

Keep fighting

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[0 : 00] Please turn to 1 Kings 18 if this is the first time you are here. Let me explain that we have been going through 1 Kings. We have got to chapter 18. As I said earlier, although it was advertised that we do the whole lot and it is a brilliant chapter.

In fact, we will just take it a bit of time. We will do these first 18 verses which will leave us all being well a useful amount of time to look at the splendid events of the rest of the chapter.

Brothers and sisters, we are in a warfare. If you are a Christian, you are in a warfare. Our enemy deploys lethal force and will kill us.

Body, if possible. Body and soul, if possible. What are our options to defeat the enemy? Not that we are conscious of persecution so much as distraction and temptation in our neck of the woods.

But many, many Christians face persecution, have done in the past, will do in the future. What are the options? So there is the no compromise option.

[1 : 14] The option of confrontation, of denouncing the government, the state, of being separate from it and having nothing to do with the state.

So I am not quite sure. I put Peter and John there but I am not quite sure whether that is quite what they did. There was a point at which they said when they were hauled up before the authorities, the authorities said, don't talk about Jesus anymore.

And they said, we will obey God rather than man in this matter. So I think I have actually put them in the wrong heading. From what the little I understand from talking to Katya, I think this is what the Ukrainian Baptists did.

Did they say that you are not allowed to vote in the state elections? You are not allowed to be going along with what the state does? Is that correct, Stefano? Yeah.

So the option of no compromise, separation, complete. But another option of submission up to the point of sin.

[2 : 14] So here is the pagan state. And in a sense you collaborate with the state. And this is what Daniel did. So he was a high up official in a pagan state, wasn't he?

And he served the king up to the point where the king told him to do something that God had forbidden. So he wouldn't pray to his king.

He said, I'll only pray to the Lord. So there's a sort of collaboration being part of the state. But at a certain point saying, this far I go and no further. And Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did that, didn't they?

They were good citizens up to the point where the king said, worship my statue. And they said, no, up with that we will not put. There's a line there and we won't cross it.

I don't know whether in contemporary politics and spirituality, whether something like the Christian Institute would say that we don't denounce the state.

[3 : 16] We call on the state. We call on the court system to uphold Christian freedoms. So it's a little bit of a muddled introduction. But you get the general idea.

And it's a question that is really increasingly a question for Christian teachers. Do we... You've got a young man looking for you at the back there.

Christian teachers. What are our freedoms to speak about the gospel? Where do we draw the line? Where do we not draw the line? And in the National Health Service, am I right in saying that somebody was at some point brought before a tribunal for offering to pray with a patient?

Is that correct? I think that's correct, isn't it? What about parents? What do you do about the school system? Do you say, we'll collaborate with the state school system, but there will be a point at which we will protest and withdraw our children from lessons?

Or do you withdraw from the system altogether? And if you're a Christian politician, what would you do? I mean, is it right to be a Christian politician? There are Christian politicians. How do they vote on sensitive and difficult issues?

[4 : 24] If you're a trader, you know the difficulty that traders got into in Northern Ireland, I think it was, wasn't it? Refusing to ice a particular cake with a particular slogan or something like that.

So where do we stand on this? And we work against the system from the outside or within the system. And in the passage that we've got, we've got two options here of how this works.

A particular option of particular interest on the second of these two options. Here's a bit of history just to remind you. We're looking at the North Kingdom known as Israel.

After the golden years of Solomon, the southern kingdom have their kings and the northern kingdom have these seven kings. Jeroboam, who brought in the golden calves, which I always think are up there.

I don't know why I think they're up there. I always imagine that they're up there. The calves that he said you to worship these. Behold the gods who brought you out of Egypt.

[5 : 26] And worshipping the Lord in the visible shape of a calf. A terrible, terrible exchange. A terrible sin. He was followed by Nadab. He was followed by Barshah. He was followed by Ella.

