I was in the hospital..."

You know what it's like. If you're not a doctor and you go to the hospital, you're like, "Where am I? What floor am I on? How long am I here? How does healthcare work?" What we hear all the time is someone from Two Cities who's a doctor comes up there

and says, "How can I help you? Who can I introduce you to? How can I pray for you?" God has all of you in specific places for his gospel purposes.

Let me show you this. It says in verse 5, **"And Ahab said to Obadiah, 'Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals.'"** This looks like the first good thing Ahab is doing. Nothing good has been said about him until right now. But there's still something wrong. You may want to ask not just what the Bible says but what it does *not* say.

Here's the one thing Ahab is not doing. He's not looking to the Lord. He's looking for grass to feed animals to protect the people, but he's not looking for the grace of God. Here's the whole thing. It has been three years, and Ahab still won't repent. He's trying to fix his problems another way. God is like, "If you repent, it'll rain again." He's like, "I don't want to repent." "If you stop worshipping idols, it'll rain again." "I don't want to stop worshipping idols."

How many times in our lives, if we're honest, we would like to do anything to fix our problems except repent? This is the obsession with the pill. I'm not talking about the birth control pill; I'm talking about *any* pill. And we're not anti-medication. But how many people... It's like, "Do you want to change your lifestyle or do you want a pill?" "I'll take a pill." Here's what the Bible teaches us: there are no human solutions to our deepest spiritual problems.

So, Ahab is out, and he's trying to fix things apart from repentance. Look at what happens next. Verse 6: **"So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself..."** You know it's bad when the king is out looking for grass. **"...and Obadiah went in another direction by himself."**

Here's the first interaction...Obadiah and Elijah. **"And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him."** Here's what you see throughout the whole Bible: the providence of God in bringing people together. Here's what the providence of God means: God is in the details.

If you think about it, it hurts your head, but somehow, God is orchestrating every little detail in your life for his glory and your good, and he's bringing people together. And you go, "What's going to happen when, finally, Elijah meets Obadiah or, even more so, when Obadiah sees Elijah?" Remember, Elijah has been in hiding.

"And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, 'Is it you, my lord Elijah?'" Now, I want you to pay attention to this, because Ahab is going to meet Elijah in just a few minutes and act completely differently. Here's what you need to know: how you respond to godly authority in your life tells us what you believe about

God. How you treat your parents, kids, is how you treat God. If you lie to your parents, you lie to God.

At the beginning of Paul's letters, it's like, "Christ is King. Christ is Lord." At the end of the letters, it's like, "Obey your parents, submit to the government, and be a good employee." You're like, "What does this have to do with anything?" It has everything to do with it, because you begin to see authority rightly ordered.

So, he says, "There you are, Elijah." ***"And he answered him, 'It is I.'" "You're right, it's me. I've lost a little weight during this famine, but it's me." "Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" And he said, 'How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me?'"***

Here's the thing, guys. Like a lot of you, Obadiah wants to do the right thing, but he's afraid. How many of you know the right thing to do...? You're halfway there. You know the right thing to do, but you're afraid of what's going to happen if you do it. Here's what it says. ***"As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you."*** So now he gets some new information. While Elijah was in hiding, Ahab has been looking for him for three years in different nations.

"And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you." Basically, if they said, "He's not here," he'd go, "Do you swear to God he's not here? And will you take an oath that if you find him, you'll tell me, or if you find him, you'll kill him?" This is how much Ahab is after Elijah.

Verse 11: ***"And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me..."*** Basically, Obadiah is like, "I want to go to heaven, just not today, if that's all right with you."

Here's what we do. We only think of the downside of obeying God. We become a false prophet. It's like, "Really? That's all going to happen? I'm going to leave, and God is going to let you get killed over all this?" Here's what can change in your life if you start asking the question, "What happens if I *don't* do this?" Like, "What would happen if I was public about my faith at work?" What happens if you *don't*? Who are all of the people we wouldn't reach? What are all of the stories we won't tell? What are all of the baptisms we won't see?

