



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Where Do You Turn?

1 Kings 22:51–2 Kings 1:1–18

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series: The Crown and the Fire

I grew up in a small mountain town and when I was in fourth grade a Thai restaurant occupied the building next door to my grandma's house; immediately I fell in love with the food. Any chance I had I'd eat fried wontons and whenever I got sick I would ask my grandma to get me wonton soup from next door. Thinking back to that restaurant I still remember the wall filled with golden idols behind the counter when you entered through the front doors. I remember the incense burning to the idols and was curious about the practice but never asked.

When I mention idols what's the first image that comes to your mind? Do you think of golden statues lining the wall of a restaurant? Do you think of carved wooden idols hidden in the depth of the jungles of Africa? Do you think of marble statues preserved in a museum in Athens? Do you think of an ornate temple tucked up against a hill in a foreign country? Or does something else come to mind in regards to idol worship? Idols come in all different shapes, sizes and forms.

It's easier to think of an idol as an object, but what about the non-physical idols we have here on the Peninsula? Have you considered education to be an idol you worship? Has the sports team your kids play on become an idol? Is your family your idol; you would make any sacrifice for them? What about relationships you're invested in? Do they take the form of an idol in your life? How about self-image? Is this an idol you've struggled to conquer? Is the amount of money you have saved in your bank account an idol of security in your life? The dictionary defines idol as "a person or thing that is greatly admired, loved, or revered."

You might think I'm being a little harsh but this is something we need to talk about, so stick with me. Idol worship is all around us; it's everywhere we look. It comes in different shapes, sizes, colors, forms and impacts each of us differently. As the definition reminds us, sometimes it's tangible and sometimes it's intangible. Idol worship is alive and well on the Peninsula and this morning we're going to see how idol worship cost a man his life. Turn in your Bible to 1 Kings 22:51.

For the last two months we've been studying the life of Elijah the Tishbite in the Old Testament. We've seen Elijah confront a king, predict a drought, raise a widow's son from the dead, call down fire from heaven, pray for rain, meet with God on a mountain, and call a young man to follow him. We've had a front row seat as Elijah has learned to trust in God for the last 20 years of his life and last week Elijah had his final encounter with King Ahab,

condemning him for his wicked lifestyle. While in battle Ahab suffers a fatal wound fulfilling Elijah's prophecy about him, and now our story picks up.

Ahaziah son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He served and worshiped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had done (1 Kings 22:51–53).

Ahaziah's Idolatry

Ahab's son Ahaziah is a chip off the old block. He is following the practices of his parents and worshipping foreign gods. As the new king of Israel he's maintained the idol worship of his parents.

After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury" (2 Kings 1:1–2).

In reality we know very little about Ahaziah. Foreign affairs with Moab aren't going to well. He has fallen through the lattice of his upper room and injured himself badly. He wants to know his future so he turns to an idol. Seeking to know the future he chooses to follow in the way of his parents and seek Baal-Zebub. His actions would be similar to visiting a psychic on El Camino to find out his future.

The only time Baal-Zebub appears in the Old Testament is here in this chapter, where it appears four times. In all four instances it refers to the false deity, the god of Ekron. Baal-Zebub is two words in Hebrew to form one word in our English language. When we translate these words we get "lord" and "flies," literally meaning, "lord of the flies." The name doesn't appear again until the New Testament and when it shows up we have the Greek from Beelzebul. Jesus is driving out a demon from a man who is mute. When the demon leaves the man and he finally begins speaking, some in the crowd say that by the prince of demons Jesus is driving out demons (Luke 11:14,15).

As you can see from this New Testament reference there was more to this idol than meets the eye. Behind Baal-Zebub was the

satanic influence of the demonic world. This is why God despised acts of witchcraft and sorcery because they were fronts for demonic activity; small doors to a world of pain. Unfortunately these practices were all too common in the nation of Israel. That is why God gave a stern warning to His people in Leviticus: *“Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritist, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God”* (Leviticus 19:31).

Some scholars think Ahaziah may have chosen to seek a god in Ekron in an attempt to keep his injury a secret from his enemies. I don't think this was the case. I think it's more likely Ahaziah is following the evil practices he saw as a child. David Roper said: “Ahaziah succeeded to his father and mother's throne—and to their sin. He grew up to be just like his parents. And that was his tragedy.”

A few weeks ago I was talking with a guy in our body in between services. He was asking me some questions about the E100 Bible reading plan many of us are doing. In our quick conversation he said something that really stuck out to me. He said, “My son and I are doing the reading together at night; my son is reading the Bible to me.” Now this man's eyes are perfectly fine but he is finding a way to connect with his son while they both connect with God. What he is doing is completely opposite to what Ahaziah's dad taught him. I can't help but think this young man will have a different future than Ahaziah because of the time his dad is spending with him in God's word. I can't help but think when calamity hits this young man he will seek the Lord and not stray to idol worship.

