

“Mountains, Valleys, & Caves: David In the Valley of Death”

By Pastor Dick Read

1 Kings 18.

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Good morning

I want to invite you to go ahead and grab your Bible . . . or go to your Bible App and find the Old Testament book of 1 Kings . . . our mountain top story this morning is found in **1 Kings 18**.

This is a wonderful journey we are on, exploring the Bible for the Mountains, the Valleys and the Caves that the people in the Scriptures found themselves.

We have a phrase we use ourselves about a place we like to be . . . the MOUNTAIN TOP. The mountains represent for us the high points in life . . . the mountaintop experiences we’ve had in life.

But we’ve also been in the valleys . . . not necessarily the worst places in life . . . but certainly among the most challenging.

And we are still going to discover later in the series that we all sometimes find ourselves in the cave.

Sometimes the cave is a place of solitude and reflection . . . sometimes, it might even be a lonely place. Sometimes in the cave, we hear from God and sometimes we hear nothing at all.

Our story finds **Elijah** high on a mountain . . . and students of the Bible would probably agree that this story in 1 Kings is one of the biggest **mountain top experiences** in the entire Bible.

Many consider Elijah to be the greatest prophet in Israel’s ancient history.

David would be considered the greatest **king** to govern God’s people.

Aaron is often thought to be Israel’s greatest **priest** . . . who represented the people to God.

And Elijah to represent God and God’s voice to the people. . . was thought to be Israel’s greatest **prophet**.

Among the prophet, the priest and the king . . . it was the prophet that was considered the most important. The prophet spoke on behalf of God to the people. . . sometimes the prophet had words of hope and promise to share with the people . . . and then sometimes the prophet shared words of warning . . . or even doom .

So for example, with the prophet Nathan delivered a message of conviction and judgment on the GREAT KING DAVID after David sinned by sleeping the Bathsheba and killing her husband in order to keep her . . .

David was brought to his knees with the message of serious conviction from the Lord through Nathan.

Well, Elijah is considered BY FAR the greatest of Israel's prophets. So much so that when Jesus came and people began recognizing Him as the promised Messiah, . . . many others thought he actually WAS the prophet Elijah returning back to them from God.

By the time of Elijah, David's Kingdom has become DIVIDED.

Israel was to the north and over a period of OVER 200 years since David's son Solomon, there would be 19 kings . . .and every one of them the Bible says were "wicked". NONE of them were found faithful by the Lord.

Judah to the south had 17 Kings . . . 8 of those followed in the ways of the Lord and 9 were considered wicked . . . they did not follow the Lord themselves nor did they lead their people in the ways of God.

Because they weren't faithful to the Lord . . . God allowed both Israel and Judah to be conquered and taken into captivity by their powerhouse neighbors.

What had happened?

Well, from the time of Moses when God's people were delivered from slavery, the Lord had instructed His people to be faithful to Him and to His instruction.

And the Lord PROVIDED His instruction through leaders . . through teachers . . . through prophets . . through heads of family . . . and heads of tribes.

The people of God were equipped with boundless instruction . . . like you and I , they were called to live their lives reflecting God's own faithfulness.

And it was in their faithfulness that God would bless them with abundance . . . and prosperity and success
(Joshua 1:8)

Knowing that EVEN God's people, could be fickle in their choosing . . . once they were settled in the PROMISE LAND, Joshua put the choice to the people . . .

. . they would have to choose.

CHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE . . . Joshua declared!

Either you choose to serve the nothing gods that you once served when we were in slavery in Egypt . . .

Or choose to serve the God we call Yahweh . . . the ONE TRUE GOD . . who has proven his goodness and faithfulness.

But you HAVE TO CHOOSE . . . one or the other . . . for Yahweh has demanded YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS before me.

As for me and my house said Joshua *we will serve the Lord!*



So . . there's our key word of this morning . . . **CHOOSE.**

And our word is going to leave us with a KEY QUESTION . . . even as we talk about this around Asbury quite a bit, the question is ever before us:

Have I CHOSEN to be a FOLLOWER OF the Lord?

And we are going to press in a bit closer:

Have I chosen yet for TODAY to follow Jesus for yet another day?

And how about with each circumstance that I face: Have I chosen in advance . . . with EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE and with EVERY BREATH . . . regardless of what that circumstance might be . . . I will follow Jesus? I will serve the Lord?