He was followed by Zimri, who reigned for a whole seven days. And then Omri and his son Ahab. And as we went down there, do you remember it got worse and worse?

Because Ahab brought in the worship of this little chap with this statue in the Louvre, which I think Maria and I have walked past, about this tall statue of Baal, the god of the Canaanites.

And so we have moved from a completely dysfunctional worship of the Lord to the worship of another god. And it's at this point that Elijah the prophet comes in.

And this is God's antidote to this terrible decline. Decline, yeah. So, just to remind us of what happened sometime previously.

[6 : 30] Elijah had been accommodated by a widow. Her son had died. And we've seen already the power of Elijah's prayer. It's in chapter 17.

He prayed, oh Lord God, why have you brought evil on this widow that I'm staying with by causing her son to die? And he prayed and he asked for the return of life.

And remember this is peculiar. Three times he stretched himself out on the boy, sort of imparting life. Lots of good things happen in threes, interestingly. Or after three times or three days or three years.

He prayed and let this life return. Let this boy's life return to him. And he lived. Woohoo, whoopee. And his mum's pleased as well. So, that gives us a flavour of what God is able to do. Just in that one incident, people would look back in generations to come.

[7 : 34] God can do that. And they would think of their nation that went worse and worse and actually ended up being sent into exile. And being like dry bones.

And they'd think, can these dry bones live? Well, God could lift, raise the dead son. If he could raise the dead son, if his life can return. Then that gives us enormous hope.

Maybe God could do that for our nation. Maybe God could do that for his church. Maybe God can do that for our neighbours. Maybe God can do that for members of our family.

He can make dead people live. Maybe God can do that for our children. Maybe God can do that for our children. So, that arms us with a great deal of hope. So, let's see what happens as the story goes on.

So, we meet Elijah. Elijah, whose name means Jah. Yah is God.

[8 : 32] El means God and Yah is short for Yahweh. Yahweh is God. So, we know which side of the fence he's on, don't we? Is he a Baal worshipper or a Yahweh worshipper, a Lord worshipper?

Well, the clue is in his name. Yah is God. Yahweh is God. And he had, let's just think, confronted the king and queen, particularly the king.

In chapter 17, verse 1, Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe and Gilead said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.

That's Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel, the daughter of Eph Baal of Sidon. Her name, Jezebel, means Baal exalts.

Can you guess which side she's on from her name? Baal exalts. And he had said, Elijah had said, The Lord, L-O-R-D, in our Bible's capital letters, capital L-O-R-D, it means God's Hebrew personal

name, Yahweh, as we understand it's pronounced.

[9 : 50] As he is the real God, is the living God, he says, there will be no rain except at my word.

And you remember, you will remember, or perhaps I'll just remind us, this is not just an arbitrary thing. It's not just that we like rain and rain is useful. This is specifically part of the terms and conditions, T and C, terms and conditions of Israel's covenant with the Lord.

When the Lord first took Israel and said, Of all the nations on the earth, you'll be the one that I teach, look after, you'll be like my only son. If you, you know, I'm going to lift you and redeem you and save you, and I want you to be faithful to me.

And if you are, I will bless you, and we'll be just like that together. And if you don't, I will let you know about it. And one of the particular things is, if you are serving other gods, I will withhold rain.

There will be no rain. So this is what this is about. Elijah's saying, remember those terms and conditions. Remember what, you know, when you are married, remember what you promised, when you married the Lord all those years ago.

[11 : 03] No rain shows this is going wrong. Except, and the, this will only change at my word. It just shows how important Elijah's word is.

And it is incidentally one in the eye for Baal, because he was supposed to bring the rain, and he obviously couldn't manage it. So where are we now? Where are we going in this story? We're going, we're going from chapter 17, verse 1, there will be no rain, to end of chapter 18, where it says, verse 48, verse 45, get new glasses.

Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, and the wind rose, a heavy rain came on. That's where we're going. We're going from rain to no rain. So this was saying, there'll be no rain, and it'll just be hot and dusty, to go to this point where Elijah says, there will be rain.

