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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Limping Between Two Opinions

1 Kings 18:21

Prayer: *Father God, I do thank you and praise you for your goodness, I praise you and thank you for your never failing love, and Father, we just again, we see evidence of that over and over and over again, and Father, again we just thank you for the privilege we have of lifting up our voices in song and in prayer, and now lifting up our hearts and our minds as we open up your word. Again, I just pray for your Holy Spirit's presence and power. I pray that what you've written in your book would be of lasting value to us. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Israel is in terrible shape. A severe drought has brought them to the point of starvation. This drought is not a natural phenomenon, it is a judgment brought on by God himself and it's punishment, it's punishment for Israel denying the one true God, it's punishment for Israel worshiping Baal and Asherah, it's punishment for the fact that they are now slaughtering the very prophets of God. Basically the war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness has spilled out into this sphere of flesh and

both sides now have their heroes in this conflict. The side of Baal is championed by wicked King Ahab and his even more wicked wife Jezebel. God's side has Elijah as its champion. And they are mortal enemies. *1 Kings 18:17-22* says this, it says: *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" 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."*

Last week we began looking at this conflict that existed between Ahab and Elijah, and we were looking at blame shifting. We saw the blame shifting that Ahab engaged in by identifying Elijah and not himself and his own idol worship as the cause of the misery in Israel. Now, they were in the third year of a severe drought and Elijah had announced that drought but Ahab had blamed Elijah alone as the reason for the drought. And what we're looking for now is the unfolding of this confrontation that takes place between Elijah and Ahab as it becomes a confrontation between the false gods of Jezebel and Ahab and the true God of Elijah. And we see in the scripture Elijah beginning to lay out the details of the confrontation in verse 19. This is what he says in *1 Kings 18:19*. He says: *"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."* So Ahab sent to all the

people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

Now it is hard to imagine that a nation who God personally led out of Egypt had fallen so far. The ruling class in Israel is now overrun by those who are given over to the wholesale worship of false gods. And the people of Israel are led away from the one true God by this god who has been manufactured by the enemy to fit their understanding and their life-style. I mean, Baal was the god of fertility. Baal controlled the weather, he controlled the storms, he controlled the ability of the land to produce food. He was custom tailored to the needs of the Israelites because they were an agrarian people, highly dependent on weather to produce the crops that would stave off starvation. Asherah was the female goddess of fertility, and together they were this deadly combination. These were monster gods. These were gods that demanded human sacrifice often of children offered as burnt sacrifices. In fact some 200 years after Elijah, Jeremiah was describing how wicked this worship was, and he said this in *Jeremiah 19*, he said: *"The people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal to burn their*

*sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind --" These were savage gods. But we can't just dismiss this savagery as being from another culture or another time because frankly, we are just as savage as they are. We just do it in abortion clinics and our high priests wear white smocks and speak medical language. Now in other words, we are living in a world that is really completely different than the world that they used to live in. There is huge differences between the way we live today and the way they lived back then. They were far more dependent on the weather, far more dependent on agriculture than we are. And so worshiping gods whose specialty was guaranteeing fertility and good crops, well, that was a constant temptation. Even though God had demonstrated time and time again that he was Israel's provider and protector, they had steadily abandoned the God of Israel for the false gods of Baal and Asherah. So Elijah is facing two radically different opinions of who the real God actually is, and he issues this challenge in verse 21. It says: *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.**

Well, my question this morning is how are we to understand this in the 21st century? What present day Elijah is going to challenge us

to choose between a god of fertility and the weather and the God of Abraham? I don't think there's any question that we as a culture have gone as far away from the God of Israel as Israel had in the days of Elijah, but we go after a far different set of gods than they went after. And there really are too many of our gods to count. I mean, Elijah brought this contest down to two different opinions because they were the options that Israel was facing. We have dozens and dozens. I mean, I don't know that Elijah would ever have to address a large contingent of atheists, but we certainly do. I mean, those who believe that we've evolved by random chance from nothing and are answerable to no one are just one of the many differing opinions that are out there that Elijah never would have faced. So before you even get to the opinions that we in the 21st century North America waiver between, we have to kind of work our way first through the atheists or the non theists who embrace evolution as religion, we have to work our way through them to the theists who at least believe in God but not necessarily the real God, and then all the way to those whose opinion is split between a real understanding of Christianity and a phony one. So you see, our problem is we don't limp between two different opinions. We limp between dozens of opinions. So let's see if we can't first narrow the field down a little bit.