Did I mention God's people were a fickle people?

Maybe not unlike you and me . . . they kinda wanted life BOTH ways!

They wanted life their way . . . on their terms . . .

But they also sure liked the sound of God's promise of prosperity and success.

Sounds familiar doesn't it . . . maybe like US?

Hundreds of years this pattern.

And priests and kings who set this pattern for God's people to **follow**.

And prophets who **warned** the people that God would not tolerate this fickle behavior from his own people.

This week, you have been reading about the prophet Elijah . . . who represented God to the people of Israel.

The **King was Ahab** who was a particularly squirley evil king. **Ahab had no shame.**

The writer of Kings introduces Ahab by saying, **Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.**
(16:33)

And to make matters worse, Ahab had an altogether Cruella-Deville-of-a-wife name Jezebel And Jezebel committed herself to be a constant pain the Elijah's backside!!!!

Ahab and Jezebel actually **LED** God's people outside of the cities, outside of their communities and into the mountains . . . to VERY MUCH ON PURPOSE build altars and worship the various gods of nothingness . . .

. . . knowing full well that what they were doing was forbidden by **their** God --- the God of faithfulness and promise.

As if to shout back at Yahweh . . . WE DON'T BELIEVE YOU.

YOU HAVEN'T DELIVERED PROSPERITY TO US!

YOU HAVEN'T GIVEN US SUCCESS

SO, WE WILL FIND IT ON OUR OWN TERMS!

And off to the mountain top altars they went . . . with Ahab leading them.

With our text this morning, Elijah confronts Ahab and challenges him to the SHOOT OUT AT THE O.K. CORRAL.

With reverence we have in our hearts for God's Word let's stand and read together **1 Kings 18:17-19**

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.

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."

Now keep your Bible open as you are seated . . . let's pray . . .

Lord, THANK YOU for giving us your Word, which itself claims to be living and active . . . even sharper than any two-edge sword. Through your Word, Lord, and with the inspiration of your Holy Spirit. . . . speak to us, your sons and daughters. AMEN.



So, keep looking at this story . . .

Verse 20 tells us that Elijah and Ahab and the prophets of Baal and, with hyperbole, even ***all the people of Israel*** gathered on top of Mt. Carmel.

When they were all gathered, Elijah steps before them with a question - - - look at verse 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.

Remember Joshua - - - hundreds of years before:

CHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE!

And the choice was still before them.

Now notice **HOW** the people on Mount Carmel responded when Elijah asked his question and demanded some kind of response:

And the people did not answer him a word.

Remember how we might reply: **You coulda heard a pin drop.**

So, Elijah says "Let's have a shoot off . . . you go first!"

Let's set up this altar for a sacrifice and we'll see WHOSE GOD SHOWS UP.

And the altar is arranged with the wood stacked and the bulls in place. And the 450 **prophets of Baal** call on their god of nothingness . . .and that's what they get . . . NOTHING.

They cried out to Baal!

In fact, the story tells us the prophets cried out to Baal all morning long:

"Oh Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar they had made.

Hours into this, Elijah starts mocking them: Baal must be in the bathroom . . . or taking a nap . . . you better scream louder to wake him up . . . or maybe he went on vacation!

Well that DID taunt the prophets of Baal so much that they actually began cutting themselves, pouring out their OWN blood on the altar into hopes of summoning the god of nothing!

And the story teller writes, *but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.*

So **Elijah** steps up . . . move aside boys *it's time for me to show you the ONE TRUE GOD. Let me remind you who is FAITHFUL and WHO answers us when we call on Him.*

Elijah dismantled the altar to the god of nothing . . .

. . . and re-arranged it according to the order of how God instructed . . . hundreds of years before . . . that sacrifices were to be made to HIM alone.

And to taunt the prophets of Baal all-the-more, Elijah instructed his assistants to absolutely drench the entire altar and the sacrifice with water.

And then Elijah simply prayed . . . check out verse 36: “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. ³⁷ 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.”

Keep reading: 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. 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.”

Friends, this IS the Word of God for the people of God!



Sometimes it's just so hard to make a decision, isn't it?

What sport should I play?

Where school should I go to?

Should we stay together or break up?

Who am I going to marry?