Okay, that's where we're going to. But the question is how we get there. Okay, because the first one just happened in one verse, but we're going to take a whole chapter getting to the second, this second encounter.

It's going to be a really interesting journey. And in chapter 18, first 18 verses, we'll see that Elijah doesn't go direct to Ahab.

[12 : 23] Oh, there's the rain. He doesn't go direct. He goes via this person, Obadiah. Now, that's what's in the story, and I find that interesting.

And I've pondered it, and actually since I wrote this all out last night, I thought, no, I haven't quite got the hang of this. There's more to this. That's the trouble with sleeping on something, isn't there? Why does he go through Obadiah?

Why do we have these 18 verses in which Elijah has this conversation with Obadiah, doesn't meet Ahab, but that's what we're going to.

So that's what I'd like us to think about. And I think there's a lesson for Obadiah. I think that's what it is. In the ravine, I think it was a testing of Elijah, and then there was a lesson for the woman, the widow woman, and this actually, I know we're heading towards the rain thing, but I think on the way, this is a lesson for Obadiah, and a lesson therefore for us.

There's that three and a half year gap between the no rain and the rain. The three and a half years turns out to be significant as a symbolic number in the book of Revelation, this three and a half year period.

[13 : 47] So we're going there. And in this three and a half year period, what do we have? We have a warning word from God. So God is saying, there will be no rain, and this is the reason, because you've turned away to false gods.

That's why you're in the pickle you're in. And it's a partial judgment, so it's unpleasant. God has withheld something good.

And it also functions as a warning. So every day, when the weather forecast lady comes on Samaritan television and says, well, strangely enough, there is no fronts coming in, there is no showers, and there is no rain fringing in.

In fact, it's as dry as it was yesterday. And with that, I wish you a good day. So every time she says that, they think, what is God saying to us? Answer. What God is saying is, turn back to me.

That's what he's saying. Every day, turn back to me. So God is using the methodology of judgment and warning and withholding something, and he's going to go to favor and blessing, which is what the rain symbolizes.

[15 : 06] But how does he get there? How do we get from the no rain to the rain? So, answer A. I've got some multiple choice questions this morning.

Via a wide, widespread, and deep repentance as the nation turns from Baal to the Lord. That's what's really needed.

Now, ponder that, because that turns out to be quite important. How do we get from one place to the other place? What we really want is the whole nation to say, we got this totally wrong.

We want them to confess sin, to feel terrible about what they've been doing, and to turn in a heartfelt way to the Lord. Answer B.

a confession of truth that Baal is not God and the Lord is God. That would be a good start.

[16 : 12] So, if we could say, everybody is saying, we were wrong on that, Baal is not the Lord, the Lord is the Lord. Not, not so heartfelt, not so deep, but they say it.

Well, that would be a good start. Option C, no real change at all. So, God has given them this three and a half year period, and, does God just send the rain, even though there's been no real change at all?

That would be a great pity, wouldn't it? It would be an awful shame, if that three and a half years was wasted. It's a good question, you know, it's a good question.

How does it, according to the book of Revelation, and I won't give you all the details, but I could, if you had the time, the world that we're in now, is in a, as it were, three and a half year period, just like this, where God withholds things, God allows bad things to happen, then, Jesus said, there will be wars, and rumors of wars.

There will be the four horsemen riding out, famine, war, civil war, hardship, disease, this is, why, why does God allow that in this period?

[17 : 41] Answer, he is saying, repent. He is saying, to every man and woman and boy and girl, this world is not right, at a profound level, and it's, and at the profoundest level, it's because, you are not worshipping me.

In the book of Revelation, it says, and still people did not turn, from the idols of gold and silver and wood and stone that they worshipped. After all this, there is a spiritual message, to war and conflict, and it is God saying, repent, turn round, round.