Elijah's Final Prophecy

The king's mission implies the Lord is unable to help him in his desperate situation. When the Lord saw what the king of his people was embarking on He sends Elijah to intersect their journey.

But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, “Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’ Therefore this is what the Lord says: ‘You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!’” So Elijah went (verses 3–4).

Look how quickly the Lord moves in this situation. God sends Elijah to spare these men the pain of seeking any demonic force in Ekron. I imagine the messengers knew Elijah, or knew about Elijah, so when he came to them on the road they had a feeling of what was about to happen. Elijah brings his final prophecy to the messengers and they return to Samaria to give it to the king. The message is a formal death sentence for the king: You will not leave the bed you are lying on, you will surely die.

The road from Samaria to Ekron was about 60 miles by foot so when the messengers return quickly the king is shocked. “Why

aren't you on the road to Ekron, what are you doing back so soon?” Then they share the message from the Lord with Ahaziah.

“A man came to meet us,” they replied. “And he said to us, ‘Go back to the king who sent you and tell him, “This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!’”” (v. 6).

I imagine the king is not happy. He gave them a specific mission and they have not followed his orders and have returned without seeking the foreign god. Ahaziah starts poking around; he wants to get to the bottom of this mess. The king asks probing questions and the messengers share an interesting fact about the man who met them. They say “he was a hairy man.” From their description, immediately Ahaziah knows it was Elijah. He has seen the hairy man before. He recalls clearly how he killed the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel when he was a young boy. He remembers the voice prophesying death to his father and his entire family. The image of the hairy man is haunting him again.

Fire from Heaven

The messengers of the king have returned and he is no doubt unhappy with their obedience to Elijah. So how do you respond if you're the king? Listen as we see Ahaziah's frustration manifest.

Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, “Man of God, the king says, ‘Come down!’”

Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, “Man of God, this is what the king says, ‘Come down at once!’”

“If I am a man of God,” Elijah replied, “may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.

So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. “Man of God,” he begged, “please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants! See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!”

The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king (verses 9–15).

In full fledged anger, Ahaziah sends 50 fighting men to intimidate Elijah. The men find Elijah sitting on top of a hill and the captain commands the man of God to come down having no

respect for his prophetic position. Elijah responds by calling on fire to come down from heaven and destroy the men. That's exactly what happens.

Ahaziah is back in the palace and when he finds out what Elijah has done he is not impressed and sends another 50 men. The second captain is more rushed than the first adding "at once" to his request of Elijah. Just a quick side note, if I'm the second captain and the first guy who approached Elijah is dead I would not try to hurry the prophet. Again, refusing to converse with soldiers under the command of a wicked ruler the prophet calls down God's judgement. It happens again—fire falls from heaven and 50 more men are laying dead. Word must have traveled quickly around the barracks: the hairy man on the mountain is not someone to take lightly!

The third captain was obviously the wisest of the three. In humility and reverence, he begs Elijah to come down from the mountain and meet with the king. Now, I have to wonder if the third captain worshipped the Lord. It's just speculation on my behalf but look how different his approach is to Elijah. He's in a tough spot, he has orders from the king and knows what happened to his fellow soldiers. Once again, we see Elijah's close relationship with the Lord revealed and God speaks to him. At the recommendation of the Lord Elijah agrees and meets with Ahaziah.

God's Word Never Fails

Picture the drama unfolding. Elijah is escorted down the hill with 50 well armed men. He is brought into the presence of the young but powerful king. Standing in front of the king who just tried to intimidate him is Elijah who just prophesied his death. I imagine Elijah standing in an open room with the king laying in his bed across from him. The king has a face of disgust at the sight of Elijah. The message hasn't changed since he delivered it to the messengers but it's time for the king to hear it himself.

He told the king, "This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" So he died, according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

Because Ahaziah had no son, Joram succeeded him as king in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah (verses 16–17).

The king has armed guards at his disposal and as Elijah is sharing this message they are nearby with sword in hand. No matter the situation Elijah stands strong and communicates the message from the Lord.

There is no exclamation point at the end of Elijah's message and we see nothing that would make us think Elijah is being rude to the king. Elijah boldly shares the message with the wicked

king. Saint John of the Cross said that those who know God and what he is doing have three distinguishing characteristics—tranquility, gentleness and strength. I would say we see these three characteristics in Elijah. The opposite of this would be haste, impatience and instability; all three of these we see in Ahaziah's life.

I love what Charles Swindoll writes about this encounter: "The heroism of godly men and women is demonstrated in their being willing to face unpleasant conditions, even threatening circumstances, with remarkable calm. They act with firm resolve, even though it means incurring personal unpopularity. Nothing deters their passion to obey their God...regardless. His message is paramount. Period." We learn a valuable lesson from Elijah in this passage: The Lord strengthens those who put their trust in Him. Did you see the strength God gave Elijah here? Have you noticed that strength in your life or in the lives of those around you?

