

“Altar’d - Renew our Faith”

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:20-22, 30-39

Graphics: altar, fire, faith, loyalty, idolatry

Big Truth: God calls us to surrender our control and demonstrate our commitment through obedience. Are you willing to commit only when it’s conditional, when it’s convenient, or when it’s on your own terms? Jesus walked toward the cross in full obedience without condition. Are we willing to let go of control in order to commit ourselves fully in obedience? Are we willing to fully surrender? Are we willing to have an undivided heart?

Focus Phrase: We may want everything, but God must be our only thing.

1. Introduction

- A. We’re in week 3, of this series called Altar’d, based on a book by Susan Kent.
- B. God is in the transformation business. Do you know that? Across the vast history of the world, God has been changing people. An nowhere does that happen more profoundly than as He’s met them at altars that were built to encounter Him.
- C. We want God to alter us - to transform our lives - as we make our very hearts an altar for him.
- D. If you remember our transformation formula: **Space + Surrender = Shift**.
 - i. Making **space** for God through prayer and worship,
 - ii. plus **surrendering** our lives to Christ, as a sacrifice
 - iii. leads to a spiritual **shift**, as God works in and through us to change us.
- E. First week was Noah’s altar in the wilderness. Last week, we looked at what it takes to fully surrender every part of our lives to God, like Abraham did at the altar HE built in the wilderness. And this is a process. Sometimes, that process is longer than we want and we’re tempted to lose faith in the process and the God who calls us to surrender.
- F. Yet, God’s call never changes. It’s our loyalty to the process that might diminish over time, or change in any season, as we seek after things that are other than God.
- G. I don’t know about you, but I have a lot of loyalty rewards program cards in my wallet. It seems like every store has a program that you sign up for and you get points or discounts or cash back. And the reason they have these programs is not because they love you or to give you stuff. The reason they have these programs is to entice your loyalty. If you have 3-4 grocery stores to choose from, and one of them has a rewards program that gives you 40 cents off gas, and lower gas prices are important to you, then you’re likely to be loyal to that grocery store.

- H. Yet, for me, none of the incentives are big enough for me to be exclusive to one of the stores. I end up choosing whichever one I'm closest to, whichever store has a sale, or really, any reason to shop where I want. My loyalty is not so good...unless I see the value in it. I have a divided and distracted heart and mind when it comes to groceries.
- I. Thankfully, God calls us to an undivided heart and mind of worship... and there's eternal value in it. Unlike a rewards program from a store that claims to be about us, but is really about the store's bottom line, God's rewards ARE eternal and his promises ARE beyond our full comprehension.
- J. Today, our altar is built by the prophet Elijah. Elijah built (or actually RE-built) this altar in response to - in direct competition with - the prophets of the pagan god Baal. Competing loyalties were at play - on one hand, to the One True God and on the other hand to fake gods. We'll see who wins (although I think we already know).
- K. And when the One True God shows up, it serves to Renew Our Faith, which is the title of this message. And when our FAITH is renewed, our loyalty to God is renewed and strengthened.
- L. Here's our focus today: **We may want everything, but God must be our only thing.**
- M. Let's PRAY and then dive into the word today...
- N. **PRAY!** (Jesus, You are Lord...)
- O. Turn with me to 1 Kings 18, starting in verse 20...

2. Scripture

A. **READ 1 Kings 18:20-22, 30-39**

- B. Author and Pastor Kyle Idleman wrote a great book called, "Gods at War." He writes: "The gods are at war, and their strength is not to be underestimated. These gods clash for the throne of your heart, and much is at stake. Everything about me, everything I do, every relationship I have, every hope or dream or wish to become, depends upon what god wins that war."
- C. With Elijah and the prophets of Baal, not only are the gods at war, but they are **demonstrably** at war - physically at war. The war may seem to be between the prophets of Baal and the Elijah the prophet. But more accurately, this is a war between the fake god Baal and the real God Yahweh.
- D. Before we get into our passage from 1 Kings, I want to touch on the Old Testament offices of Prophet, Priest, King...
 - i. **Prophets** spoke for God to the people. They delivered God's word to the people. Some of the prophets also performed miracles and healings.

- ii. Old Testament **priests** served as mediators between humans and God. They offered sacrifices, but they spoke for the people to God.
 - iii. A **king** is someone who has the authority to rule and reign over a group of people.
 - iv. Elijah was a prophet of God, as Ahab was the king of Israel's Northern Kingdom.
- E. When King Ahab married Jezebel, a woman from Phoenicia, he began to worship one of her gods, Baal. The image of Baal was a bull, which represented productivity and wealth. Ultimately, Baal was a god of materialism.
- F. Ahab even built an altar to Baal inside of God's temple. Talk about an insult and offense to the living God.
- G. The Israelites had, over time, become a people with a divided heart. They had been going through the motions of devotion, and not fully committing to God.
- H. So God sent the prophet Elijah to King Ahab to proclaim His judgment on him, and to draw God's people back to Himself.
- I. "Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.' But the people said nothing..." (1 Kings 18:21).
- J. These are pointed questions from Elijah:
- a. How long will you waver between two opinions?
 - b. How long will you live with a divided heart?
 - c. Who is Lord and God of your life?
- K. So, to help the people answer those questions, it was time for **Elijah to Repair the Altar (1 Kings 18:30–35)**
- i. It was time for a showdown on Mount Carmel, between Elijah, the one faithful prophet of the one, true God...And the 450 prophets of Baal.
 - ii. The prophets of Baal made an altar and cried out to this fake god. And Elijah would make an altar and cry out to the One True God. They would see which God would answer with fire.
 - iii. So...the prophets of Baal made an altar and tried to get Baal's attention. They were shouting, even cutting themselves, but nothing was happening.
 - iv. So, in prime prophet forms, Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder. Perhaps your god is deep in thought. Maybe he's busy or traveling. Maybe he's sleepy or in the bathroom."
 - v. The prophets of Baal then shouted and slashed themselves all the more.
 - vi. Then Elijah called the people to him and he repaired the altar to the Lord which had been torn down.