Turn to the Lord. Romans tells us, that the wrath of God, is being revealed, from heaven, against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men.

That's why the world is like it is, because God is, warning, and showing, you need to turn. Only the church will tell you that.

The political commentators will tell you, it's because of this and that, and economic commentators, will tell you that and that. That's not the profound enough answer. The profound enough answer is God. He's telling people to turn.

[19 : 06] One day, there will be no wars, there will be no sorrow, there will be no sighing, all these things will be passed away, there will be no death. That's the day when Jesus Christ returns.

Let's get back to the story. So, Obadiah, and, Ahab. Chapter 18, verse 1, a long time in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.

So, Elijah went, to present himself to Ahab. Now, the famine was severe, in Samaria, and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace.

There's Obadiah. His name means, servant of Yah, so, we could guess from his name, which side he's on. Fortunately, his master never quite spotted that.

He was over the household of Ahab. It says, he was a devout believer. Literally, he feared the Lord greatly. That's what it says, he feared the Lord greatly.

[20 : 14] And while Jezebel was killing off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets, and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water. So, here's Obadiah, who feared the Lord greatly.

Jezebel was, there she is, there's Jezebel, busy cutting off the Lord's prophets. That's what she was doing. There she is, thinking about it. There's the Lord's prophets. I've given them cloaks, so you can tell that they're prophets.

And she's busy cutting them off. She's busy cutting off their heads. She's busy killing them, getting rid of them, exterminating them, whatever you will. And Obadiah had taken some of the prophets, there they are, heading for a cave.

It's rather too grassy for a famine, but it is, there they are. And he's taken them in fifty times two is a hundred. And he has brought them, look at that.

He's brought them bread and water. So that's what he's been doing. And interestingly, through the story, prophets get provided for.

[21 : 16] Elijah got provided for by ravens, who brought him roadkill. And I don't know whether that's particularly appetizing. They didn't really know what they were doing, but the Lord used them to provide for Elijah.

And then the Lord provided using a widow, who I think to begin with, did not really understand very much, but came to a position of definite faith.

And that's the process she went through. And the Lord used her to provide for Elijah. That's right, isn't it? And here's Obadiah, and he's providing for prophets in a different way.

It's not roadkill, at least we presume it's not roadkill. And he does know what he's doing. And I think the Bible is very clear that he's showing great courage and conviction to do this.

So he's like the chancellor of the exchequer in Ahab's court. And on the side, quietly, he's arranging for prophets to be hidden.

[22 : 23] If Ahab caught him, he'd cut his head off. But he's courageously arranging for these prophets to be hidden and provided for. So there's Obadiah.

In times of pagan power and lethal danger, God is able to give special protection to his people. You notice he didn't do it to all of them, because some of the prophets did get their heads chopped off.

But some of them God specially protected.

It's like the book of Revelation. And I would hazard a guess that God is doing the same sort of thing in North Korea, where it's highly illegal to be a Christian.

Some Christians are becoming martyred, and some are being marvelously, strangely, miraculously provided and protected. And in Syria, where, as we know, terrible things are happening, there are Christian people.

Some of them are having their heads chopped off by Islamic extremists, and others are being wonderfully, remarkably, amazingly protected.

[23 : 30] Let's see what happens next. Verse 5. Ahab had said to Obadiah, Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so we will not have to kill off any of our animals.

So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction, and Obadiah in another.

So there's Obadiah going in one direction, there's Ahab going in one direction. Don't forget the queen, who's trying to kill off the prophets.

Go through all the land to the springs and ravines, and Ahab is thinking, I don't want cutting off any mules. I've got mules and donkeys, animals.

Don't want them killed. Don't want them killed. He's quite happy for his wife to be killing off prophets of the Lord. It's the same word. It's an ironic comparison, isn't it?

She doesn't, you know, more prophets killed, oh, whatever. How many donkeys have we got left? You know, it's a strange priority, but that's what he was like.

