

# Two Men, Two Masters, Two Missions

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon delves into the contrasting lives of two men, Elijah and Obadiah, serving different masters and missions. Elijah, chosen by God, boldly confronts King Ahab with God's judgment, while Obadiah, though claiming devotion to God, compromises by serving a wicked king. The sermon challenges listeners to examine who they are truly serving and to respond to God's call with radical obedience and repentance, emphasizing the importance of being sensitive to God's leading and avoiding compromise.*

**Duration:** 40:27

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 16:25, 1 Kings 17:1, 1 Kings 18:1, 1 Kings 18:3, 1 Kings 18:8, James 5:17, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Revelation 3:16

**Topics:** "Radical Obedience", "Avoiding Compromise"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Well, if you would like to open your Bibles, if you're following me in your Bibles, I'll be in the first book of Kings in the Old Testament. And the title that I have given to this message is Two Men, Two Masters, and Two Missions. Before we actually look at the text itself, I'll just say this much, the particular period of time that we're going to visit is a very dark period in the life of Israel.

And I'm going to break in in the 16th chapter of 1 Kings. And when I say break in, that's exactly what I'm going to do, because we're in the midst of a whole catalogue of names, names of kings that have reigned and references to their activities and their behaviour and so on. And this is the back story to what I'm going to talk about as we proceed.

But the people who have been so uniquely privileged and chosen of God have rejected God in favour of gods of their own making. And that's where we break in. And I'm going to turn your attention to the 16th chapter, as I say, in verse 25.

But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord. Now he is a king. He wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord and did worse than all before him.

For he walked in the way of Jeroboam the Nemat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities. What an incredibly serious and pitiful and tragic indictment to have such things spoken of you. To be a king in that land of Israel and with those people and to have it written in the very scriptures themselves that you did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel into anger than with all their vanities.

This is the tragic story. Just dropping down a little bit further into the 29th verse. In the 30th and 8th year, Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel.

And Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass as if it had been a thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nemat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians and went and served Baal and worshipped him.

Amen. The provocation before God by the evil is just truly amazing to consider. But at this time, while all this was taking place and all these things were happening, God had his eye on a remote village in Gilead.

And in particular on a man, a man who he God had chosen and ordained to be his human instrument. And he there in that place of isolation was being prepared by God, prepared in secret. And that, as a matter of fact, and as an aside, has been God's timeless method.

He prepares his instruments, he prepares his people in secret. And he progressively awakens hearts to the grace of God and to the purpose of God. And the individual or individuals concerned may be completely ignorant and in all likelihood would be completely ignorant of the fact that the almighty God had his eye on them, his hand on them, that they were chosen of God, even before the foundation of the world.

And that he was causing issues and circumstances to come together and to work out according to his purpose. It reminds me of what Paul says writing to the Roman church when he said, all things work together. A better translation is, he causes all things to work together for the good, according to his purpose.

It's not merely that. I think that text is taken very often to encourage us that, well, everything's going to work out great, God's going to work everything out wonderfully. The fact of the matter is, not everything does work out wonderfully, even in the lives of Christian men and women.

But the statement clearly has a higher meaning and significance. It's all things are being worked together sovereignly by God for the good, the good that he has ordained, the good purpose that he has ordained to take place. And that was happening at that time.

I might just say that I believe it's happening at this time also in our particular and individual lives, no doubt, and on a broader platform as well. Now, the name of the man who lived in that little village that God was dealing with was, of course, Elijah. The name Elijah means God is my strength.

Now, I talked about him a bit, as you will remember, if you were with me last week. But there's a reference to Elijah in the New Testament, in the book of James, chapter 5 and verse 17, where we're told that Elijah was a man of earnest, prevailing prayer. And we don't have any other information, there's no specific

information other than this statement I've made concerning Elijah before he appears on the public platform, as it were, in the 17th chapter.

But, of course, he had a history that goes back before what we read about in chapter 17. And that's what I've been referring to sort of obliquely because there's no detail given to us in scripture, as I'm saying. But this is just a reminder, and I want to underscore it and highlight it too, that God prepares his people in secret.

And as I indicated already, maybe without them being aware of what's taking place, but God knows whom he has chosen, God knows what he's doing, God knows what needs to be accomplished in the lives of his people. And such was taking place here for this man Elijah. But clearly, in his own heart, although not documented other than the reference in James, is the fact that he had a relationship with God and he knew what it was to pray and talk to God in this very earnest and very meaningful way.

And in the impeccable timing of God, God spoke to Elijah. Again, we've got no reference to this specifically, but of course, it's very obvious that this had taken place. So far as God was concerned, the time had arrived.