First let's choose between theists and non theists or atheists.

You see, the problem with naturalist atheists is that their opinion of God's non-existence is the issue. You see, they really cannot avoid limping through the same kind of issues that Elijah was dealing with even though they believe in a non moral entity ruling creation. Now, I can picture Elijah saying, "If the Lord is real, follow him; but if atheism is real, then go ahead, follow it." The problem with atheistic evolution is that nature itself is "red in tooth and claw." What that means is that nature itself is vicious, it is brutal and it cares not a whit about moral right or wrong; it just is. But atheists care a great deal about moral issues. They have very strong opinions about moral good and moral evil, and one of the great moral issues that many atheists concern themselves with is how evil Christianity is. I mean, they'll go on and on about how terrible the crusades were, how present day Christianity oppresses people, but the fact is if they truly believe what they believe, well then the only thing that matters is who is strong enough to impose his or her belief on others. You see, evolution doesn't care at all who is morally right or wrong. Survival of the fittest only cares about who is the fittest, who is the strongest. And this creates very interesting ethical dilemmas.

I recently saw a special about how killer whales are changing the ecosystem in the Arctic. And the understanding was because of global warming, they are now -- there's areas that are icing out

much earlier and there's areas that they are getting into that they normally don't get into and because they are apex predators, they are literally changing the ecosystems of these areas that they're going into. They're talking about killer whales and narwhales. Narwhale is a kind of mammal, it's about twelve, fifteen feet long, very unusual looking thing, it's got a bony protrusion in the front, looks like a -- the unicorn of the sea is what they call them. The Inuit people use narwhales for food. And what they've been reporting again and again and they've been watching in horror as pods of killer whales now attack and kill whole pods of narwhales that the Inuit are using to depend on food. But there's a twist to this predation. What they've observed again and again is the killer whales are killing narwhales just for fun, just for entertainment. They're slaughtering them after they've eaten as much of them as they can and they're no longer hungry at all. And so they're trying to figure out what is going on. Now, as a Christian we might look at that kind of behavior and see solid evidence for the fall and the curse that all of creation is under. Well, you know and I know that an atheist evolutionist can't make that observation. No one is going to start moralizing about how fallen even killer whales are because naturalistic evolution has no moral component in it at all; it's just driven by random chance, power, and time. And according to the dogma of evolution, killer whales are more powerful than narwhales so they get to utterly

destroy them even if it's just to keep them entertained. Well, human beings are just one step higher up the ladder than killer whales. And if there's no God and if there's no higher power directing the process, then whoever gets the most power wins. A mouse being toyed with by a cat before it's killed and eaten is in no position to complain about the immorality of the bullying and of the strong bullying the weak and the helpless because the system itself's got no morality in it at all. And from an evolutionary standpoint, there's not a whole lot of difference between a mouse and Christian family in Syria being butchered by Muslim extremists. I mean, from an evolutionary standpoint, if ISIS can murder and terrorize its way across the whole Middle East and by ruthless slaughter itself become the dominant force in that region, then guess what? Then they win. Because after all, survival belongs to the fittest. Well, unfortunately most materialist atheists have to borrow from God a moral code that insists that there's some things that are just right and some things that are just wrong. But then they use this code which is absolutely missing from evolution against God. I mean, the hypocrisy is overwhelming to me. If killer whales are just animals and people are just slightly higher animals, then ISIS cutting off people's heads is no different than killer whales picking off narwhales for fun. I mean, it's just part of the domination process and no atheist has anything to say whatsoever about its morality. So if evolution is morally all

there is, then all the enemies of ISIS can hope for is that they somehow can find the means to be stronger so that they can kill them and then be the superior species. But don't pretend that there's anything moral going on. I mean, they're just animals doing what animals do.