[24 : 36] They divided the land and crossed over it. It's a little bit like Joshua. It's a Joshua sort of word, dividing the land, crossing over, but it's a very strange way of doing it.

They go in different directions. Jezebel's cutting off the prophets of the Lord, and Ahab is worried about cutting off livestock. It's terrible, really, isn't it?

We ought to care about our brothers and sisters being persecuted for faith. We shouldn't be like Ahab, who was only worried about his mules.

What happens next? While, so this is verse seven. As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground and said, is it you, is it really you, my Lord Elijah? There he is. Whoa, who's this in front of us?

[25 : 40] And he bows down and speaks to him. Don't forget what Jezebel's doing to the prophets. So, Elijah, what sort of message have you got?

How have you been? How's your family? How's things going? None of that. You don't get any of that sort of stuff, do you? Is it you? Yes. Verse eight. Go and tell your master, Elijah's here.

Now, this is what I want you to do, just in a couple of words, really. You go and tell Ahab, behold Elijah. Right, off you go. That's it. No pleasantries. I don't know what sort of person Elijah was.

He seems to be a very commanding personality. And he does seem to have a little bit of abrasiveness that people every now and again say, you've come to kill me, haven't you? This is what, you know.

No social skills. I don't know. I don't know. But it's an interesting thought. I mean, we get very little information about him. He just appears, tells people stuff.

[26 : 43] They sort of go, ooh, yeah, all right, okay. And then occasionally they go, you've come to kill me, haven't you? Sorry. There we are. So Elijah says, go and say to your master, Elijah is here.

Or literally, behold Elijah. Off you go. Now, this is the point at which Obadiah has to learn some things. And I want you to try and think, we're trying to think our way through, through this one.

So he says, what have I done wrong? Verse nine. What have I done wrong? What is my sin that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?

Jezebel's been doing this to the prophets. And you're just lining me up to do the same thing, aren't you? A bit like the woman. Do you remember? She said, have you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?

And Obadiah says, is this what you're up to? You just, you know, you just kind of get even with me over something because you're telling me to stick my head in a noose, aren't you?

[27 : 52] It's not the way of God to do anything which really diminishes us. God's way of enriching us may seem strange, but God never ever does anything to his people to really to hurt them, to be cruel to them, to remove from them in a way of callousness which he won't somehow make up.

So it's a wrong thought really. Have you come just to kill me off? And I'd like us to look at the reasoning that he gives. So let's look at, what have I sinned that you give me to Ahab to be killed? And what he's afraid of is that if he goes back and says, Elijah's here, then Ahab will come and he won't be able to find him. And then Ahab will say, you idiot, you know, you've wasted my time, you've wound me up, you've given me wrong information, right, off with your head.

That's what he's worried about. So what do you think about, what do you think about Obadiah in this? So we've got three choices, A, B and C.

Is he gung-ho? Gung-ho means that he's just enthusiastically saying yes to everything without really thinking of the consequences. Yeah, I'll do that. Who'd like to go to Ahab and volunteer to be killed?

[29 : 28] Yeah, yeah, I'll do that. Yeah, yeah, no problem. Is it A, gung-ho? Is he B, excessively fearful? Oh, I can't do that.

Is he C, sensibly cautious? I'm not really quite sure. I don't think it's A. He's certainly not gung-ho, is he? I mean, how did he get to be Chancellor of the Exchequer?

By being prudent. A little political reference there. So he's a prudent man, isn't he?

He's thinking about this like a council officer or somebody drafting legislation in Parliament. Oh, let's just see. He's working his way down through the list.

Is he excessively fearful? Does he overdo it? Or is he sensibly cautious? So I offer that as a question rather than an answer.

[30 : 28] I think the people who would have read this later on, perhaps in Babylon, where they'd settled down, they got themselves settled, they built houses, which is what the Lord had said, planted vineyards, which is what the Lord had said, still worshipping the Lord, and then the Lord might have said to them, I want you to go back to Jerusalem.