Something that sticks out is a line in the text: "Is it because there is no God in Israel." Three times we see it repeated: "Is it because there is no God in Israel." This week I found myself evaluating Ahaziah and Elijah and examining their actions to see what we could learn from them. Let me share what I found. When times were difficult for Ahaziah he immediately turned to idol worship. He ignored the Lord, was careless with the lives of 102 of his soldiers, and is basically toying around with demonic powers. On the other hand we have Elijah who is so connected and committed to the Lord he is able to discern His voice. When God asks him to do something, no matter how hard, he obeyed. Elijah's life is marked by strength and trust in the Lord. Elijah's life is devoted to God.

All of this got me thinking this very simple question: Where do you turn? Where do you turn when the MRI comes back with a spot on your lung? Where do you turn when your marriage is hanging on by a thread and your spouse is ready to leave? Where do you turn when final exams are looming in the near future? Where do you turn when your company is making cuts? Where do you turn when your adult children are rebellious and running from God? Do you turn to the Lord or do you turn to the idols you've set up around you? Ahaziah turned to idol worship while Elijah turned to the Lord.

Understanding all of us are in a different place spiritually there isn't a "one size fits all" application of this message. No matter where you are spiritually—if you're seeking Jesus this morning, close to God, or today is your first time—I think the following steps can help all of us address areas in our life where we've allowed idol worship to infiltrate our being.

The first step is to **identify the idols**. Before you think I'm talking to the person sitting next to you, listen to this. In our staff meeting this week we talked about this passage and I asked our team to

share some of the idols we worship here on the Peninsula. Listen to some of their answers: education, sports, money, family, self-image, power, prestige, recreation, innovation, security, comfort, relationships and image are some of the idols they named. From that list it's easy to see, idols come in many different forms. Let me be the first to confess that we have set up idols all around us. They are not visible idols but invisible idols we worship instead of the Lord. This week I started asking God to help me identify idol worship in my life and I've been extremely convicted. I struggle with coveting and have for years. I've sought luxury, comfort and security over God. I'm convicted of my actions as I've asked God to help me identify the idols in my life.

What are the idols in your life? What are the things in your life that draw your attention away from God and capture your heart? Did anything from the list I just shared strike a chord with you? This week will you find a quiet place where you can sit with God and ask Him to reveal the idols you struggle with? Ask God to name them and have a pen and paper ready so you can write down the idols you struggle with. This is something all of us can participate in. This is something for the person who just accepted Christ as their savior to the person who's been following Christ for decades.

Once you have the list of the idols, take time to **repent of idol worship** in your life. Confess your sin of idol worship to God. Name the idols you struggle with and repent of your sin. Let me make sure I'm clear on the difference between repenting and being remorseful. When we have remorse for our sins, we feel bad about our actions. We may be remorseful for a period of time and then return to our sins once we're done being remorseful. To repent of our sins is to leave them, to do a physical 180 degree turn and leave them behind us. This is what I'm talking about dealing with the idols in your life—leave them behind and never return.

After you've identified the idols you may have to make some drastic changes in your life to repent of them. It may mean getting rid of things you keep stored in your heart and your home. It might mean doing a deep cleaning in your life and entering places to repent of actions in your life; things you learned in your younger years. As you do this, you may realize you need help.

If you're struggling you don't have to do this alone. Can I encourage you to call our church office and connect with a Biblical Counselor? We have trained people who can help you overcome these struggles.

First we identify, then we repent, and finally we **replace**. This step is key in the process of addressing our idols. We replace our idol worship with worshipping the Lord. If money is an idol in your life, the next time you're tempted to check your bank account balance worship the Lord. You could worship the Lord by memorizing Proverbs 3:5-6 and confess you worship Him and not money. If coveting is an idol in your life, the next time you find yourself struggling with wanting more use that as an opportunity to thank God for all you have. Are you seeing the pattern here? Let's do one more example. If prestige has become an idol for you I encourage you to avoid those places where you feed this idol. We replace idol worship with worshipping the Lord. This is where we change unhealthy patterns in our life and create new, healthy patterns.

Tim Keller said: "Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something besides God." We must not only uproot the idol in our hearts, but replace it with the love of Jesus. We remove the idol and plant the love, grace and truth of Jesus so the idol won't grow back. This is a lifetime process. We are constantly going to have to check our heart, identify the idols, repent of idol worship, and replace them with worshipping the Lord.

If idol worship has taken root in your heart will you turn your eyes to Jesus this morning? We don't have to be a slave to the false idols, we can fix our eyes on Jesus and worship Him as our savior. Jesus hung on the cross 2,000 years ago to save us from our sins, confess those sins and find freedom. Just as the Lord strengthened Elijah He will strengthen those who put their trust in Him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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