

The Prophet Elijah
1 Kings 18:19-29
Confrontations on Carmel

This is my message written prior to being preached. Please excuse the bullet point format and any grammatical mistakes. This is meant to be spoken.

¹⁹ Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

²⁰ So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

²¹ And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping 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. 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. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. ²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "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." ²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. 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. (1 Kings 18:19-29)

Introduction

- Last week we left Elijah confronting **King Ahab**.
- Ahab had **provoked the LIVING LORD** by leading Israel to worship lifeless false gods,
- **the Baals and Asherah**.
- And because of that, 3 ½ years earlier God **called Elijah** to bring His Judgment (drought and famine) upon Ahab and his Kingdom.
- So, **for the last 3 ½ years** Israel had experienced **great suffering**, but then...

¹ ...the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." (1 Kings 18:1)

- God, in his grace and mercy **would again send rain upon the earth**.
- But before the rain came, Elijah needed to accomplish two things.
- **First, he would show himself to King Ahab**.
- And again, **this is where we left Elijah last week**.

- His confrontation with Ahab is recorded in **1 Kings 18:17-18...**

17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" 18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. (1 Kings 18:17-18)

- God's judgment was not caused by Elijah's but Ahab's.
- Ahab had abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.
- And therefore, **Ahab was responsible for bringing trouble upon Israel.**
- So, having rebuked Ahab,
- Elijah turns to **the second task he must accomplish before** the rain will come, he tells Ahab...

19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." (1 Kings 18:19)

- **Elijah** next mission is to publicly confront **Prophets of Baal.**
- And to do that he needs two things... **the Public (Israel) and the Prophets.**
- Notice that **these prophets** were supported by **Queen Jezebel** herself.
- While the **famine was severe in the land** and the people were suffering,
- The prophets of Baal and Asherah are being supported by Jezebel's government relief program.
- But not for long, Elijah has a different program in mind.
- And apparently his rebuke of Ahab and his authority as a prophet of God moved Ahab to action.
- He went from **calling Elijah the troubler of Israel** to obeying his command, **verse 20...**

20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18:20)

- The people of Israel and the prophets are **gathered at Mount Carmel.**
- So, the stage is set for the most famous spiritual & theological confrontation recorded in Scripture.
- It will pit Elijah, who serves the TRUE GOD,
- against the prophets of Baal who SERVE A FALSE GOD.
- **But before Elijah confronts the Prophets of Baal, He first...**

1. Elijah Confronts the People of Israel

- The people need to understand who **Baal truly is not**, and **who the LORD God is.**
- They need to see the difference between the power of the living God
- **and the impotence of false gods.**
- And by God's grace, Elijah would show them, but first he confronts them directly, **Verse 21...**

21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping 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. (1 Kings 18:21)

- Elijah accuses Israel of an **inability to commit to either the LORD GOD or Baal**.
- And notice, the people remain silent, **they say nothing, which speaks volumes**.
- They're God's chosen people, the children of Israel, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- But they were silent because didn't want to **commit to a specific God**.
- Apparently, **they didn't know which god they trusted or wanted**.
- On the one hand, there was Baal, who through Ahab and Jezebel had taken the country by storm.
- Following the **Baals was comfortable**, it was endorsed by the government.
- It was the current cultural thing to do.
- How easy it is to give in to **the pressure of King or culture** and just go along to get along.
- **Which seems to be what most of the people were doing**.
- **But on the other hand**, they were the children of Israel.
- **They** had been raised in the traditions of God's Law.
- and so, they couldn't quite bring themselves to **totally deny the existence** of the LORD God of Israel.
- To put it another way, the people **wanted to hedge their bets**.
- They wanted to have their **Baal and their Yahweh, too**.
- A few weeks ago, I introduced **the New Monroe Doctrine**,
- Which is named for the actress **Marilyn Monroe**, who endorsed the idea that **people should believe everything a little bit**.
- And it seems **that Israel** was **following the Monroe Doctrine** even before **Marilyn herself**.
- They liked to believe in everything **a little bit**.
- They liked to believe in the **Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . a little bit**.
- They liked to believe in **Baal . . . a little bit**.
- They liked to believe in **Asherah . . . a little bit**.
- So, when Elijah **confronted them on Carmel**, calling them to declare their ultimate allegiance, **they had nothing to say**.
- They were just like many people in our culture.
- People who want to believe that there are many roads **to heaven or to God**.
- That you are **free to choose or not choose** whatever religion or religions **feel best to you**.
- In fact, you can believe whatever you want, **you can develop your own personal religion**.
- I remember back in the **early 2,000s** when **Phil Jackson** was coaching the **Lakers**.
- Being known as a Zen Buddhist, he was asked about his **religious beliefs**.
- And he said something like this.
- I like to take different ideas from different religions,
- I like the meditation and freedom that I find in **Buddhism**,
- but I like the **unconditional love I find in Christianity**.
- I later read that he also **incorporates Lakota (Native American) spiritual concepts** into his life.