I'm thinking of that phrase we find in the New Testament so often, in the fullness of time. In the fullness of time, God prompted Elijah that it was time for him to emerge into the public and to come out of the little village where he'd been living. And clearly, God directed him that he wanted him to go on a mission.

He wanted him to go into Israel's then capital, which was Samaria, and to confront this despotic king, Ahab, and pronounce the judgment of God upon him. And he did that. If you glance down a little further, we're into chapter 17 and just the first verse of the chapter.

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be Jew nor rain these years, but according to my word. And what a pronouncement. And I think I hinted at some of these features last week in what I was talking about.

But the amazing courage that the man was displaying, Elijah that is, and the total confidence that he had in God, that whatever God had whispered into his heart to say to this wicked king, he was able to say it with such authority and such boldness. This is just wonderful to watch. Having made that pronouncement, the next verse reads, and the word of the Lord came to him, to Elijah, saying, get thee hence and turn thee eastward and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

And so he makes his way there. As I've been reading in this passage in the last few days, there's so much that follows and takes place during this next three and a half year period that's of significance, but I can't do that on this occasion. But let me just say this, that God, no doubt anticipating the danger that Elijah would be in, having made this pronouncement and as the fulfilment of that pronouncement, that is of God's judgment, came upon that nation, Elijah had a target on him.

And God saw to it that he would go to a safe place and hide, because God hadn't finished with him yet. There was a further purpose for him in that same arena where he had spoken to King Ahab. And so for the next three and a half years, God protected Elijah and God provided for Elijah.

For much of the time, much of the period of those three and a half years, he was cared for by a very grateful widow. But to his great credit, and perhaps to challenge our own hearts, during that three and a

half year period of being hidden, three and a half years in a quiet place, three and a half years of sort of retirement, if you like, he never allowed that time to become dull. His sensitivity to God never diminished at all in his retirement.

He never became dull or insensitive to that voice that speaks in the stillness that we gave thought to last week. Nor did he allow the comfort of those years to strip him or weaken the availability of his heart to God. I might add, I think, how unlike the majority of senior people in their retirement in these days waste their valuable time, in many cases, squat on a lazy boy somewhere in front of a TV set or something.

But how unlike Elijah, he was poised in the presence of God in his original state, in his original home. He's called to go out and make this incredible pronouncement to the King of Israel. He does it.

God takes care of him, hides him somewhere. For three and a half years, he would not have known how long that period would be, but clearly he kept his heart before God, sensitive to God. That's a tremendous challenge for you and for me.

You may not be in senior years in your life, many of us are certainly, but whenever we are on the spectrum of our life's journey, what a tremendous challenge this is, especially living in the West and where things are very different from what Malcolm was describing earlier those years ago in Europe. But how easily we become distracted and settle down with the comforts that are so commonplace for us at this time. It's not always going to be like that, it may change sooner than we realise, but the fact of the matter is how easily we go to sleep inwardly.

But this is a time to wake up and I pray that God will use even this word on this occasion to just stir your heart and wake you up. It's time to wake up and it's time to do business with God and we're responsible to be sensitive to him and listening to him and ready to move at his bidding. Too often the things that we deem to be our blessings actually cripple us and hinder us from becoming the men and women of God that God would have us to be.

In any event, Elijah's master spoke again to him, and I'm turning the page over into chapter 18 now, where I read in the first verse, and it came to pass after many days, this is three and a half years, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying go show thyself unto Ahab and I will send rain on the earth. And Elijah went to show himself to Ahab and there was a sore famine in Samaria. Let me stop there.

Amen. It was one thing for Elijah to respond to the call of God those years earlier and to venture into the capital city and then to the very throne room of the king of Israel with this declaration that he claimed to be from God. A word that basically was a word of coming judgment upon him and upon the nation.

But this, I suggest to you, was a much harder situation on this occasion. In the natural sense this, of course, must mean the end of the comfortable life that he'd been experiencing for these last few years. But more likely than that, he would know this could terminate in him being killed.

He would know that Ahab and his consort Jezebel, they were livid with anger. They were seeking to find him. I don't know to what extent he knew that, but he would anticipate that that was true and it was indeed true.

And to go back to Samaria, to go back there to King Ahab would be to walk into the very teeth of the fiercest storm that one could imagine. Having made that statement or found that statement in the first verse there, I so appreciate verse two, it just says, And Elijah went. It reminds me immediately of that time

when God spoke to Abraham.

Do you remember when God said, Take now thy son, thy only son, Isaac whom thou lovest. And he was told he must make him an offering upon one of the mountains that God would show him. And the very next verse, as in the morning, Abraham rose up and he went.

Just amazing. This radical obedience to the word of God is so profoundly challenging to us. And this we find again in this man, Elijah.