Now Elijah would have an easy time challenging the atheist materialists on whether or not their God was real because what he was doing was setting up an empirically provable experiment. God was going to respond to either side. And there would be proof positive whether or not God was real or not, as if that would make a permanent difference. May I remind you that the Jewish people whom Elijah was challenging, these, the very people who had abandoned the real God and were now embracing these false gods and these Baals and Asherahs, these people once walked through the center of the Red Sea on dry land. These people once lived for 40 years on food that rained down from the sky. These people once had water coming out of a gushing rock in the middle of a desert. All it took was the passage of time for that empirical proof to dissolve into dust. There was also proof positive that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. I mean, there was an empty tomb. There were over 500 eye witnesses. There were scores of people who were willing to go to their own deaths rather than disavow what their own eyes had seen. All it took was the passage of time for that

conviction to go away. And time will do that for any single empirical event. I mean, if Jesus were to walk down Main Street in Port Jervis and if he was to take Mount Peter and throw it into the Delaware River, you know what? It would only be a matter of time before people started disbelieving what their own eyes had seen. That's why Jesus said to Thomas in *John 20:29*: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

You see, Elijah was tasked by God to draw a sharp contrast between two very, very different ideas. Verse 21 again says: *And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go on 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. You see, if Elijah were here today to challenge between two different opinions of God, he would have to go with the theists rather than with the atheists, because most atheists won't even believe what their eyes are telling them. But you know, that hardly narrows the field. The great religions of the world share one thing in common with the false religion that Ahab and Jezebel had promoted in that God was somehow someone or something that you had to work your way upwards towards. And there were multiple ways in which you worked to make yourself worthy of heaven. God is someone or something you work at placating or satisfying and whether it's Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism, it's really

still a matter of reconciling your life with the forces that shape and mold it. The false gods of Israel went so far as to demand a sacrifice of children in order to keep them satisfied. Now, all the great religions of the world are far less demanding than that, but make no mistake about it, they do have their demands. In every other system besides Christianity, we do what we can to measure up to a God or a force that can make our life go well or badly depending on how well we fulfill our part of the bargain. Not so with Christianity. Christianity's the only religion in the world that doesn't assist you in reaching up to God but instead tells you that those efforts are futile. In fact what makes Christianity so radically different from other world religions is its absolute insistence on the impossibility of you being able to do anything to make yourself worthy of heaven. You know, Islam has its five pillars; they have five different ways in which you work to make yourself worthy of heaven. Judaism has its ten commandments, Hinduism has its adherence trying to live out their life working out the karma that they built up in previous lives, Buddhists spend their lives struggling to somehow climb above all desire which they see as the source of all suffering, and in each case your ability to cope with this life and to be prepared for the next is directly related to the effort you put into making yourself worthy.

Well, Christianity acknowledges that the only one who was ever

worthy enough, the only one who like God was perfect was the God man Jesus Christ. And he became a man and took on flesh and lived the life that we were supposed to live, and then he exchanged his righteousness and his perfection for our sin at the cross. Now, I have no problem whatsoever saying that by faith I am fully righteous before God. But my righteousness is an alien righteousness. That means it doesn't belong to me, it belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ; and he by faith gave that to me when I accepted his sacrifice on the cross.

Elijah's challenge, like I said, is not to atheists really, I mean, it's much more to theists. And once again he says to them, he says: *"How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him."* And the people answered him not a word. Well, you might say, well, Tom, that's not two different opinions, that's five different opinions. Well, actually not really. There are five great religions in the world today. Four of them point in one direction and that is what you must do to make yourself worthy. One of them, Christianity, says in a million years you will never be able to work your way up to worthiness before God. In fact, God even gave us a measuring stick to show us how impossible that task is, and that measuring stick is the ten commandments. Now, the ten commandments are not a list of rules that we undertake in the hope

that somehow or other we can be made worthy by keeping this list well. What the ten commandments actually is is a list of ten non-negotiable demands given by the King of the universe. And here's the impossible part: Along with the demands is the further demand that these rules must be kept perfectly. *James 2:10* says: *Whoever fails in one part of the law fails in all of it.* So God has given us this impossible task and he knows it. See, the purpose of the law is not to make us worthy; it's to show us the absolute impossibility of trying to become worthy by virtue of my effort. I am no more capable of following even the first commandment perfectly than I am of flying.