- Jackson is **just one of many in our culture who follow the modern Monroe Doctrine**.
- In our world, this kind of religious pluralism and philosophical (believing a little bit of everything) seems very open-minded, accepting, tolerant, **even wise**.
- **But to Elijah it was lame**. He accused the people of...

limping between two different opinions

- That word limping refers to someone who is lame, who can't walk right.
- The Israelites were limping along, stumbling from **side to side**, through life.
- It was as if they had a **sandal on one foot and a ski boot** on the other.
- They had one foot **on the path of obedience to God**
- and **one foot down in the ditch of bondage** to Baal.
- So, Elijah wanted to know just one thing: **how long will you waver between two opinions?**
- **The people of Israel had divided hearts, divided loyalties**.
- They wanted to worship the **Lord God of Israel** and still enjoy a **little Baal worship** on the side.
- And unfortunately, **Christians sometimes lead the same kind of lives**.
- Rather than letting God be everything for us, **we waver**,
- We go to church; we sometimes even pray or read our Bibles.
- But we make space for a little **lust**, a little **self-indulgence**, a little **materialism**, a little **pride**,
- and so, we **limp along through life, not walking steadily for Christ**.
- But **God** through his word demands that we **make up our minds**.
- Through Elijah, he demanded it from Israel.
- And He made the same demand through Moses.
- After Moses came down from the mountain and saw the people of God worshiping a golden calf, he said,

²⁶ ...“Who is on the LORD’S side? Come to me.” (Exodus 32:26)

- Later, he made the same demand through **Joshua**, who said to the children of Israel,

¹⁵ ...choose this day whom you will serve... (Joshua 24:15)

- The same demand comes to **every man, woman, and child in every generation**:
- **How long will you waver between two opinions?**
- If the Lord is God, then follow him.
- We cannot hedge our bets. We cannot straddle the fence.
- **The God of Elijah, the God of the Bible, the One True Living LORD is exclusive**.
- **He allows no others**.
- He will not share his glory with any other god.
- **To believe in God is to follow him with our whole lives**.

- But we cannot do this if we're still on the fence, **trying to decide if God is God or not.**
- If we're still on the fence, **then we're not following God,**
- and may not even know him in a saving way at all.
- As Jesus said of Himself, the Divine Son of God...

30 Whoever is not with me is against me... (Matthew 12:30)

- The Bible teaches that we are separated from God by our sin,
- and that **the only way** we can be delivered from eternal judgment is **to trust in Jesus Christ** alone,
- believing that his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave is the only thing that can deliver us from our sins.
- **That as Jesus said...**

6 ..."I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

- **There is only one way, God's way, with God it is all or nothing.**
- He wants our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. **Again, Jesus said...**

24 "No one can serve two masters... (Matthew 6:24)

- The Puritans used to put it this way: **"You cannot serve God by halves."**
- So, we need to ask ourselves, **have I given my whole self to God,**
- or am I still dragging around **the ski boot of some other god of this world?**
- If the Lord is God, then we are called to follow him with both feet, **making him first in worship,**
- first in work, first in leisure, first in every area of our lives.
- And here is one simple way to test whether we are limping between two opinions.
- **The true believer is not silent.**
- When the waverer is asked about spiritual things,
- Like the Israelites on Carmel, he or she is not quite sure what to say.
- But when a Christian is asked about spiritual things, **about who they trust in.**
- **he or she is able to give a bold testimony of faith in Jesus Christ.**
- I know that polite American society we are not supposed to talk about Religion or Politics.
- And I'm certainly think avoiding politics is often wise.
- But not so with religion (our relationship with God),
- when a **spiritual topic comes up in a conversation** or when a someone asks an important question about life,
- **we should be ready to give a clear answer that testifies to the grace and truth of God.**
- An answer that points people to their only hope for salvation in Jesus Christ.