Should we LIVE together before we get married?

Do I cheat even-just-a-little on my tax paperwork to eek a little bit more out of the IRS?

Really now . . . only I'll know about this . . . who is it really going to hurt?

Do I want to have THIS kind of REPUTATION or THAT kind of REPUTATION?

Even big questions like: When choosing a life vocation, am I going to just go with what will get me the most money and biggest notoriety OR am I going to intentionally seek the Lord and how He has gifted me for His purposes and plans?

In fact, what am I going to do with God anyway? I've heard so much about how God does have a purpose and plan for my life . . . Does that matter to me? Do I care what God has to say about things that are important to me?

And with this faith that I have been raised with . . . am I still "IN" or am I going to go my own way?

We seem to almost-constantly be facing questions of choice, don't we!?

And Elijah's question to the prophets of Baal become questions also laid right in front of us?

How long will you limber?

How long will you hesitate?

How long will you waiver?



You can hear it, can't you?

Silly question because I **know** you can hear it!

I'm talking about ALL THE NOISE Not just the WHITE noise

Although there so much of it, sometimes it sounds like WHITE noise

But a WHOLE LOT LOUDER!

This noise isn't so pleasant as the refreshing sound of the Oklahoma wind . . . or running water . . . or singing birds!

This is the noise of SO many voices . . . and they're all talking at the same time . . .

. . . not just talking . . . YELLING . . . all at the same time like those 450 prophets of Baal, crying out to be heard!

And it sounds like so many these voices are **ANGRY**

Many of them, even the ones in your own head, are telling of impending DOOM

And demanding that THEIR solution is the ONLY way to solve whatever crisis you're alarmed about.

And they are commanding us that THERE IS ALWAYS A CRISIS!

This noise . . . causes us ANXIETY and FEAR as it demands to be heard and for you and I to adhere to THEIR demands.

They are the voices of today's **politics**

Of pervasive **consumerism** *Here, BUY THIS so your life can be complete!*

Voices of **IDENTITY** sexual identity ethnic identity

Identity of beauty and appearance and fulfillment

And there's the voices of **performance** ... requiring you to MEASURE UP to whatever standard the voice puts before you! And we feel the pressure to MEASURE UP so that others will know I really AM SOMEBODY important.

And **so many** voices of **DOOM** Freaking out . . . what IT IS: *This is bad . . . this is really REALLY bad!*

And countering **those** are the voices of **hedonism** - life is one big party

Here.... Drink this . . . smoke this . . . take this . . . it'll ease whatever else you're feeling!
HEY . . . turn up the music!

And like the prophets of Baal on the mountaintop, they are screaming out all at once . . . vying for your attention.

No wonder noise-canceling headphones . . .and devices of all kinds are such a big deal!

And you know what? **YOU CAN CHOOSE TO TURN OFF THE NOISE!**

Yes, I know . . . easier said than done!

Especially when you've gotten so used to the noise --- like an unwelcome companion that you don't really like That companion that's even become so fowl and putrid . . . but you've gotten used to it.

And we KNOW those voices are very loud and very demanding!
But . . . you must know **You can CHOOSE TO TURN IT OFF**

And when you turn it off --- and the noise is gone

And all you hear is the beautiful silence.

And it's there . . . I invite you to speak these simple four words:
LORD SPEAK TO ME

Then . . . be very patient . . . be very very patient as you wait and as you listen as the Lord SPEAKS LIFE BACK INTO YOU

We've gotten so used to the noise that the silence might be deafening.

Yet, so very often . . . it's in that silence that you finally hear the one voice that you have been wanting to hear over the rest of the noise.

And when you finally hear **THAT** voice . . . you'll hear the voice of the UNBELIEVABLY LOVING ONE who created you

The ONE who speaks **HIS** identity into you . . . for He CREATED YOU IN HIS VERY OWN IMAGE . . . created you to REFLECT HIMSELF!

THAT voice will be a voice of **wisdom** and **direction** ... **instruction** and **guidance**.



Now, I promise you that the voice of God isn't going to say the same things the other noises are screaming at you . . .

. . . in fact, many times God will tell you **just the opposite** of the noise you've grown so accustomed to.

Maybe that's why ---- even after hearing from God's voice in the silence - - - - so many people run back to all the noise.

So Elijah asked the question:

How long will you limber?

