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Sermon 416 - 1 Kings 18:24-39

## *The Standout*

The Blumer household is going under some transition, and most specifically it is the gluten free transition. We have been learning the different products that are available, and fortunately there are a ton more options now, and a lot of information. Is anyone else familiar with going gluten free? You or a family member with Celiacs? But our experience is there are some products that are clearly delicious, and others that well...are not. So I have a taste test up and I was hoping for a volunteer who could test out our gluten free products. Our selections are bread, noodles, and brownies. Which one is the best? Yeah it's clear even in gluten free products sweets are the best. They are the standout. Yes there are clear winners in gluten free products, but my experience is there are clear winners in almost every facet of life.

Like when an infant needs to settle down. There was a clear way to do it and to get them to calm down. Maybe for your household it was a binkie, bubba, or blanket. For our little one named Bella during her infancy there was a clear winner. Not a blanket or bottle, but ball room dancing and Josh Groban. I would turn on his cd "You raise me up so I can stand on mountains." One family has found an interesting perhaps not recommended way to stop a tantrum. Video. Yes there are clear winners with babies.

There is a clear winner between these two fast food options isn't there? (McDonalds vs Burger King). A clear winner with laundry detergents. (Tide and Gain) A clear winner between cell phones? Iphone and Android? A clear winner between these two hockey teams. (Blackhawks and Red Wings) And a clear winner between these two teams (Sox and Cubs). There have been clear winners over companies you have worked for, and people you have dated, and stores you have been to.

And if there are clear winners with people, products, and companies is it possible there are clear winners in the spiritual realm? That's what I wish to discuss with you today.

We live in a world of spiritual options don't we? From scientology, to Islam, Christianity, to Buddhism. And if you've been searching you what you can do is end up confused. Wondering what the difference is, wondering if they are all the same, if there is a right or a wrong. And so we're starting this series called the God I wish you knew. And it's to clear the air over what you might have heard of the God of Christianity. To get to the core of who that God is. And I am a Jesus follower so it will be hard to hide my bias as I lead us. But what I'm hoping at the very least is that you will see the God of Christianity is different, and is unable to be lumped together. And perhaps, just perhaps, you'll see that this God stands out in some pretty remarkable ways. May God bless us.

So where we dive in is the Old Testament and with a man named Elijah. And what we have here is a Elijah setting up not a gluten free test, but a spiritual test. A test between the God of Israel and the God called Baal. They are going to ask each God to show up with fire, and the God who does will be the stand out and the clear winner. I invite you to follow along with me as we see this test from 1 Kings. So there it is. One God Baal who did not answer, and one God

who we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who answered with fire. There is much for us to learn from this. Much about the God I wish you knew.

It's interesting how the daily demands of life can wear us down. Because it doesn't really matter what you accomplished two years ago, two months ago, or even two days ago. What matters in our American society is what are you doing today. Kevin Durant got it right when he said. We live in a world of what have you done for me lately. We don't remember the day before sometimes. Think back five, six, years ago what he was doing. It's unheard of. I consider that especially with sports, was reading an article of the top 10 reasons why it's ok to be concerned about the Cubs season. It was just last year they were touted. So a quarter of the way in we've already forgotten last year. Great.

I don't know if you've ever felt the pressure of what have you done for me lately, but it seems to be the essence of what it was to follow Baal. As we dig into the story and Baal and their prophets go first look at what they are doing. **v.28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.** As was there custom. So it was a familiar thing, a common thing, a regular thing for them to offer their blood to get the attention or to appease their God. Baal was a God of demands who among other things like temple prostitution seems to have asked for blood, seems to ask for human sacrifice. The sacrifice Baal demanded was the sacrifice the people fulfilled.

But the God of Elijah is a standout God. For *the sacrifice demanded is the sacrifice God fulfilled*. Yes, Elijah would bring a sacrifice, and yes this wasn't the first sacrifice ever given. It was their practice to come to the temple with goats, doves, oxen, sheep. There was the burnt offering, the grain offering, the wave offering. And what they learned from that is what we still understand that when we sin, it merits something. When an offense occurs a holy God isn't ok with it, or doesn't condon it. No a holy God like a good judge says there are consequences. But this sacrifice of Elijah was not himself, he didn't offer his blood. No this goat was a symbol to a greater sacrifice. It all pointed to sacrifice of Jesus. Consider this from the book of Hebrews, "First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (10:8-10)

And this is the God I wish you knew the God who freely gives and fulfills what the law demanded. The God who looks us square in the eye to tell us once for all it is not about what you have done for me, but about what I have done for you. That I have ransomed you and redeemed you from the consequences of sin because of the greater sacrifice of Jesus given to you out of love on the cross. And because this is the case, I have something to tell you about the God I wish you knew.