- As Peter instructs...

15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:15)

- As Christians, we must stop **limping between two opinions**.
- We must give ourselves; we must live our lives fully dedicated to the LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- And as his representatives in this world, we must not remain silent.
- We must allow him to speak through us, proclaiming the gospel to a lost world.
- Okay so we have looked at **Elijah's confrontation with the people of Israel**.
- He has called them **to stop wavering and make up their minds**.
- And then to help them do that...

2. Elijah Confronts the Prophets of Baal

- With wavering limping Isreal looking on, in an effort to help them make the right choice.
- Elijah employs a **two-stage strategy**.
- **First**, he'll show the utter powerlessness of the false god Baal.
- Making it clear that **choosing to follow Baal is foolishness**.
- **This is what we will look at today**.
- And then he'll show them the **great power and glory of the true living God of Isreal**.
- Making it clear that choosing to follow **the LORD God is the wise and right thing to do**.
- **This is what we will look at next week**.
- Now as Elijah faces the prophets of Baal, he is **badly outnumbered**...
- **Verse 22...**

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. (1 Kings 18:22)

- Two things to note here.
- **First**, we know from last week that even though Jezebel had killed many of the Lord's prophets,
- **But with Obadiah's help, at least 100 had survived**.
- But remember, **to survive they had to go into hiding**.
- So, when Elijah says **he is the only prophet left**, he probably means he is the only prophet of the LORD left who is willing to take a public stand against the prophets of Baal.
- Then one more thing, **if you remember back in verse 19**,
- Ahab calls the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah.
- But then in the rest of the passage only the prophets of Baal are mentioned.
- So, either the prophets of Asherah didn't show up, or Elijah wanted to focus specifically on Baal.
- In either case, 450 prophets were enough to make his point.
- If there were **bookmakers on Mount Carmel**, they would get 450-to-1 odds against Elijah.
- Nevertheless, Elijah gives his **opponents every advantage**.

- You could say he offers them **home-bull advantage**:
- Elijah, who is in complete control of this contest says...

²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.” (1 Kings 18:23-24)

- **This was good sportsmanship.**
- Just in case one bull was preferable for sacrificing, **Elijah let his opponents choose first.**
- And at this point the Israelites find their voice and endorse Elijah’s challenge.
- Apparently, they were up for a good fight.
- **Elijah then let the prophets of Baal go first:**

²⁵ 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.” (1 Kings 18:25)

- Remember, this was a sudden-death competition.
- Whoever succeeded in bringing down fire first would win the contest immediately.
- Elijah had said,

The God who answers by fire, he is God

- So, if Baal had answered with fire, he would have been declared God
- and Elijah wouldn’t have had the chance to try his bull.
- Furthermore, this entire contest played to Baal’s supposed strengths.
- He was a god of nature.
- He was not only the rain god but the god of the sun,
- so, warmth and heat were his areas of special expertise.
- Baal was also the god of the storm, so fire was right up his alley.
- Surely the god of thunder could manage at least one lightning bolt to ignite his bull!
- Also, some believe that Mount Carmel was a site of Baal worship, so they truly did have home court advantage.
- So, Elijah does everything he can to give the prophets of Baal a fighting chance.
- But he knows they have no chance whatsoever.
- From the beginning Elijah has no doubts about what the outcome of this contest will be.
- **As he confronts the prophets of this false god.**
- **He has absolute confidence in His God.**
- **And this** is a good example for us.