Listen to what God says in *Exodus 22*, he says this, he says: *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."*

Well, what God is not saying here, he's not saying you can't have some false golden calf in your backyard that you worship secretly. What he's saying is that he must have the position of absolute preeminence in my life, in every area of my life, all of the time, with no exceptions. I look at that first commandment and I instantly recognize my absolute inability to live up to it, and then I realize there's nine more after that. I've said many times the purpose of the ten commandments is not to show you what you have to do to be good enough for God, it is instead to show you and

I that we can never measure up to God's standard which is absolute perfection. And if God was to leave us there, we would all be doomed. God saw that we couldn't live up to his standard, so he became one of us, lived perfectly up to that standard of perfection and then he offered his life as a substitute for ours.

And so if Elijah was alive today, he would make the same offer. He'd say: *"How long will you be limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him."* Well, what would the two different opinions be? I think it wouldn't be atheists, it would be theists. But even among the theists, what two opinions would we contemporary North Americans have to choose from? I doubt very much that any of us would put Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism as the choice we'd have to make between Christianity and some other differing opinion. What we really have to face is not a choice between multiple opinions but between two different opinions of the same thing. See, if Elijah were here today, he would quickly see that the choice is not between Christianity or atheism, the choice is not between Christianity and the other religions of the world; no, the real choice is between Christianity and false Christianity.

Perhaps the most enduring threat to Christianity is that you can embrace it in ways render it really no different than any of the

other world religions and even atheism for that matter. I have little doubt that Elijah would have known that the single greatest threat to Christianity is ersatz Christianity. How many of you have ever heard of that word, "ersatz?" Raise your hand if you ever heard that word before. That's a real word. That's a real adjective in the real English language. It comes from the German, it means "replacement" in German. Let me give you the definition of what "ersatz" means. It says, "A usually artificial and inferior substitute or imitation." A cubic zirconium is an ersatz diamond. Astro turf is ersatz grass. Margarine is ersatz butter. You get the idea. Ersatz means not just a substitute, but an inferior substitute. The single greatest threat to Christianity in North America is not any of the world's great religions or even atheism. The single greatest threat is ersatz Christianity. If Elijah was addressing 21st century North Americans, it would be this false religion that he would be challenging. You see, we're under no threat whatsoever to worship the gods of Ahab and Jezebel. That's not on our horizon at all. But we are under a constant threat and temptation to go after gods that look like Christianity but are not. *Proverbs 14:12* says: *There's a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way to death.* Ersatz Christianity can certainly seem right to a man or woman, but the end of it is disaster. Jesus once said this in *Matthew 7:21*, he said: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of

heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Here's the question that we have to address in order to put this into right -- the right perspective is how do I know that my faith, that my Christianity is the real one? Christian Smith is a sociologist who studied Christianity particularly among young people, and he and his researchers went out across the entire country, they interviewed 3,000 teenagers. They interviewed them about their faith, about their Christian faith, and they were only interviewing people who ostensibly said that they were Christian, Christian teenagers. They came up with five qualities that mark what the vast majority of those they interviewed thought Christianity was all about. They assembled it into five points which I've mentioned before. Let me just read you those five points again. This is what 3,000 Christian teenagers across the country who were interviewed think Christianity means. Number one, a God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. So far so good. Number two, God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. Number three, the central goal of life is

to be happy and to feel good about oneself. Number four, God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. And number five, good people go to heaven when they die. Well, three of these points are flat out false, one is true, and one is half true. But here's the horrible part. This is what millions and millions of Christians believe. This is the essence of ersatz Christianity. Listen to what Smith reports, he says this, he says: "To the extent that the teens we interviewed did manage to articulate what they understood and believed religiously, it became clear that most religious teenagers either do not really comprehend what their own religious traditions say they are supposed to believe, or they do understand it and simply do not care to believe it. Either way, it is apparent that most religiously affiliated U.S. teens are not particularly interested in espousing and upholding the beliefs of their faith traditions, or that their communities of faith are failing in attempts to educate their youth, or both." That's awful! But my biggest complaint about Smith's conclusion is that he limits it to young people. Al Mohler commented on Smith's book by saying this, he said: "The 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' that these researchers identify as the most fundamental faith posture and belief system of American teenagers appears, in a larger sense, to reflect the culture as a whole. Clearly this generalized conception of a belief system is what appears to characterize the beliefs of vast