The God you may have heard of is one of demands, one of loss, one that says you give to me in order to get anything from me. In fact one of the reasons you may have been holding out on coming to God or church is because you think there is so much to lose. But the reality is, it is only in coming to him that you realize all there is to gain. *The God I wish you knew gives way more than he ever demands*. Peace. Here it is. Purpose. Got that too. Provision. Not a problem. Companionship. Yup. I'm here says your God, says the God, the standout.

Walking with this God is kind of like going to Target. Have you ever gone into Target on a mission to get one thing? We just need some shampoo. Going to get shampoo. Oh but look at what's on sale. Clearance on vitamins you don't say, oh and I forgot about protein bars. Oh and it's Mother's day, pick up the card. I wonder if they have gift cards for mom. Sure enough. And one simple trip for shampoo turns into so much more. You leave with a cart full.

Here's my point you may have come to God for one thing. But I am promise you, you will leave with so much more than you imagined. You will find the gifts he offers are way bigger and way greater than the gifts we might offer him. Yes friends, following this God isn't about what *we* have done lately for him, but what *he* has done lately for us.

But the standout God does more. One of the interesting things Elijah is doing is picking stones for the altar. And how many does he pick? 12. Let's look back at that verse. 31Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." And he was reminding them of all the stories of the past. Of he chose Abraham and brought them out of Egypt. How he saved them time and time again during the period of the judges. He was recounting all the ways that *the standout God was reliable in times of need.*

Something reliable when I was growing up was our microwave. Does anyone remember the ones with the twisty dial? I tell you, you could put the wrong things in there. You could bang the door. And it was built like a tank. Doesn't it seem they just made appliances in general a little more reliable than they are today? I don't remember having more than one tv, or washer. These things just worked. You could count on them.

Even better than appliances from the 70s I believe is the God we've come to rely on. And let me as has he ever been there when you needed him? Has anyone walked long enough with God to know financial need, and when you didn't expect him to answer or seemed too late - it actually worked out. Walked long enough to know your need for strength - it could be your health, it could be your emotions. And he came through. Did he ever answer your need when you were alone. I remember when we moved from El Paso Texas to Beaver Dam Wisconsin. In grade school saying good bye to friends, picking up things new. And I'll never forget my first day at school meeting a guy also named Dustin. And it was just like breathe. I'm going to be ok. Because I have a God whose proved reliable when I was in desperate need.

Elijah was not only reminding the people that but then it was proven. So he calls for fire. **"Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench"**<sup>38</sup> Now it is one thing to burn up something drenched in water, you don't usually drench the wood before a campfire. It's another thing completely to have fire that burns up the stones. I was doing research about how hot it has to be to burn or melt stones, and I read that for some it would be over 1000 degrees. And he does this to prove to Elijah and us - you can count on me. I will never fail you. You call on me, I answer. I'm ever better than that 70s microwave. This is the same God we gather around today. He has not changed. We call he answers. He is reliable friends.

But perhaps the most phenomenal feature of our standout God has to be the one I want to consider next. To set this up I need to tell you a new testament story a familiar story. The story of the prodigal son. And I'm influenced by Andy Stanley I heard him retell the story this way.

So the prodigal. He goes to the father and asks for his inheritance. And basically he's saying, "Can we fast forward to the part where you are dead and I get your money." Reminds me of the Three Amigos, "Can I have your watch when you are dead." And if you think that is insulting today, it was even more insulting back then. We knows what he does. He burns through the money with women and parties. He hits rock bottom and says, we'll let's try to go back. I don't know what my Dad will say, but maybe just maybe he will take me back. So he sets out. He has his apology ready. And the dad sees him. And look at what the verse says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with \_\_\_\_\_ for him." (20). He was filled with disappointment. For this is the son that had made his family the laughing stock. He was filled with anger, after all he should have known better. He was filled with sadness because there was so much to teach his problem child. No what was he filled with? Compassion. And he is a *standout God because he has compassion for lost people*. For those who should have known better. For those who have strayed.