- We Christians tend to be very defensive.
- We often keep to ourselves, thus avoiding any kind of confrontation with the world.
- We have our own **schools, magazines, radio, books, TV programs, and even movies.**
- We tend to isolate ourselves **in our own little communities.**
- We tend to retreat from the world because **we feel threatened by a culture that is hostile to biblical faith,** and when we do go out into the world, **we keep it pretty quiet.**
- By contrast, **Elijah went up on the mountain and confronted his culture.**
- He was not **afraid of the number of those who opposed him,**
- or intimidated **by the strength of their arguments.**
- Elijah went out in broad daylight and let his opponents make the strongest possible case for their religious beliefs.
- He was **not afraid to do this because** he knew that ultimately, **they would fail.**
- He knew **that Baal was nothing, a big ZERO,**
- **and that even if Baal had 450 prophets,** Elijah could do the Math, **450 times 0 is 0.**
- From the beginning, Elijah knew that it was no contest,
- that any attempt to **show Baal's power,** would actually end up destroying **Baal's credibility.**
- And of course, that is precisely what happened.
- Despite the fact that Baal's prophets made every effort to reach him, **Baal never answered:**
- **Verse 26...**

26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!"

- For **hours Baal's prophets** are calling out to him... Please, O Please Baal answer us!!
- Send your fire!

But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. (1 Kings 18:26)

- **Baal was a total failure.**
- All the effort of the prophets resulted in dead silence.
- And like **the people of Israel who were limping (stumbling) between two different opinions.**
- These prophets are just exhausted and therefore they could no longer walk properly,
- **They're just stumbling around the altar.**
- **And maybe you might be feeling sorry for these guys.**
- But remember **they're at the forefront of leading God's people away from the one true God,**
- The God who created **them and chose them** and knows them and loves them.
- But these prophets are leading them into the worship of a totally false and morally corrupt god, Baal.
- **Elijah gets just how evil and destructive these guys are.**
- So, once **he's given them time to show the power of their god Baal,** with no effect.

- Elijah then **drives his point home** with some pretty good **sarcasm, verse 27...**

27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "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." (1 Kings 18:27)

- Maybe you need to cry out a little louder.
- Perhaps Baal, who is a god right, **was just musing, thinking deep thoughts.**
- Or, perhaps he's **relieving himself,**
- Maybe he's thinking deep thoughts while he's reliving himself in the men's room.
- Or maybe **he's on a journey,** even gods **deserve a vacation.**
- Or taking a nap, **even gods need a little rest now and then.**
- This mockery was all part of Elijah's strategy to show the **utter powerlessness and non-existence of Baal.**
- The prophet was cutting Baal down to size, **diminishing his stature,** reducing him to human terms.
- Elijah gave Baal no respect, because he refused to grant that he was really a god at all.
- Something similar happens at the end of The Wizard of Oz.
- When Dorothy and her friends reach the Emerald City,
- they hear the voice of **THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE OZ.**
- **At first, they are afraid of him,** but then Dorothy's little dog Toto pulls back the curtain,
- and the great wizard is revealed to **be a little old man with a megaphone.**
- The wizard is exposed as a huckster and a cheat.
- And by confronting the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel,
- Elijah pulled back the curtain, he exposed Baal as a not only a fraud and a huckster.
- But as **NOTHING** at all.
- Now Elijah's mockery may **not seem very sportsmanlike,**
- It may not be **gentle or respectful** as Peter suggested.
- But the prophets of this false God were not asking honest questions about the **LIVING GOD.**
- They were leading people to reject Him for Baal.
- Therefore, it was right and good for **Elijah to mock them and their NON-GOD.**
- Elijah's mockery was **holy sarcasm.**
- The prophet's **overriding motivation** was to demonstrate **the glory of God,**
- and in order to do this, **he needed to show that God has no rivals.**
- Elijah had **to first show Baal as nothing,** before **he could show God as everything.**
- He had to show that **no other god can stand in the ring with the God of Israel.**
- That in fact, there is no God but His God, Yahweh the **LIVING LORD of ISRAEL.**

- In his commentary on this passage, **Theologian John Woodhouse** writes...

