



Day thirty-one

For the next 40 days we are offering us all a challenge to consider 40 things that are sucking the life out of us. The challenge is to examine these and through confronting God's word, his Spirit, and his community of faith as we seek to be filled with his life and his love again. At the conclusion of each challenge there will be an opportunity to engage about this with another person and/or the larger community.

Today the thing we are asking us to explore giving up is:

idolizing.

Confronting the text

During the third year without rain, the Lord spoke his word to Elijah: "Go and meet King Ahab, and I will soon send rain." So Elijah went to meet Ahab.

By this time there was no food in Samaria. King Ahab sent for Obadiah, who was in charge of the king's palace. (Obadiah was a true follower of the Lord. When Jezebel was killing all the Lord's prophets, Obadiah hid a hundred of them in two caves, fifty in one cave and fifty in another. He also brought them food and water.) Ahab said to Obadiah, "Let's check every spring and valley in the land. Maybe we can find enough grass to keep our horses and mules alive and not have to kill our animals." So each one chose a part of the country to search; Ahab went in one direction and Obadiah in another.

While Obadiah was on his way, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized Elijah, so he bowed down to the ground and said, "Elijah? Is it really you, master?"

"Yes," Elijah answered. "Go tell your master that I am here."

Then Obadiah said, "What wrong have I done for you to hand me over to Ahab like this? He will put me to death. As surely as the Lord your God lives, the king has sent people to every country to search for you. If the ruler said you were not there, Ahab forced the ruler to swear you could not be found in his country. Now you want me to go to my master and tell him, 'Elijah is here'? The Spirit of the Lord may carry you to some other place after I leave. If I go tell King Ahab you are here, and he comes and doesn't find you, he will kill me! I have followed the Lord since I was a boy. Haven't you been told what I did? When Jezebel was killing the Lord's prophets, I hid a hundred of them, fifty in one cave and fifty in another. I brought them food and water. Now you want me to go and tell my master you are here? He will kill me!"

Elijah answered, "As surely as the Lord All-Powerful lives, whom I serve, I will be seen by Ahab today."

So Obadiah went to Ahab and told him where Elijah was. Then Ahab went to meet Elijah.

When he saw Elijah, he asked, "Is it you—the biggest troublemaker in Israel?"

Elijah answered, "I have not made trouble in Israel. You and your father's family have made all this trouble by not obeying the Lord's commands. You have gone after the Baals. Now tell all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel. Also bring the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

So Ahab called all the Israelites and those prophets to Mount Carmel. Elijah approached the people and said, "How long will you not decide between two choices? If the Lord is the true God, follow him, but if Baal is the true God, follow him!" But the people said nothing.

Elijah said, "I am the only prophet of the Lord here, but there are four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. Bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one bull and kill it and cut it into pieces. Then let them put the meat on the wood, but they are not to set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull, putting the meat on the wood but not setting fire to it. You prophets of Baal, pray to your god, and I will pray to the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to his wood is the true God."

All the people agreed that this was a good idea.

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "There are many of you, so you go

first. Choose a bull and prepare it. Pray to your god, but don't start the fire."

So they took the bull that was given to them and prepared it. They prayed to Baal from morning until noon, shouting "Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound, and no one answered. They danced around the altar they had built.

At noon Elijah began to make fun of them. "Pray louder!" he said. "If Baal really is a god, maybe he is thinking, or busy, or traveling! Maybe he is sleeping so you will have to wake him!" The prophets prayed louder, cutting themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed, which was the way they worshiped.

The afternoon passed, and the prophets continued to act like this until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But no voice was heard; Baal did not answer, and no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Now come to me." So they gathered around him, and Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes, the number of Jacob's sons. (The Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel.) Elijah used these stones to rebuild the altar in honor of the Lord. Then he dug a ditch around the altar that was big enough to hold about thirteen quarts of seed. Elijah put the wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the meat and on the wood." Then Elijah said, "Do it again," and they did it again. Then he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it the third time. So the water ran off the altar and filled the ditch.

At the time for the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went near the altar. "Lord, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," he prayed. "Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people that you commanded me to do all these things. Lord, answer my prayer so these people will know that you, Lord, are God and that you will change their minds."

Then fire from the Lord came down and burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch.

When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground, crying, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!"

Then Elijah said, "Capture the prophets of Baal! Don't let any of them run away!" The people captured all the prophets. Then Elijah led them down to the Kishon Valley, where he killed them, (1 Kings 18).

Confronting my self with God

An idol is anything of relative value that is given absolute worth.

So today that would be things like our bank accounts, the look and style of our car, our electronic devices.

Absolute value is that for which we would cross an I beam at 30 stories. That thing for which we would brave incredible odds to be a part of or to save.

The thing is if push came to shove (which is not a good thing on an I beam 30 stories up) we would mostly cross it for what the Bible would call the right reasons:

our kids hanging by their finger-tips; a puppy.

Rarely do you hear of people doing the equivalent of crossing the I beam for their iPhone.

But we *act* as though we would.

Those things and people fill our thoughts day and night and though they are nothing. They consume us. But, we inhabit the tension that while they consume us we are very willing to prostitute ourselves to the *god de jour*.

Blasé Pascal would say the reason for our capricious worship is that there is a God-sized-hole in all of us. We are constantly looking for the real thing. Ahab and Jezebel thought they had found it. The priests and prophets of Baal thought they had as well. It took a wandering prophet by the name of Elijah whose name "My God is Yahweh" said it all with a talent for theatrics. The fire fell as did the idol worshippers of Mt. Carmel.

Listening to God's people

What are your idols? Be honest.

Would you cross an I beam for them?