He starts to think only about the downside. In fact, he says this. He's like, "One more thing I want you to know about me." He says, ***"...although I your servant have feared***

the LORD from my youth." Now, that's great. We have a kids' ministry and a student ministry here because we want kids to fear the Lord from their youth.

Another thing I've learned in 20 years of doing premarital counseling is that whenever you do premarital counseling, part of what you deal with is a bunch of people who regret a bunch of decisions they made in their youth. The Bible says to give your youth and your strength to the Lord. Basically, Obadiah is like, "I was homeschooled. Don't let me die."

Look at what he says. ***"Has it not been told my lord what I did..."*** Look at this. It's okay to tell other people what God has done through you. That's called a *testimony*. ***"...when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men..."*** We heard about this earlier, but now *he* tells the story. ***"...of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water?"***

One of the things Obadiah has that I would love for each of us to have is he has a track record of obeying God, which is going to give him the strength to obey God in a very difficult situation here. Here's the thing. Most of us don't have stories in our lives. We are a story-less generation. You talk to our grandparents and our great-grandparents. Because they fought in wars and built businesses, and for other reasons, they have a ton of stories.

I'm convinced the reason young people travel so much is it is literally the only stories they have to tell. "Let's use up all of our vacation and save up all of our money and take as many pictures as we want so we can tell everybody the stories of our traveling trips." We're not against taking vacations, but you get what I'm saying.

So, he says, "I have this track record of following you." Verse 14: ***"And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here''; and he will kill me.' And Elijah said, 'As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.'"*** This is the last verse where Obadiah is mentioned. ***"So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah."***

In verse 17, we move from the interaction with Obadiah, which was a cordial, helpful one, to the interaction between Ahab and Elijah. ***"When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Is it you, you troubler of Israel?'"*** Here's what you need to know. Ahab represents the world; Elijah represents the Christian or the church. What the world loves to do is nickname and demean Christians.

They may call them the *God squad* or *holy rollers* or *Bible thumpers*. I remember, when I was in college, I was trying to have a ministry in the college dorm. I was a new Christian. I was trying to be public about my faith. One time... This was back when we had answering machines in our dorm. This was before the smartphone. They left me a

voice message from God. They said, "Kyle, it's God. Calm down." They nicknamed me "Rev," short for "Reverend," which I kind of took as a badge of honor.

Here's what will happen. If you step out, stand up, stand against, and stand alone...all that stuff we talked about last week...they're going to call you things, and it hurts to be called these things. You're going to be called *intolerant*. In a world of tolerance and diversity, you're going to be called *intolerant*, which is the worst thing you can be called in our culture today, just because you believe in something instead of everything.

You're going to be called *judgmental*. They used to say the number-one verse people knew was John 3:16. Now "Judge not lest you be judged" is America's favorite verse, except Jesus later says, "Judge with right judgment," but anyway... Then you're going to be called *primitive* or, worst of all, *out of step* and *uncool*. It's like, "Oh, that one hurts." I know I'm not cool. I've never been cool, but I want to be cool, and to be told, "You're not cool. You're on the wrong side of history..."

Here's what's interesting. I love that he calls him the *troubler of Israel*, because Elijah is in good company. Jesus is called by Pontius Pilate in Luke 23:5 the *man who stirs up the city*. Paul and Silas, when they go to Philippi, are called *disturbers of the city*. Paul and his disciples in Acts, chapter 17, are called *men who have turned the world upside down*.

Here's what I'm trying to say: you need to get in a little gospel trouble. I don't know what that looks like for you. You need to stir things up. You need to shake things up. You need to shake up the status quo. In fact, here's what he does. He speaks right back. We need more Elijahs today. Look at how he talks.

"And he answered, 'I have not troubled Israel...'" It's okay to defend yourself, by the way. Don't think, "I'm a good Christian. I can't defend myself." You can defend yourself. **"...but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals."**

When times get darker, you have to get more direct. What we see in this passage is God confronts people directly. And you try. Some of you are so good at this. You try to ask questions, and you try to be winsome. You try to do the whole "sandwich" thing, where you say something nice, then you say something hard, but then you say something nice again. That works for normal people in normal times, but there are certain...