Elijah would not fit in well in the inclusive society that demands respect for all religions. We need to think this through with care, but there is a place for mocking the ridiculous. All too often religion really is ridiculous when you know the God who is really there. (John Woodhouse)

- He is saying, and I would agree, we need to be careful about mocking other religions.
- But at the same time we need to know and communicate that...
- Compared to the Lord God Almighty, any other deity is a total joke.
- **This will become completely clear next week as God demonstrates his great power.**
- But we can even now begin to consider the absolute contrast between **Baal and the God of Elijah.**
- In comparison to busy, sleepy Baal, the glory of the Lord God Almighty shines forth.
- Unlike Baal who may be preoccupied with something else.
- The Lord God Almighty is **always busy, always involved, always active.**
- Jesus said...

17 ...“My Father is working until now, and I am working.” (John 5:17)

- Also, God is never **lost in his thoughts**, because he knows and understands all things perfectly.
- As the **Psalmist** declares...

5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. (Psalms 147:5)

- And, he doesn't have bodily functions; for as Paul tells us..

17 ...the Lord is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17)

- And we know He never takes a vacation because he is always there for us...
- Jesus promised his disciples...

20 ...I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

- Also our God is never sleepy and never takes a nap.
- As the Psalmist wrote...

3 ...he who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalms 121:3-4)

- And so, **there's no comparison, there's no need to limp between two opinions.**
- The Lord, **he is God**, and there is no other.
- He and he alone is never absent, never distracted, never asleep.
- **Therefore, we can trust him to watch over us and care for us.**

- We can know that in **every spiritual confrontation** or difficult situation we face.
- God is always present and always at work in and through our lives.
- And so, we, like Elijah, can confront the false gods of this world and their representatives.
- Seeking to show the fallacy of following any other god but the LIVING LORD Jesus Christ.
- So, we've seen Elijah's confrontation of **the People and the Prophets**.
- We've seen his strategy of showing the public (Israel) the powerlessness of this false God Baal.
- And as we conclude, **there's one final thing I want us to see in our passage**.
- I want us to **learn somethings about prayer as we see...**

3. The Prophet's Prayers Go Unanswered

- In case it wasn't clear, prayer is central this confrontation on Carmel.
- Remember to the prophets, Elijah's said...

24 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." (1 Kings 18:24)

- What is another name for calling upon the name of your God: PRAYER.
- So, the confrontation on Carmel was all about which God was **able to answer prayer**.
- And so, what about Baal? Could he answer prayer? Not a chance!
- We already saw that **his prophets had spent hours praying** with no result, they...

26 ...called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. (1 Kings 18:26)

- Baal did not and could not answer their prayers because **he was no god at all**.
- Now these prophets didn't give up easily,
- All they received from Baal was silence, but this caused them to get desperate.
- Their prayers were not being answered,
- and worse yet, this prophet of **Yahweh**, was mocking them.
- And so, they became desperate... **Verse 28...**

28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. (1 Kings 18:28)

- Apparently, they believed Baal needed more than the blood of a bull to answer their prayer.
- They had to offer their own blood as well.
- What a terrible bloody gruesome sight this must have been. **And it was all for nought.**
- As darkness drew near a **hush fell over Carmel**, and in **verse 29 we read...**

29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation,

- An oblation is an offering or a tribute, apparently, they made one final offering to Baal,
- hoping against hope that he would answer their prayers.

but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:29)

- Again, the prophets of **Baal meet with silence.**
- **Baal did not, would not, and could not respond.**
- He didn't answer their prayers; **He didn't even pay attention.**
- **And why is this?** Because Baal was absolutely nothing.
- **And a nothing has no power to answer prayer.**
- Baal's silence on the mountain proved the absolute futility of Baal worship,
- Baal was losing the bullfight.
- His prophets could not be faulted for a lack of commitment,
- They gave it their all, they prayed and prayed, giving their very own blood.
- But prayer is not about **generating an intense religious experience.**
- It's not about **really really getting into it with all your heart and blood.**
- It's not even about **having enough faith**, these prophets of **Baal demonstrated their faith with hours of prayer and the shedding of their blood.**
- **So, what is prayer about?**
- Well, it certainly involves faith, but your faith and your prayers must be directed to the right God.
- That's all that really matters.
- You can pray with all the passion and faith you can muster,
- but if you are praying to a god like Baal (or any other false god)
- If you are praying to any god but the one true living God. **Then your prayers are pointless.**
- As the Psalmist wrote...