- vii. The people to this point, had been too distracted by idolatry to realize the altar was in need of repair.
- viii. (How easy it is to replace God as our most important relationship with the pursuit of other desires. Before long, the space we made for God - the altar - becomes cluttered with other self-interests.)
- ix. But for the people of God, on Mt. Carmel that day, it was time to rebuild the space that would be used to surrender the sacrifice and invite God to make a shift in their lives.
- x. And that shift, caused by the power of God, is what renewed their faith in the One True God.

L. Renewing Our Faith (1 Kings 18:36–39)

- i. It was time for Elijah to rebuild the altar. He rebuilt the altar with stones in the name of the Lord and with the names of the tribes of Israel. He built a deep, wide trench. He arranged wood and laid the bull on top of it. He covered everything with water and then again and again with more water.
- ii. And then he prayed. **“Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”**
- iii. And, in a miraculous display of the incredible power of God, when Elijah called on God, the Lord consumed the sacrifice. The WHOLE thing! His power consumed the altar. It consumed the dust. It consumed the water in the trench. It consumed EVERYTHING...all of it...every part of what was offered and stuff that wasn't.
- iv. And the people's response, when they saw God's power, was nothing short of a declaration of renewed faith: **“The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!” (v. 39).**
- v. The people may have wanted everything but God, but when they witnessed the miraculous power of God right before their eyes, they shifted instantly to wanting nothing BUT God.

3. Application

- A. God's desire is that you would not live with a divided heart, but that you would declare with your lips and with your life: **“The LORD, he is God!!”**
- B. Whether you realize it or not, your heart is filled with competing loyalties. These loyalties are at war within you.
- C. These competing loyalties affect the life that you live and the lives of others around you.

- D. Your loyalties determine whether you live a life of impact for Jesus - a life of peace and love and purpose - or you live for some other god that vies for your heart, your time, and your attention.
- E. You and I were made to be in relationship with our Creator. But when we lose the focus of our faith, we lose our devotion. Our loyalty to God and God's will IS worth our undivided hearts and minds.
- F. Charles Spurgeon said in his devotional, Morning & Evening: "A jealous God will not be content with a divided heart; He must be loved first and best."
- G. Proverbs 4:23 reminds us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."
- H. We're so often tempted - lulled by the desires of the world - to go through the motions, and allow ourselves to become distracted by other things. We forget the nature and the goodness of God.
- I. And what almost always follows forgetfulness of God is doubt and worry, and that so often leads to idolatry...as you try to fill that hole in your life with the thing that can only come from God.
- J. When you take our eyes off Jesus as the Lord of our lives, you begin to doubt the truth He has taught you, you doubt the power of God, you doubt your relationship with the Lord, and you worry, and you wander.
- K. What you need is a renewing of your faith in the one who burned up the sacrifice, the altar, the dust, and the water! He did it once, he can do it in YOUR life!
- L. Renewing of your faith in God comes when you remember the promises and the faithfulness of the Father.
- M. Renewing of your faith in God comes when you turn your heart back to God and place Him as the one most central, most important thing in your life - not your work, your family, your sin, or your own ambition.
- N. In his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4:20-24, Paul called the believers to a renewal of their faith: "That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."
- O. Put off your old self, and be made new in the attitude of your mind.
- P. If someone were to ask you about your loyalties, what would the truth show?
 - i. Would the One True God or many gods receive your secret attention?

- ii. Does the One True God or many gods receive your resources of time and money?
- iii. What effort do you give to support the place of the One True God in your life?
- iv. God is calling you to place your loyalty squarely in Him!

Q. So, where are your loyalties? Does God have first place in your heart?

4. Conclusion

- A. We are followers of Jesus. Shifting our loyalties to God starts with giving Jesus full and loving attention.
- B. Confess the attention and space you've given to other gods and receive God's forgiveness.
- C. Give the Lord the worship and attention He is due.
- D. Resist the temptation to give yourself to false idols, that lead you away from God and your loved ones.
- E. Give yourself to the Lord, and ask him to renew your faith: to make you whole-hearted in your love and devotion to Jesus.
- F. This Lenten season is about asking ourselves the hard questions and being brave enough - vulnerable enough - to listen for the answers, do the things that God is calling us to do, and then be renewed in our faith.
- G. As we come to the Table today, you're invited you to not only receive, but let this renew your faith in the One who gave it all for you. Receive his grace and mercy...but also leave whatever is not of Him here at the Altar.
- H. Be Altar'd.
- I. **Let's pray...**