We're going to see a couple of different tactics of confronting people, but the first thing is you just have to say things directly to people. Sometimes you need to pull your guy friend aside and go, "Dude, you're not being a good dad...like, at all."

Sometimes you need to pull a lady aside and say, "The way you talk about your husband is embarrassing. It's awkward. I don't even know if you know how embarrassing it is, how you sound."

Sometimes you need to pull a single guy aside and go, "Hey, listen, man. You're single because you're selfish." You need to pull other people aside and... Look. I'm talking to *all* of you and you're like, "This is intense." Imagine how it feels when you do this to one person individually.

I don't have the temperament for personal confrontation. I don't like it, but you have to do it every once in a while. You have to pull someone aside. "Listen, man. Quit complaining about being underemployed. The reason you're underemployed is because you're lazy." I'm serious, guys.

Here's the thing. Ahab has what some of *you* have. It's a perception problem. He thinks *Elijah* is the troubler when *he's* the troubler. This is what we want to do all the time. This is as old as Adam and Eve. I mean, the number of Millennials who don't like their parents... Goofy. People want to blame their parents. People want to blame their genetics. People want to blame their boss.

People want to blame climate change and the government. As big as we can go. *That's* who's wrong. We want to blame our spouse. We want to blame our kids as they get older. Here's the reason we want to do that: if you blame somebody else, *they* need to repent. You're like, "Oh, thank goodness. I can just stay the exact same, and hopefully *they'll* change, and that'll be easy."

So he has this... You're going to guess it. Ahab doesn't like this. In verse 19, Elijah goes into full Dana White mode, if you know who that is. He's the head of the UFC. He's like, "All right. In *this* corner, here's what we're going to do." ***"Now therefore send and gather all Israel..."*** It's not a great fight if we don't draw a crowd, so we need a big crowd. "Rent out Madison Square Garden" is what he's saying.

"...gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel..." That was the head of Baal worship. He's like, "All right. This'll be an away game for me and a home game for you. We'll fight this battle on your turf." He says, ***"...and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."*** That had to have been a massive dinner table.

Here's what happened, by the way. Jezebel is frustrated that she lives in Israel. I told you last week they had a political, diplomatic marriage. She was the princess of Phoenicia. She doesn't want to be in the desert with the Israelites, so she kills the prophets, and then she brings in all of these false prophets. What's interesting is he's

going to call 850 prophets, 400 of Asherah and 450 of Baal, but only the prophets of Baal come. We don't know why that is.

Here's what happens. Verse 20: ***"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...'"*** That word is going to be repeated. That is a controlling key word here. ***"...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."***

Okay. One major thing on leadership. There's so much we could talk about leadership, like, you can't be a leader if you don't know where you're going, and all that kind of stuff. One of the things that, again and again... If, as a dad, you're like, "I want to be a leader..." Okay. You have to call people to a decision. That's what leaders do.

This is what Moses does. "Are you going to choose life or are you going to choose death?" This is what Joshua does. "Choose this day whom you serve, but as for me and my family, we're going to serve the Lord." This is what Jesus does. "Are you going to build on the rock or are you going to build on the sand?"

He calls people to a decision, and he says, "Stop limping." Now, I say that, because in a minute you're going to see the false prophets... It's the same word. I'm telling you ahead of time. It says they limp around the altar. To *limp* is to move slowly. To *limp* is to shift your weight from one side to another. It's the language of being double-minded.

Some of you are miserable as Christians because you're a double-minded Christian. A double-minded Christian is the most miserable Christian, because you're not fully in the world, though you fantasize about what it would look like if you did that, but you're not fully in the church, because that would require some confession, repentance, and reorganization of your priorities and finances. You don't want to do *that*, so you straddle the fence.

Some of you are limping around Two Cities Church. You limp. You limp to Community Group. When you come, you limp to church service. He's saying the opposite of being double-minded is to be devoted to the Lord. It's to be single-minded. It's to be surrendered. This whole confrontation between the false prophets and Elijah is to wake up Israel, the church of the Old Testament. I'll show you this.