millions of Americans, both young and old." What's even worse is that Mohler went on to say that this new understanding of Christianity is actually "colonizing" Christianity itself, and it's happening in thousands of churches across the country. And what people actually believe and what the gospel actually is are two very different things. Folks really are limping between two different opinions. I pictured Elijah and his challenge when I read Mohler's concluding paragraph about the challenge the church now faces. This is what he said, he said: "Indeed, our challenge may be even greater than the confrontation with paganism, for we face a succession of generations who have transformed Christianity into something that bears no resemblance to the faith revealed in the Bible. The faith 'once delivered to the saints' is no longer even known, not only by American teenagers but by most of their parents. Millions of Americans believe they are Christians simply because they have some historic tie to a Christian denomination or identity. We now face the challenge of evangelizing a nation that largely considers itself Christian, overwhelmingly believes in some deity, considers itself fervently religious, but has virtually no connection to historic Christianity." These are folks who have bought into ersatz Christianity. That is the last thing that I want for any one of us in this church.

So how do we tell the real thing from the phony thing? Well, what

we do is we fix our eyes and our ears and our heart on the real thing. And Jesus made one thing very clear when he said in *Matthew 7:21*: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Okay. There's a very valuable piece of information there. See, there's one thing we know for certain what that will is. There's one way that we do know why and that's what God says in *1 Thessalonians 4:3*, he says this: *For this is the will of God, your sanctification.* Well, sanctification is the process that God uses to shape and mold us into the image of his Son. Every single one of us from the moment we become a Christian is undergoing the process of sanctification. To "sanctify" means "to set apart." And so when you become a believer in Christ, God sets you and your life apart from your friends, from your companions, from all of the stuff that you knew before this had happened. *2 Corinthians 5:17* says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is passed away; behold the new has come.*

Here's where I really want to focus in on this ersatz Christian thinking. What makes you a new creation is not going forward at a meeting, it's not saying a prayer, it's not signing a card; it's the fact that there's a new living presence inside your heart that was not there before. Now, I may be stepping on thin ice, but at the risk of falling through, I have to say that one of the telltale

signs of ersatz Christianity is the idea that somehow something that I did as a child or in my past, some kind of goose bumps that I got about God in the 70's, the 80's or the 90's or even last week, somehow that means I'm saved. Not necessarily. There's a phrase I want to be very careful about discussing, you've all heard it; it's the phrase: "Once saved" -- what? -- "always saved." Now, misunderstanding those four words can cause an enormous amount of spiritual damage. But understand something, I whole-heartedly believe that once you are saved, you are genuinely forever saved, and scripture is replete with proof of that. *Romans 8:35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? John 10:27, Jesus's own words: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand."* And *Ephesians 1:3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.*

So understand, I have no doubt whatsoever that God by the power of Christ completely saves and preserves his own, and that no one or no thing will ever be able to snatch us out of his hand. The only doubts that I have are about people who have bought from ersatz Christianity the notion that something that may have happened years ago is some kind of proof positive that now I'm saved instead of the ongoing proof of a transformed life. Now, I mentioned this once before but I had a seminal moment with this one particular man that was in the hospital dying of cirrhosis of the liver because he was a raging alcoholic, who at one point was consuming a fifth of Jack Daniels a day and he was not doing well at all and he was asked about his spiritual condition because of the terrible condition that he was in, and he just said, "I am fine." "Why are you fine?" "Because I went forward at a Billy Graham rally in 1965." I mean, he had bought into the notion of once saved, always saved, and he had bought into that with disastrous effects. So now am I saying that I want people terrified that they're losing they're salvation? No; I want just the opposite. I want you set, certain, and sure that you are saved. I want what Peter said when he said this in *2 Peter 1:5*: Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you practice these qualities you will never fall. Good question; what qualities? Just back up, *2 Peter 1:5*: *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with*

knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Now, you may recognize that these qualities sound an awful lot like the fruit of the Spirit, and we spent a lot of time on that. And steadfastness is another name for patience; steadfast, self-control, godliness, another name for goodness; steadfastness, self-control, godliness and love, they are all fruits of the spirit. God even goes so far as to describe a lack of these qualities as being unfruitful. What God is saying here is that if you are one of his own, these fruits will be growing within you. They will mark who you are. This is not something that you do by your own effort; this is something that God's Holy Spirit does within you, so much so that if you don't find these fruits growing within you, then you should wonder if you're one of his in the first place. I mean, Jesus himself said: *"For a tree is known by its fruit,"* in *Matthew 12:33*. I know this sounds awful to say but I am terrified lest any of you fall through the cracks. You see, when God saves

