“The Confrontation” (1 Kings 18:1-19) Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:25

October 19th, 2025 Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

 It seems that here in Minnesota, or maybe it is a general midwestern thing, but around here, we are obsessed with the weather. Rain or shine, everybody has got a comment to share. We either needed the rain or we’ve had too much rain. We think it should be warmer of this time of year, or maybe we expect it to be colder. And when winter rolls around, we can’t help but share our endless commentary about the driving habits of other people. Yes, we talk a lot about weather. And maybe that should come as no surprise. Here in Minnesota, we get a wide variety of weather. We see all four seasons which is actually one of my favorite things about living in this state. It’s also true that lot of change can happen even from day to day: temperatures swing, and storms break and we find that to be remarkable, so we make remarks. I can remember a few years ago when the city of Forest Lake implemented water bans due to the lack of rain. People were not supposed to be watering their lawns since there was overall less water available. That’s a far cry from the experiences people had in the 1930 dust bowl days. Farmers had no crops and dust storms would literally cover everything in the house. This experience of drought changed people’s lives. It would be hard to take rain for granted again.

 Our story from scripture today takes place in Samaria, where king Ahab rules from his palace. Samaria is basically dead center within the promised land, which scripture describes as a land, “flowing with milk and honey”. They would have had hot and dry summers, but these months would have been offset by wet winters that would refresh the land and allow for the growth of crops and the ability to sustain flocks and herds. As far as the local geography was concerned, this was the place to be. Everywhere else, all around, was barren desert, but in the Promised Land there was plenty of grazing to be had toward the east, and fertile soil in the hills, plus a coastal plain that was very productive. There were many streams and springs flowing throughout the land and many varieties of crops could be supported. But, of course, even the best farmland needs water and this primarily comes from rainfall. Everything depends on water. This is part of the reason why Baal, the supposed storm god, has developed such a large and committed following. If you don’t please the storm god, then you don’t have rain and, as we just said, everything depends on rain. But, we can’t forget, the very first thing Elijah says when he enters the story back in 1 Kings 17, “As surely as the LORD lives, Israel’s God, the one I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain these years unless I say so.”

Elijah decrees something that should be impossible, something that certainly defies the authority and power of Baal. Elijah says that he serves Yahweh, and that he has the say so about this weather business. Later in that same chapter, we saw Elijah fully legitimized as a prophet of God. After Elijah raises a widow’s son from death, she endorses Elijah with these words from 17:24, “Now I know that you really are a man of God and that the LORD’s word is truly in your mouth.” As readers of the story, we had that inkling all along, but the author wants us to take note. Remember what Elijah said in the first place…I serve Yahweh and there will be no rain until I say so. We are to couple these words with this widow’s proclamation, that these words are indeed truly the word of the Lord. We know now what King Ahab and the rest of the people are soon to find out.

Now, if we were shooting the movie, we would use a shot of a barren desert landscape with maybe some wind whipping up the sand. There would be no green plants anywhere and, on the bottom of the scree, we would put up the words, “Three years later”. It’s hard to imagine going that long without rain. It’s hard to come up with reasons as to why Baal would be withholding. You can imagine people are starting to panic and get desperate. They are trying to think through why it might be that Baal has gone silent. Maybe the people were not making full use of the prostitutes in the temple. A fertility god must be honored through such acts. Maybe there needs to be more bloodletting from Baal’s worshippers. Self-inflicted wounds should arouse his attention. It’s been so long now since we’ve seen rain, maybe we ought to start offering our children on Baal’s altars. Surely such a sacrifice would be pleasing and would cause some precipitation to fall.

As we read chapter 18, we see it is Yahweh, Israel’s God who responds. (READ 18:1-6) So, the text tells us outright that Obadiah was devoted to the LORD even though he worked directly for Ahab and his queen Jezebel. Remember, she was the ringleader of Baal worship in Israel at the time. And because she worshipped Baal, she hated Yahweh and proceeded to have the true prophets of God, men like Elijah, systematically extinguished. Ahab, as we will see, is pretty much a bystander in the story. Jezebel goes about her murderous ways while Ahab looks on with no objection or interference. Obadiah, on the other hand, does everything he can to save some lives. He knows of a few good caves and so he hides the prophets away and makes sure to feed them. So we know actually a lot more initial backstory for Obadiah than we do for Elijah. But we do know that Elijah is a legitimate prophet of God and that, for right now, Obadiah is on the hunt for some green grass anywhere.

(READ 18:7-17) Elijah meets up with Obadiah. Obadiah has a deep respect for this legitimate prophet, so much so that he bows down before him. Elijah makes a simple request, “Go tell Ahab, your boss, that I am here.” And Obadiah kind of freaks out. It doesn’t seem like he stops to think about it for very long. The first thing he says is, “What have I done wrong? Why are you doing this to me? It’s been, like, three years since you’ve shown your face, Ahab has been trying to hunt you down that whole time and now I am supposed just go and tell him that you are here all of the sudden? What if the Spirit of God himself whisks you away somewhere else and Ahab never does find you. That’s not going to go well for me. You know who I am right? I’m the guy that risked everything to save some prophets, 100 of them to be exact. I hid them away and took care to them….If I go to Ahab, he will kill me.” It’s a lengthy response to a simple request. But what can we glean from Obadiah’s words? What do his words tell us about the state of his heart? He is nervous and anxious. He has no faith. He is living in fear. He is devoted to the LORD and has even done great deeds for the LORD, but here, in this moment, he has no faith. And this is important because what did we see in the previously mentioned widow when Elijah had a request for her? She trusted. She gave her last bit of bread to Elijah first, before she fed herself or her son. She had faith. A gentile widow, lowly and destitute, a Baal worshipper, exercised faith in Yahweh, while an Israelite servant of the king, functions in fear.