How long will you hesitate?

How long will you waiver?

Joshua displayed the choice: **Choose this day who you will service!**

As for me . . . and as for MY HOUSE . . . we will serve the Lord!



YES , the choice IS YOURS! How long will **you** limber?

How long will **you** hesitate?

How long will **you** waiver?

I wonder what you will choose.

The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews encouraged this way:

LET US KEEP OUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND THE PERFECTOR OF OUR FAITH!

We **ARE** faced with challenging circumstances and difficult chooses are placed before us, it seems most every day.

Thankfully with many . . . even most of those choices, our response to them is pretty clear. We know what we need to do!

That's one of the really nice things about experience and age . . . with age and experience comes wisdom.

Yet, each of us are also confronted with more complex and costly choices . . . the decisions we have to make in those circumstances, we know will have more serious repercussions.

And you and I both know THAT's where that noise comes in . . . those voices that TELL US what we need to be doing!

Please let me speak to that for just a moment:
First and foremost, let me suggest you make this choice long before any circumstance or question arises: **Lord, I choose you!**

For, with THAT CHOICE already made, you've declared a solid foundation on which to build move forward.

Whatever the circumstance . . . whatever the question . . . whatever the challenge . . . and whatever the temptation

Jesus, I CHOOSE YOU! Even when you don't know the specific resolution or answer or outcome, determine IN ADVANCE the way of the LORD . . .

. . . . **whatever it is** Jesus, I **choose YOU!**

Once you've made THAT choice IN ADVANCE . . . you can remember several tools the Lord has given to you to determine the specific way to follow through with that choice -- let speak ever-so-briefly about just three of those tools in your toolbox:

First, through the Scriptures . . the Bible . . . God has given us His word to instruct us, even in these most challenging circumstances.

The GREAT KING DAVID reminds us what HE learned Himself . . . God's Word instructs us!

Friends, as you invest YOURSELF in being a student of the Bible, you WILL be equipped to make WISE CHOICES according to God's will.

Second, those **who LIVE IN A COMMUNITY** OF fellow-Jesus-followers will make wiser choices!

Wisdom comes in seeking the input of fellow godly men and women.

Christian Community causes us to be sharper . . . and wiser . . .

. . . where our brothers and sisters in Christ care for us and spur us on in faithful discipleship.

Those who's Christian perspective is primarily about ME & JESUS are much more vulnerable to being swayed by the voices and noise that's pervasive in our culture.

Friends, this is why your pastors and other leaders at Asbury speak so highly of being involved in one of Asbury's MANY Discipleship Communities, small groups, ministry groups and support groups.

When we look at Scripture, we rarely find Christian discipleship done in isolation . . . alone . . . JUST ME AND GOD!

Scripture shows us that following Jesus is most always done best when it is with others . . . in Christian community!

And, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the empowering and ungirding presence of God in your life through the **person and work of the Holy Spirit.**

The very moment you decided to be a follower of Jesus, when you decided to walk away from your past and enter into a life of Christian discipleship, the Holy Spirit took residence in your heart in order to give you everything you need to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

In fact, through the Holy Spirit, God has given you everything you need to be that person you determined to be when you first chose Jesus.

My guess is that most of you have already made the choice for Jesus . . . you have chosen to be a follower of Jesus.

If you haven't yet made THAT choice . . . well friend, this morning . . . right now . . . how about you make that decision . . . I AM CHOOSING TO BE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST.

I or almost anyone seated around you right now, would love to spend a few minutes with you this morning talking about that IMPORTANT DECISION.

And how about the rest of us . . . those who have already chosen Jesus as Savior . . .

Have you determined to declare the LORDSHIP of Jesus Christ in your life

not ONE OUT OF THE MANY VOICES IN YOUR LIFE . . .

. . . . but the ONE VOICE alone you will listen to and follow as you CHOOSE to be the person God created you to be.

How long will you limber?

How long will you hesitate?

How long will you waiver?

CHOOSE THIS DAY WHO YOU WILL SERVE.

This table of Holy Communion is a place of decision.

It's the place where, in a moment, we will hear a beautiful invitation . . .

And invitation to choose the one Jesus . . . NOT one among MANY Gods

But the ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

I share these thoughts with you in the name of the FATHER and the SON and the HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.