And they said, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, that's a bit dangerous, isn't it? There's a question where sensibly cautious becomes excessively fearful.

That's a question, isn't it? Verse 10. As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or a kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you.

This is reasons, Elijah, why I'm a little bit troubled about doing what you've told me to do. He's been looking for you everywhere, and whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear that they could not find you.

And now you're going to say, I'm supposed to go to him and say, behold, Elijah. Surely as the Lord lives, Ahab has sent all the nations seeking you, and he made them swear they could not find you.

[31 : 39] Now what's this? This is really a question about Ahab's policy now. Is it A, making truth known to all nations? Because he apparently goes to all nations.

I presume that's a slight exaggeration, but he's gone to the different nations around, asking where Elijah is. Would you say that that was evangelism? Would you say it was B, honest seeking of

truth?

Or would you say it was C, deliberately suppressing truth by going to great lengths? I think it's C, isn't it? I think Ahab is certainly not evangelizing.

This is sort of the opposite of evangelism, isn't it? It's sort of evangelism in some sort of caricature, reverse caricature. Instead of going out to all nations to give them good news, it's going out to all nations to stamp on good news.

Is it honest seeking truth? It's a good question, isn't it? Is he going, I'd really like to find Elijah because I'd really like to know what the word of the Lord is.

[32 : 43] It isn't, is it? He's going out of his way. If he can find Elijah, if I could just find him, I'd squash him. Interestingly, the Bible poses the same sort of question about human nature.

What is human nature? Does human nature have enlightenment to spread? And the Bible is actually very pessimistic and says actually no. Human beings are naturally in darkness.

They don't have any light to spread. Do human beings honestly seek the truth? And the Bible says no, actually they don't. Because human beings naturally love darkness rather than light.

So it's a very insulting thing if you've come this morning seeking. Please don't be insulted but God's saying you're only here because I put that in your heart.

If I'd left you to yourself you wouldn't be interested at all. People don't honestly seek the truth unless I put it in their hearts. What they actually do is see. The Bible says this is the natural condition of humankind.

[33 : 50] Even though they know about God, they suppress the truth. they find it and squash it. It's a very insulting thing but the Bible is actually not a very tactful book.

Let's go on. You might ask yourself. So, Obadiah and Elijah, you go to Ahab, say behold Elijah.

And this is what his next problem is. Verse 11, so you tell me to go to my master and say Elijah is here. I don't know where the spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you.

If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he'll kill me. So, this is the bit that he's worried about that the spirit of the Lord will whoosh Elijah somewhere. He says, I have no idea where the spirit of the Lord will carry you.

It's the same phraseology about what did happen later on. I always get Elijah and Elisha mixed up. Who was carried up into heaven in a whirlwind? Whatever you just said, that's the one.

[34 : 52] Yeah. So, it did happen but in this case, he's saying, you see, what's going to happen is I'm going to go and tell Elijah and then this whoosh will happen and you won't be here and I'll be killed.

The spirit of the Lord may lift you to I know not where and Ahab will kill me. That sword keeps on reappearing, doesn't it? So, what is this? Is it A, a failure to grasp the supernatural aspect of Elijah's ministry?

Is it B, mistrusting the prophet's word? Is it C, mistakenly thinking that the spirit's mysterious word is capricious?

I need to explain the word capricious. Capricious means you can't depend from one day to the next what will happen because things just go off in all directions. So, if you're a capricious person, you say to somebody, meet you tomorrow at 11 o'clock for coffee and then, when you wake up, you think, do you know, I'll go to Grimsby today and you just go to Grimsby and there's somebody waiting for you.

I don't know why you'd think to do that. You know, somebody's waiting for you at 11 o'clock, have the coffee and they think, where are they? Where's this person? That's being capricious. And what is going on here with Obadiah?