Elijah responds to all this in verse 15 mirroring the words he first spoke in chapter 17, “As surely as the LORD of heavenly forces lives, the one I serve, I will appear before Ahab today.” Obadiah is reassured enough that he does go and speak to Ahab. (READ 18:16-18) When they do meet, Ahab has a choice word for Elijah. He calls Elijah the “troubler of Israel.” In a sense, Ahab is right. Elijah is the one who declared this horrendous drought. There has been no rain for so long and Elijah is the one who brought about all this trouble. But Elijah basically says back to Ahab, “Na-uh, you are! It’s you and your fathers who have brought trouble because you have deserted the LORD’s commands. Look around Ahab, look at how the people worship. Temple prostitution, inflicting wounds on themselves, offering their children in the flames all in the name of false gods. Do these things not signify trouble?” Then Elijah sets up a contest. (READ 18: 19-20) He is proposing to face off with 850 servants of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The parameters of this contest are yet to come, but Ahab is pleased with his odds. One lonely prophet of Yahweh, Elijah, against a mob of Baal priests. So Ahab sends a message and everyone gathers to witness this contest.

We will get to the rest of the chapter next week. If you can’t stand a cliffhanger and you need to know what happens next, please, please, please, read on ahead. But I want to stop for a moment and think this through. I have heard it said before that sin makes you stupid. And stupid is one of those words that we frown upon using when we are speaking about other people. We don’t allow for it in our home and in most cases, you probably shouldn’t use the word stupid. But that is the phrase as I have heard it, “Sin makes you stupid.” And I think we see this playing out quite clearly when it comes to king Ahab. Remember now, Ahab has married Jezebel and he has let her run wild with her Baal cult. Baal worship has run rampant in Israel. And throughout these years of drought, Ahab has been on the lookout for Elijah, presumably to kill him. And, we might also assume that the proclamation of drought has been ringing in Ahab’s mind for the last three or so years. When he wakes up to another dry and dewless morning, surely he can see Elijah’s face in his mind’s eye declaring drought until he says otherwise. On the constant lookout for rain or even a patch of green grass, this drought almost becomes a character within the story. And now, finally these two men meet and Ahab’s best line is to call Elijah the troubler of Isarel.

 I hope you can see why this is stupid. Ahab attributes this drought to the words spoken by Elijah. Ahab declares that all this trouble is Elijah’s fault. The drought is brought upon by Elijah and his God, meaning the drought is not an issue concerning Baal. In three years, Baal had done nothing to relieve the trouble caused by Elijah. In a very insane way, Ahab is openly admitting that Elijah is a legitimate prophet of God! But his sin has made him stupid. Ahab is caught up in a worldview that worships rain, and fertility, and lust. He has no capacity for rational thought, no appreciation for truth. The fact is Elijah is effective; his God is powerful. A proper response would include repentance, turning away from sin, and aligning with the words God has already spoken. But Ahab is entrenched in sin. He is stupid. His response to the observable power of the true God is to try to stop God. He digs his heels in even deeper, and descends even lower into idol worship. Stupid.

 Now, before we are too quick to judge dumb ol’ Ahab here, we have a golden opportunity to take a look at our own life. Is our mind free and clear to worship God as is fitting for the Almighty Creator of the universe? Or do we have a block in our minds? Some sin that clouds out wisdom? I think we all have some areas within us that can get stupid like Ahab. There are times when we are quick to dismiss the power of God and pursue some other dead-end path. There are times when we persist in sin even though all the evidence points to the devastating effects. And when we look around us and see nothing but barrenness and dust, like Ahab, we blame God for our situation. Sin makes us stupid because it severs the connection between our actions and our consequences. We no longer consider the reality of cause and effect. Elijah makes it clear in verse 18 when he says that he has not troubled Israel. But he says to Ahab, “You brought on this trouble when you deserted the LORD’s commands.”

 Sin makes us stupid, and it happens when we desert the Lord. I have seen this play out in the lives of many old friends from my bible college days. At that time, we were all young and eager to get involved in ministry, we were all committed to the Lord. But as we graduated and life moved on, over the years, I saw more and more of those old friends turn away from the truth and as they did, their lives became a mess. They began making decisions that did not lead to what God had in store for them. And it’s not as though these people woke up one day and decided to discard their faith. It was a slow progression, a process of taking on the ideals and ideologies of this world and trying to mix them with a Christian worldview. Sin makes us stupid because we think we can serve two masters. When that happens, the faith that once defined us becomes diluted and contorted to the point where it is no longer applicable.

 None of us are safe from the stupidity of sin. That’s why it is so nefarious. It slowly blinds us to truth and once we are blind, well, then it’s very hard to see. It’s very hard to find the truth again once you’ve been blinded. Proverbs 24:7 lays it right out when it says “Wisdom is beyond foolish people.” Paul echoes this as well in 1 Corinthians 1. He says that the message of the cross seems like foolishness. To the world, the gospel story makes no sense. The wisdom of God seems like foolishness. That is why we so desperately need his word! To fill us in, to guide us so that we know the way in which we should go. It is a long road out of stupidity. But there is hope. Even for Ahab as we will see eventually. But we must take seriously the words of Jesus himself: We cannot serve two masters. We either side with Yahweh or with Baal. We are either getting wiser or stupider.

 Don’t desert the Lord. Don’t put aside his ways. Trust in him. Trust that his ways are good and right even if you don’t fully understand. When trouble starts to gather around you, don’t insist on pursing your own path that has proven not to work. Be smart! Turn to the Lord in repentance. Change your focus, change your behavior and you will find that there is no contest between Baal and Yahweh. Amen.