Verse 22: ***"Then Elijah said to the people, 'I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.'"*** He goes, "Guys, look. It's 450 to 1." Here's another principle: there are always going to be more false prophets than truth-tellers. You know, you go on YouTube, and you're like, "Oh, the false prophets have

more YouTube channels. Oh, they have more of a social media following. Oh, they have more podcasts." But as has been said, one with God is a majority. Here's what it says. He starts to give instructions.

"Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. 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.'" "Okay, we'll do this."

Imagine this. It hasn't rained in three years, and they're going to build two altars, one to Baal, one to Yahweh, and they hope that lightning strikes and fire falls from heaven. That's what they're hoping, and that's the beginning of rain, and it lights up their offering. Here's what it says:

"Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, 'Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.' And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon..."

When you see this, it makes you angry, but it also makes you sad. That's what idolatry does. It makes you angry, but it makes you sad. ***"...saying, 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made."*** What we're seeing here is a picture of the futility of idolatry. I want you to see at least three things.

The first thing we see about idolatry (it's super clear) is there's a lot of religious activity, but there's no relationship. There's no power. I've seen this everywhere I go. Hopefully one day it'll get safe and I'll take a bunch of you to Israel with me. When I went to Israel... Most people have the same experience in Israel. Whenever you get to Munich, or whatever flight you're on, and you finally get on the flight with all of the Jewish people (sometimes that's right out of JFK)... Everyone is like, "Oh, wow. This is amazing."

You'll see people stand up on the flight and go pray on the flight. You're like, "Honey, don't look, but he's praying." Then you get into downtown Jerusalem, and you see all of the rabbis. This is my experience. For the first day or two, you're like, "This is unbelievable. I can't believe all of these Jewish people here." By about the third day, I'm like, "I am sick of the religious nature of everything."

You go to the Wailing Wall, and it's just religion, no power. It's everybody in their religious garb with their religious Torahs, doing their religious bows, saying their

formal prayers, sticking... That's what they do at the Wailing Wall. They stick prayers into the wall. It's like, "Jesus is the Messiah, guys. I want you to be set free." This is what the apostle Paul so longed for.

I saw it when I went to India. People take their shoes off, and they fast all day, and they cry. I saw it in the Catholic church, where it's just a bunch of First Holy Communion and confirmation and a bunch of religion and ritual and routine and no relationship. I see it even with people in our church. People in our church are religiously lost. They're doing a bunch of religious activity, but there's no relationship with God.

So, that's the first thing. The second thing, though... I want you to see this. This is how you have to confront people. If you're new to Two Cities and new to the Bible, welcome. Look at *this* verse. **"And at noon Elijah mocked them..."** Is it biblical to mock people? Sometimes. It's like mustard. It must be used sparingly. **"...saying, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god.'"**

By the way, this is why this is every middle school boy's favorite story. It has blood, it has gore, and it has *this*. Here's what he says. **"Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself..."** Literally, "He's on the toilet." He's like, "Maybe he's like your dad and he's in the bathroom too long." **"...or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."**

Listen. Sometimes (and you need to use it sparingly) you have to make fun of people for them to hopefully wake up. Every once in a while, someone is like... It doesn't happen that often because of the culture of our church, but every once in a while, someone is like, "You know what, Kyle? I don't know if it's really appropriate for you to be joking on stage." I'm like, "I'm just being biblical."

Sometimes, if I pick on you or make fun of you... You know, my joke about "We know you don't discipline your kids," when I say, "'Oh, we don't discipline Timmy.' We know you don't discipline Timmy." I say that because... And I'm not a comedian, but what comedians do... Really, pastors, politicians, and comedians are the only people who stand on a stage for a living.

The reason people love comedians is they show them the world through humor. You never saw it until he said it, and you laughed at it because it was true. Sometimes the way to free people up from their religion is, for the first time, to laugh at themselves, because a religious person hasn't laughed at themselves in so long, and part of the problem is how seriously they take themselves.

But it gets sad. I want to show you this. So, the first thing they do is it's a bunch of religious activity, but then it gets bad, because that's not working. Verse 28: **"And**

they cried aloud and cut themselves..." Self-harm. "...after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them."