Elijah was a man of unhesitating obedience to his master and he heads out on his mission. And his mission basically was to call the nation to repentance. In just reading that myself, I'm challenged and I extend that challenge and would offer it to you this morning.

How many of us, how many of us are truly ready at this particular stage in our lives, whatever that is and whatever it involves each and every one of us, how many of us are truly ready to hear his voice, to respond to his bidding, no matter what the cost? I think that probably the bigger challenge, first of all, the first aspect of the challenge is who is listening? Who is so attentive to God that they would hear that still small voice speaking and whispering in our hearts? Amen. Elijah was listening. He was listening to his master and he heard what the mission was to be and he got up and set out to do this very thing.

Amen. Somewhere at an unknown location in the journey from where he was to Samaria, a seemingly unremarkable event took place. He met another man, but the fact of the matter is this was not some unremarkable event at all, quite the opposite.

It was actually the result and the product of the sovereign God, his master, unfolding his own plan in this developing situation. The man's name, of course, was Obadiah and let's just read about him a little bit here. I'm still in chapter 18 of 1 Kings.

There was a sore famine in Samaria. Okay, verse 3, Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor in his house. So he was the governor in Ahab's house.

Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, for it was so that when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord that Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifty in a cave and fed them with bread and water. And Ahab said unto Obadiah, go into the land, unto the fountains of water, and unto the brooks. Peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.

So they divided the land between them to pass throughout. Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him, and he knew him, and he fell on his face and said, art thou that my Lord Elijah? We'll pull away from the reading for a moment there, shall we? So this is a very remarkable situation.

In the light of where Elijah was going and the person that was now meeting him, this high-ranking official from the king's own household, this was no coincidence. How many times in our own lives are there events that take place that we most naturally would refer to or think of if we even thought of them specifically at all, as just a sheer coincidence. It just happened this way.

Meeting certain people. I could digress very easily right here and talk about particular people that people that I have met, where he called, caused my path and other people's paths to converge, and it turned out to be highly significant. If we are walking in that place of surrender to God and with our inward ear

attentive to him and watching the things that are opening up as the course of our life continues, we must be prepared to recognise God's got something in this that's beyond what I can see at this point in time.

This was certainly the case here, and the contrast between these two men, it just readily presents itself as we read here. Elijah was, without any question, I think of him this way, he was a man from the closet, you understand what I mean when I say that? He was a man of God, he was a man who knew what it was to withdraw himself into the presence of God and to be before him and so on. Obadiah, by contrast, we see in the seventh verse that I just read to you just finally, as he meets Elijah, he falls on his face before him.

It's very interesting, I'm sure that you're like me in this respect, that when we read the Bible so often we just wish there was more information there, but God's given us all the information we need, I understand that, but sometimes we find, well how did this, what happened when these two men met? Just, you know, but we don't know. But one thing I do know, and that was that somehow, for some reason, Obadiah recognised Elijah. There was something about Elijah that distinguished him, and I want to suggest, others may see things very differently to me in this respect, but I want to suggest to you that Obadiah somehow recognised the very presence that this man Elijah was carrying.

You know, I suggest to you that there was an unmistakable fragrance of a higher world that somehow this man Elijah carried, which reminds me of how the Apostle Paul spoke to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 14 and 15 in that section. Paul speaks about something which is manifested through us, something which is seen and becomes visible through us, and he refers to it as the sweet fragrance of Christ which is manifested through us in every place, he says. Wonderful.

And there's another verse that we pass through quickly, but let me turn your attention back to it. It's in verse 2 where it says, I'm sorry it's in verse 1, and where there's a reference to Obadiah, and where am I here, it's in verse 3, I'm sorry about that, and Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of Ahab's house, now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, that's the phrase I was wanting, he feared the Lord greatly. Now that's very interesting, and how should we deal with this? The conclusion that we're compelled to come to at this point in time with just the information we have before us, is that both of these men, Elijah and Obadiah, they claimed to be men of God.

We know for certain that Elijah was. Obadiah professed to be a man of God, and in speaking to Elijah in verses 4 and 5, he's making reference to his own works, he's saying, you know well, Elijah this is what I've done, did you not hear about this, I've done such and such, and I've done such and such. But as I continue to read here, and I've heard someone take a very different interpretation to this, but what I'm sharing with you, I'm convinced of beyond any doubt at all.

These two men, who to all intents and purposes, one way or another, are claiming to be men of God, they represent and they serve two different masters. Elijah, without any question, is serving the living God. Obadiah, just look down with me, still in chapter 18, verse 8, I'm breaking in a little bit again, but Obadiah has fallen before Elijah, and he answered him, I am, this is Elijah, are you Elijah? Elijah says, I am, and then he goes on to speak to Obadiah, he says, go tell thy lord, another translation changes that word to master there, go and tell your master, behold Elijah is here.