Now this is a tangent. But consider church life. Consider other Christians. Does our church fill in this blank with the same word? When we see people who have disobeyed and should have known better come back? Or is it judgment? Is it perhaps a glare? Is it frustration? What we collectively put in that blank is going to make a world of difference for this church. Dear friends we have the opportunity by the Spirit to act like the Father. To be the visible arms of the Father open wide for whoever comes back or comes the first time. Regardless of their sins, regardless of how long they've been away, regardless of everything.

And isn't that what God did for us at one point or another. When we should have known better, when we were away. When were lost for our own reasons he still showed compassion and open arms. And we found the goodness of our standout God.

And the standout God's compassion for the lost is the reason Elijah shows up as he does. It's the reason for the dual. So God could reach his arms out to those who were lost. Lost not in vegas or licentiousness, but lost to Baal. And God could prove he is God. And they could respond like never before. Respond like prodigals who have finally made it back home. Respond like we did when we first understood the good news of Jesus and that his love, his cross, his life was for us. v.39 "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!". Friends I'm here because the Lord is my God and he didn't just answer with fire for me. He is my fire. He is the Spirit inside me. He is my assurance of love, he is my friend, counselor, and comfort. Is there something in you that says the same? Something that says my God is a standout in the way he gives, in his reliability, and his love. Then there is something for us to do with that knowledge. And that direction was given before this whole account was given.

Here's the direction given in the words of Elijah. "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." (21) If you too have found what I'm convinced of the next step logically is this *Don't waver*.

Oh but wavering is so easy. It's so easy to follow the gods of this age? And like Baal in that day they are so alluring. They call and beckon. There is the god of pleasure. That says follow me. Pursue me. But pleasure doesn't answer when your sick and need healing. There is the god of career. Pursue me it calls. Follow. But career doesn't answer when your relationships with others are following apart. There is the god of family. pursue kids and spouse. This one actually seems pretty good comparatively. But then when you needed them to

come through and they failed you see them for the false gods they can be. Not bad, just not God. It's like Baal when the others really needed him, he was not there. And our heart of repentance today should be over all the times and ways we wavered. We've put other good things before God. And if there is anything standing in our way this day of pursuing God first and best let us put that behind us and God ahead.

And see again the one who sent down fire from heaven that day, he's the same one who sent down his Son from heaven another day. The Son Jesus who is our rescuer. And says that those who hold out hope in him will never be put to shame, because he will always answer.

So what does it look like not to waver? This reminds me of a mom. How many Moms are here? Happy Mother's day once again. And I wanted to ask you when do you stop being a mom? I didn't realize how strong the mom radar was until we had infants, and 24/7 where's the child what's it doing. And the radar doesn't going away when they go to school, it doesn't go away in high school. Even when they move out of the house the mom, never stops being a mom and never stops thinking about her child. Right?

What if it was said of us, man they just didn't know how to turn off that Christian thing. They were Christian on Sunday, Monday and through Saturday. They followed Christ in their homes, they followed Christ when going out, they followed Christ on Friday nights. They followed Christ no matter who they were with. It's like this idea to put him first and seek his will was always on. What if that was said about us? What if we had a Christ radar, that sought him and saw him in all things? I was reading from the psalms and it said, "Blessed are those who always do what is right." 106:3 - How good would that be. Because we had Christ in the forefront of our minds.

And it's good because he's a standout God isn't he. And I think when you find the stand out you should also stick with. Do you think this will be the last of the gluten free brownies we ever make. No we are going to buy them, eat them and delight in them. When you find the stand out you stick with. You ever done that with the person? Maybe you put a ring on their finger because when they stand out you stick with. Maybe you did that with a company or a church or a home or a car - the stand outs you stick with.

May this be said of our walk with God. That we stuck with him because he stood out. That we always did what was right thinking about him at all times in every environment. And may God help us. Let me pray for you:

Dear Jesus, you have stood out as the one to pay what was demanded. You have pursued me once again and you have me. Empower me I pray by your Spirit to now also pursue you. To put in you in all things and at all times. Keep me from wavering so that the the world may know, and I may continue to see how great you are. Give me the wisdom to know what to do with this message, and then the strength to do it. Amen.