I don't know exactly what's going on right now with self-harm in our nation. I'm 40. When I grew up... I went to public high school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I had never heard of anybody harming themselves. I mean, we occasionally had a suicide, but I'm saying this cutting, this burning, this hitting that supposedly 10 percent of high schoolers, 25 percent of teenage girls, tried once...

There are many reasons. Sometimes it's "I want to just feel. It may be the only thing I'll feel. I feel so dull. Life feels so gray. I just want to feel." Other times it's "I've done bad things." It's the Roman Catholicism of the medieval period with self-flagellation, modernized. The gospel speaks to self-harm. It says, "Jesus Christ bled for you; you don't need to bleed. Jesus Christ was punished for your sins; you don't need to punish yourself for your sins."

What else is interesting... Modern people, with their chronological snobbery... You know, "Look at these people back then, cutting themselves and worshiping idols." Listen. Remember what I told you the idols of Baal and Asherah were? The idols of fertility and sex. This is a story about a group of people worshiping sex that leads to self-mutilation. Welcome to 2025.

We've been worshiping sex, as Americans, since about 1960, and it has hit a fever pitch in the last five years, where the worship of sex, like in this story, has led to bodily mutilation. They "Orwellianly" call it *gender reassignment* or *gender affirmation surgery*. Guys, the Bible is not what happened; the Bible is what still happens.

So, it's a bunch of religious activity and no power. That's most Americans. Then it's self-harm, but then they do one other thing. This is an interesting word. Let me show you this. Verse 29: ***"And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention."*** Because Baal doesn't exist.

The third thing is it says, "They raved on." It's a hard word to translate from the Hebrew, but basically, it means they acted crazy. So, if you ever want to know where your idols are, you need to ask this question: "Where am I acting crazy?" I don't know how much... Maybe just a small amount. I have to imagine at least some of the mental illness in our nation has to do with idolatry.

If all of a sudden your son is acting a little crazy or your daughter is acting a little crazy or your husband is acting a little crazy, usually there's an idol somewhere.

We've seen this before. All of a sudden, the daughter starts dating this guy, and you're like, "You're acting insane." It's an idol. They get a job... I mean, people act crazy.

Well, how the false prophets act is supposed to be in contrast to now how Elijah acts. Let me show you this. Verse 30: ***"Then Elijah said to all the people, 'Come near to me.'"*** He's like, "I want you to see this. Gather up." ***"And all the people came near to him."*** Here it is. This is the first thing he has to do. ***"And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down."***

Why are we told that? We don't know why it has been thrown down. We don't know if this is intentional or by neglect. Part of what some of you need to do is rebuild the altars in your life that have been torn down. The altar of a devotional life. It's like, "Let me rebuild this altar." Some of you need to build something; others of you need to rebuild something. He begins to rebuild this altar.

It says, ***"Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob..."*** This is all symbolic. He's basically saying, "Guys, remember who you are and whose you are." ***"...to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, 'Israel shall be your name,' and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench..."*** So, he gets a shovel out, and everyone is like, "What's he building a trench for?"

"...about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, 'Fill four jars with water...'" Which, by the way, would have been unbelievably valuable. ***"...and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.' And he said, 'Do it a second time.' And they did it a second time. And he said, 'Do it a third time.' And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water."***

God loves it when the odds are against him. So he's like, "All right. It's not even going to be an equal battle. Put four massive jars of water... Make sure the wood is wet so that it's clear that the only way this could happen is if God shows up in power." Some of you right now may be somewhere where you feel like, "Look. The deck is stacked against me."

I've talked to couples before. You know, we've tried to get them some help in marriage, and they go, "We have worn out marriage counselors." It's like, "Yikes." "Oh, yeah. We've gone to, like, six different ones. They've basically been like, 'We can't help you.'" Some of you might feel that with a health diagnosis. Some of you might feel that with a prodigal son.

Some of you might feel that with a sin struggle. You're like, "You've been struggling with the same thing for 10 years." I want to show you how the power of God shows up. God loves it when the deck is stacked against him, and God loves to show up and show off. So, let me show you this. This is why it's so public.