[36 : 06] You see, because he's been told, very simple, this is what you do, go to Ahab, say, behold Elijah, job done. You say, oh no, I can't do that. You know, I can't do that.

So, do you think it's A, a failure to grasp the supernatural aspect of Elijah's ministry? No. No, he knows it's supernatural, doesn't he? Is it B, mistrusting the prophet's word?

I think there is a bit of that, isn't there? Because, Elijah's saying, this is what you go and do, you just do that, trust me on this, and he says, I can't trust you on that. Is it mistakenly thinking that the Spirit's mysterious work is capricious?

I think he's doing that as well, isn't he? He's thinking, he's sort of blaming the Holy Spirit as being unreliable. Really, isn't he? So, I think Obadiah has some lessons to learn himself.

Oh, sorry about this. Let's see what he says next. You've heard, my Lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord. I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.

[37 : 11] And now you're telling me, go to my master and say, behold Elijah. So, let's not forget the prophets in the cave. So, is this, sorry that they didn't come up in order.

So, is this, see, what's he saying here? Oh, the prophets in a cave, come on, you don't expect me to go to Ahab with this behold Elijah stuff today, do you? Is it, A, thinking that he has earned his salvation by good works?

B, is he saying that his faith isn't just empty talk? Is it, C, using experiences in the past to excuse shortcomings in the present?

See, I lose, that's a question. That's interesting. Well, I would scrub out A, actually, because I think, what, the Bible says he feared the Lord greatly.

So, I think the Bible gives him credit. That was a courageous thing to do. I don't think he was trying to earn his salvation by that. I think he feared the Lord. It says he feared the Lord from my youth, it says, doesn't it, in verse 12.

[38 : 21] I, your servant, have worshipped the Lord since my youth. So, I'm not going to, I think his idea of serving the Lord, I don't think he's, I think he's held up as a good example.

I don't think he thinks he's earned his salvation by good works. And I think, B, he is showing that he puts his money where his mouth is. He says, I fear the Lord.

And he does something at risk to himself, you know, considerable risk to himself. You know, I did that. And he did.

And it is showing that faith isn't just empty talk. So, I think we could learn something. If we were in a situation, you know, we were an occupied, you know, let's suppose that we were in a country where it was illegal to be a Christian.

And, you know, certainly illegal to be a pastor. And some, somebody in the congregation had smuggled me and Chris into their garden shed and kept on giving us beef burgers and chips and things.

[39 : 26] I think that was good, you know, good stuff. I'd be very pleased about that. So, faith isn't just empty talk. But I do think that what he's saying is, look, Elijah, I've served you in the past.

I've been to Sunday school. You know, parents are Christians. I've been through all that. And I've done great things in the past and it cost me something to do that. But please don't ask me to do it today.

Please don't ask me to stick my neck on the block today. But Elijah is asking him to stick his neck on the block today, isn't he? He's saying, today you need to stand up for what you believe in a way that you didn't have to yesterday and it's perhaps the biggest challenge to your faith ever.

But I want you to do this today. Just trust me in this. And Obadiah is saying, I'm not quite sure I can manage this. And I think Obadiah has to learn that even as somebody with a brilliant track record, and a lot of experience, he's still got to stand up for the Lord in today's challenge.

It's a rather sobering thought, isn't it? Because some of us might be getting to the point where we think, well I've done my Christian life bit. I've done quite a bit of that. Don't ask me to stick my neck out for anything else.

[40 : 49] But the Lord says, no, so long as you're here on this earth, you need to, if I tell you to stick your neck out for me, you stick your neck out for me. Do you understand what I mean by stick your neck out? Take a risk.

Yeah. So, verse 15. Elijah says, look, I am going to do this.

I am going to go before the king. As the Lord Almighty lives whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today.

And that's as good as it's going to get for Obadiah. He's just going to get it emphasized. It's a very solemn undertaking as surely, get these words, as the Lord of hosts, translated, the Lord Almighty. The Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand as surely as that, I'm going to see Ahab today. Brilliant. Certainty, isn't it? Brilliant. Stirring.