you, he places his Holy Spirit within you, and the Spirit of God wants in your life and mine, what Jesus wanted in his life, and that is above all that God would be glorified, that God's attributes would be demonstrated in some way by your life. Trust me, this is not something that only happens to some select group of super saints. This is something that happens to virtually everybody who is genuinely saved. The Spirit of God who now lives in you, moves you so that you are not divided at all by two different opinions. You know what matters most in your life, and you know it's the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom. And if you can't honestly see that in yourself, consider the possibility that what you believe in and follow is ersatz Christianity.

Now, I've said this before and it bears repeating, the words of this wise old black pastor who may not have been grammatically correct but was absolutely spiritually correct when he said this, he said: "If you is what you was, you isn't." That's brilliant. "If you is what you was, you isn't." I mean, it says it perfectly. If there's no difference in your life since you became a Christian, question whether or not you've become a Christian. I mean, if you can't look back and see where you were verses where you are now and see a real difference, then it's time to seriously wonder whether or not you actually bought the real thing or whether you're locked into the ersatz version.

Let me again bring this back to Elijah's challenge. Let me just repeat it again, 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."* And the people did not answer him a word. Well, see, the people said not a word because their spiritual senses had been so dulled by disobedience, they didn't know which opinion was real. Don't think for a second that that can't happen to us. And don't think that somehow or other we escape having to make a similar choice. The first set of opinions that we looked at this morning was to choose between no God and yes God. I think all of us could settle on the fact that "yes God" is our first answer. The second set of opinions was between the gods of this world and the Christian God. I think we can settle on the Christian God as well. So this third set of opinions that we're looking at, the choice between real Christianity and ersatz Christianity is really the question that Elijah would be asking of us, because it's as great a threat to us as Baal and Asherah were to the Jews. *"How long will you go limping between two different opinions?"*

See, one of my greatest fears as a pastor is that someday on judgment day one of you will ask me why I never warned you, that you were -- what you were believing in was not real, that you were believing you were saved when you were not. Here's another

terrible fact: We know for a fact that Christ said that every church will have in it people who are unsaved. Jesus speaks about the wheat and the tares and how they grow together and then they're collected and they're separated only at the end, and he implies that every single church will have people in it who thought they were saved when they were not, folks who will one day hear the worst words human ears can ever hear, *Matthew 7:23*: "*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*" I want this church to be the exception to that rule. I want every single one of us to realize the danger of ersatz Christianity that tricks you into thinking it's real when it's just an imitation. I want every one of us set, certain, and sure in our opinion that our worship of the Lord Jesus Christ is real not because we're perfect or because we've kept all the rules, but because we've made our calling and election sure by sensing, knowing, and understanding that we are being sanctified, that we're not what we were, and that we're still in the process of becoming like Jesus. And frankly, if I had to choose between the discomfort you might feel wondering whether or not your faith is genuine and the false security you might have in ersatz Christianity that will fail in the end, then I'll take the temporary discomfort. Consider one of the hallmarks of the followers of ersatz Christianity: It's an inability to see, it's an inability to hear, it's an inability to care that what you believe in might not be real. So if God is touching you in any way

about limping between two opinions, consider this a grace, consider it a blessing. I personally beg you, if you have any inklings about whether or not your faith is real, speak to me, speak to one of the elders, let's get this thing straight before it's too late. "If the LORD is God, follow him; if Baal, then follow him." Let's pray.

Father God, I know these are heavy words, these are difficult words, and I frankly hate having to say them; but what I hate even more is the possibility that even one soul in this building could go through life thinking he was squared away, thinking that he was worshiping the real thing when he was buying in fact ersatz Christianity. I pray that you would give every one of us in this building the set, certain, and sure knowledge that they are in the process of being sanctified or a holy terror that they're not, and Lord, if anyone here has that sense that God is speaking to them, I pray that you would connect, that they would connect with us, with me, with the elders, that you would give them the grace of saying now is the time to get this right. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.