¹⁵ The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. ¹⁶ They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; ¹⁷ they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. (Psalms 135:15-17)

- Baal was one of the silent gods that the psalmist criticized.
- He was a god who could not speak or answer.
- **And he was and is not alone!**
- Take all the false gods of this world, **all the idols and religious impostors.**
- Whether they have **names like Baal or Asherah** or their modern equivalents.
- Or other gods, that we tend to worship in the Western World.
- Power, wealth, fame, security, beauty, entertainment, sex or Self.
- None of these false Gods can answer prayer,
- None of them can meet the deepest longings of our soul.
- They cannot bring joy or satisfaction **or most importantly of all they CANNOT SAVE.**
- We may bow down before them, we may believe they have much to offer.
- We may give them our money, time, and loyalty.
- **We may offer them our affection.**
- They may well cause **us to waver between two opinions.**

- Should I serve Jesus or should I serve my bank account or my sexual appetite.
 - But they are **not true gods** because they **cannot answer prayer**.
 - **They demand our service**, our lives but **they give nothing that lasts**.
 - This means they will disappoint **us when we need them most**.
 - When we are lonely, **they cannot hear us**.
 - When we are sick, **they cannot heal us**.
 - When we are dying, **they cannot comfort us**.
 - Worst of all, **false gods cannot forgive us**.
 - I didn't mention this before, but the fact that Elijah included the sacrifice of a bull in his contest is telling.
 - In Baal worship, the bull was a primary symbol of strength and power.
 - So, by using a bull Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal with their **own sacred imagery**.
 - But the bull had a different meaning **in the worship of Yahweh**.
 - In Mosaic law, the bull was a major sacrificial animal used for significant offerings and atonement for sin.
 - So, Elijah's use of the bulls not only challenged Baal,
 - but pointed to God's covenant with Israel **and his provision for the forgiveness of their sins**.
 - **The reason Israel sacrificed bulls was to seek forgiveness**.
 - So, understand that what the people of **Israel were witnessing related directly their own forgiveness**.
 - Not only which God could answer prayer, **but which God could answer prayers for forgiveness**.
 - Which God could **offer and give salvation**.
 - And what did they discover?
 - Baal (or any false god) cannot answer **our prayers for forgiveness**.
 - They cannot accept **atonement for sin, and thus they cannot forgive**.
 - But the true God can answer prayer.
 - **He can accept atonement for sin and forgive all our sins**.
 - He is the **God who speaks and is not silent**.
 - We will see this next week but again we don't have to wait.
 - Because the ultimate proof of God's saving power came when **Jesus Christ was raised from the dead**.
 - The accounts of **his crucifixion close by reporting that...**
- ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46)***
- Imagine what would have happened if Jesus had offered his final prayer **to Baal or to any other false god**.

- **Silence.**
- No one would have responded; **no one would have answered**; no one would have paid attention.
- No other god could have heard his final words from the cross or answered his dying prayer by accepting the sacrifice that he made for our sins.
- No other god could **have raised him from the dead for our salvation.**
- Praise God, therefore, that Jesus prayed to the **God who is God!**
- He prayed in faith to the **living God, the Lord God of Israel.**
- The God of Elijah and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ heard that prayer and answered it by raising Jesus from the dead.
- **So, today we've seen the futility of trusting in and praying to a false god.**
- And next week we'll see the **great value of trusting in and praying to the one true God.**
- So, the question is who will you pray to?
- And I don't just mean when you close your eyes and bow your head.
- I mean throughout your day, as you face the trials, difficulties and sins of this life.
- Who will you turn to and call upon for help, for deliverance, for salvation?
- Because as Elijah begun to demonstrate, there is no God but God,
- And he alone answers prayer, and he alone accomplishes our salvation.
- **So would you join me in prayer to HIM.**