"And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.'"

I want us to learn something that I think is really practical, but I think Elijah prays a lot differently than you and I tend to pray. This is what Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher who I often quote, said. He said we need to learn to talk to God in our prayers like a lawyer. He said what you do when you pray to God is you make your case before him for his glory.

It's one thing to say, "God, please save people at Wake Forest University," and it's another thing to say, "God, you know what? You look really small at Wake Forest. The average student at Wake Forest couldn't care less about you. Many don't even think you exist. They think you're irrelevant. They're more excited about sports than you. God, show up!" That's a different type of prayer. If you pray like *that* around some people, they go, "Who are you?"

You start praying for your prodigal. "God, our prodigal is making you look so bad. We raised him in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and he's making worldliness look like it's actually good. God, would you show up and show off in his life?" That's some scary praying. That's some God-centered, God-saturated prayer. Then, the second part is the warm part that we love. "God, turn their hearts back. God, show up and show off so that people's hearts are turned back to you." And that's what happens. Here's what it says. You knew this was going to happen, but here it is.

"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.'"

When God shows up in powerful ways, it creates wonder and worship in people's hearts, and that's what we've been praying. "God, would you show up and show off? Yes, in the Sunday service but, Lord, in our homes, in our Community Groups, in our workplaces."

Listen, guys. I wish we could just end here. We have one more verse we have to talk about, and then we'll come back next week and pick up at the end of chapter 18 and go into chapter 19. If you just read this, you go, "Oh..." It makes you kind of feel like the end of a Disney movie or something like that. You know, the old Disney movies, not the new ones.

Verse 40: ***"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."*** Let's pray. I'm just kidding.

Many times, in the Old Testament, God will give us pictures of the final judgment. As much as we love the one side of the story... The one side of the story is "God is worshiped, and the people of God are reminded." There's another side of the story that we can never forget, which is "The enemies of God will be judged."

I know, in our modern sensibilities, we read a story like this, and it's repulsive to us. A lot of people, even Christians, want to go, "Oh man. Okay, I'm really glad that was the God of the Old Testament." Have you read the book of Revelation? Jesus shows up with a sword in his mouth, and he comes back riding on a white horse. One of the only songs in the book of Revelation is the people of God celebrating that God has crushed his enemies.

I don't mean this more intensely than I need to, but I want to be direct like Elijah. Some of you think God is tolerant of your sin. He's not. He's patient. That's different. We don't know when God's patience runs out. God had been patient with these prophets for three years. God had been patient with Ahab for three years. I don't know how long God is going to be patient with you. I know the Bible says he's slow to anger. I know the Bible says he's abounding in love, but God one day will judge every one of his enemies.

So then you might go, "Well, how do I not be an enemy of God? Do I have to start being a good person?" No. You have to look to the cross of Christ, because the cross of Christ is God's sacrifice in which the fire of God came down again, not as lightning but as the wrath of God on Jesus Christ, and he absorbed the wrath of God. He laid in that tomb, he got up on the third day, and now he empowers us. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in us.

So, if you'll bow your heads and close your eyes... We talked about a lot of things. I just want to give you a couple of categories to think through. For some of you, God's will and God's timing are coming together in your life right now. There's something you know you need to do, and now is the time to do it.

I felt like someone in here needs to call their dad. You weren't going to call your dad on Father's Day for some reason. You need to call him. You can have healing on Father's Day. Some of you need to repair some things in your life. You're like, "I want fire to fall, but there are a couple of things I have to rebuild in my life. There are a couple of things I have to get rid of. There are a couple of things I have to repent of."

Some of you need to just repurpose. You're going to work tomorrow. Could you be an Obadiah? Could you say, "God, open my eyes to see how my position could serve your purposes"? Some of you just need to say, "Lord, there are a couple areas of my life where I want to see you show up and show off, Lord."

Lord, would you do that? Would we be a church full of people who take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship; therefore, would we have stories to tell, like Obadiah. Lord, we ask all this in the same way Elijah did. We ask it for your glory and for our good, amen.