[41 : 55] That's the sort of person Elijah was. So, Obadiah did go to meet Ahab and told him and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

So, we've taken 15 verses to get to Obadiah doing what he was told. And that's just interesting, isn't it? I mean, sometimes God takes time to work things through with us, which is what it's doing, just

to progress the story.

God's very patient. Verse 16, so Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him and Ahab went to meet Elijah and then you get this fantastic encounter and Ahab goes first.

There he is. You troublemaker! And how are you? And how's your family? How's your wife doing? You troublemaker!

Got you. Troublemaker is the word Akan, Achor. Remember the Valley of Achor? You remember Achor? His name means trouble.

[43 : 05] The valley is the valley of trouble. And you wonder what parents were doing giving their children names like this. Trouble. What should we call a sweet baby? We'll call him Trouble, shall we?

Or Stinker. What is that? Ba-Shar, Stinker. I don't know whether the writer of the Hebrew text has done some little jokes with the words, but anyway. You Akan!

Troublemaker. To which Elijah, I don't think Elijah would make a good pastor or a diplomat.

He's sort of more of a thug really, isn't he? He just, like, who was the guy who came down from Scotland and did those debates for us? David Robertson.

Yes, that's right. Do you remember David Robertson? He was asked a question about, we had a sort of open forum down at the library and somebody asked him a question about white Christians being involved in slavery and David Robertson, that's the stupidest question I've ever heard.

[44 : 07] You know perfectly well that I was absolutely factually incorrect. See, whereas I would have said, oh, that's a very interesting question. But he's, you're stupid. You know, like that. Anyway, so this is Elijah.

So, you troublemaker, you're the troublemaker. That's what he says, isn't it? It's you, troubler of Israel. I have not made trouble for Israel, Elijah says, but you and your family have.

You have abandoned the Lord's commands and followed the Baals. You've abandoned the Lord. You've followed the Baals. So, we're getting towards the end.

Whose side would you be on? Who would you be following? Would you be going with the contemporary culture? What's the matter with worshipping Baal?

Very nice little statues of Baal. It's costly to worship the Lord. Who's right? Is the king right? The trouble is really caused by this religion, this rather cranky Israelite religion.

[45 : 14] That's the trouble. Get rid of that. We'd be okay. I mean, Richard Dawkins would be up for that, wouldn't he? Get rid of those religious people. They cause the trouble. Or would you be saying, well, actually, it's you cause the trouble.

Worshipping the wrong God. That's where the trouble comes from. So, what about us? What sort of fight do we fight in our corner of the war?

Sometimes, sometimes, we might have to be in a place of confrontation. At the right time, in the right way. Much of the time, I think we're going to be in Obadiah's situation that we cooperate, we submit, but we must say, it's only up to a point.

There comes a point at which we have to abandon security and secrecy and stick our necks out for the Lord. We will be rejected by the unbelieving world at some point, in some way, and that might even include the point of death.

We have to accept that as Christians. That's part of the deal. We give our lives to the Lord. He died on a cross. We take up a cross and follow him. It doesn't always come to that, but in principle, that's the deal we're in.

[46 : 39] And we're to keep fighting. We're not to say, oh, I fought for the Lord last week, I fought for the Lord since my youth, but I'm not fighting today. No, we can't do that. We've got to keep fighting. Whatever challenge the Lord gives to us, we say, okay, I'll do that.

I'll trust you on this. The Lamb has overcome. The Lamb has triumphed. Jesus triumphed at the cross and he makes this promise to him who overcomes, to the person who overcomes, the person who keeps fighting and keeps trusting and keeps being a Christian and saying they're a Christian and being willing to say they're a Christian.

He will give hidden manna. It's another promise, a provision promise, isn't it? Like the bread and the water. He will give food that the rest of the world knows nothing about.

Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together.