Look in verse 11, and now thou sayest, this is now Obadiah speaking, go tell thy lord, behold Elijah is here, he's challenging this. Basically what's happening here is Obadiah is, he's sort of playing this through in his mind, that if he goes back to his master, and tells him that he's met Elijah, and he doesn't bring Elijah with him, and then the king comes out to try and find Elijah at this spot, and Obadiah says, and you'll

have gone by then, and you know what will happen to me, at that point, is what Obadiah is thinking. But notice that he's taking the very words that Elijah said, go and tell your lord, and then again in verse 14, and now thou sayest, go tell thy lord, behold Elijah is here, and he will say to me, and so on, you'll have to read all the extra verses yourself, and so on.

The fact is these two men, as I say already, they had two different masters, and they were engaged in two very different and very contrasting missions, and that's an understatement, because Elijah, whichever way we think of him, he was a radical reformer, he was obediently engaged in the call of his master, who was the king of glory, and his mission was to go and call the people of Israel to repentance. The other man, Obadiah, I want to call him a compromising believer, because he claimed to have a devotion to God, and he could speak of these works, these good things that he had been involved in doing, and were not questioning or challenging that, but one thing is certain in my reading and my understanding, he was squandering his life, serving a man who was under the judgment of God, that he was out there trying to find grass to feed this wicked tyrant king's horses, when the other man, by complete contrast, is out there as a reformer with the word of God in his mouth on the Lord's business. The New Testament sharpens the cutting blade of this word and this challenge.

I mean, John the apostle, he makes this statement, he says, friendship with the world is enmity with God. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. That's a very challenging statement.

But then we read about Jesus himself, where the text says that he was a lover of righteousness and a hater of iniquity. What a wonderful testimony. He loved righteousness, he hated iniquity.

And of course, Jesus takes it, puts it very clearly when he's talking to the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation. And he says there, because you are neither hot nor cold, the old King James, I will spew you out of my mouth. This is a very challenging word that we have before us.

But you know, Bob has been referring to Charles Wesley and we've loved the hymns and do love the hymns of Charles Wesley and many others, of course, as well. If Charles Wesley were here and he was making a reference to this statement of Jesus to the Laodicean church, he would, I believe, say that this word of Jesus was filled with, quote, pleasing smart. Smart because it's sharp and it cuts deeply and would cut deeply and was intended to cut deeply into the innermost beings of those compromising Laodiceans.

But pleasing because it carries the promise of restoration after repentance. Amen. That's the word of Jesus.

There's that which needs to be spoken, that which needs to be heard, that which needs to be received as a cutting challenge to our present state and our present activities and the whole question, well, who is it that I'm serving with my life at this point in time? But the challenge comes via the Spirit of God, from the very heart of Jesus, with pleasing smart. It's right that it should challenge, but beloved, receive it as a word of grace extended towards you. It's a word coming from our loving Heavenly Father who's seeking to draw us back into the way.

These two men, Elijah and Obadiah, each serving their two different masters, each pursuing their two different missions, represent, without any question, two categories of people within the professing Christian community. There are those who've chosen the narrow path that demands my soul, my life and my all, and there are those who want the benefits but without the death that the cross demands. Or as A.

W. Tozer was wont to say, we want the benefits of the cross but we want Jesus to do all the dying.

I'm wondering this morning, could it be that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you? Is he saying to you, my dear friend, I don't know so many of you, but is he saying it's time to cut loose from the world? Is he saying that to you? Is he calling you by his love and grace to come out clear for Jesus? As I reflect on Obadiah and that meeting that they had somewhere on that pathway or roadway or highway or whatever it was, I don't think that Obadiah would have ever forgotten for the remainder of his life that particular meeting when he found himself face to face with a truly authentic man of God. I asked myself, did Obadiah, obviously he went back to Samaria, went back to Ahab and he passed the message on. I've wondered to myself, did he, having completed that task, go to his room or wherever and just get on his face before God and do business with the true master? I don't know the answer to that question, but I do know this, you can do that.

In fact, beloved, you must do that. Charles Wesley wrote these words, he said, In darkness willingly I strayed, I sought thee, yet from thee I roved, for wide my wandering thoughts were spread, thy creatures more than thee I loved. And now, if more at length I see, it is through thy light and comes from thee.

And then he went on to say, Give to my eyes refreshing tears. And then he went on, Ignite a fire of heavenly love in my heart. He said, Until every power of my being unites and manifests in your glory.

I parted from his poetic language, but that was the gist of what he was saying. My eyes, I'm weeping, but it's in repentance that I've wasted so much of my life. But at the same time, it's with this pleasing smile, my tears are not just stinging, but they're refreshing me.

They're tears of repentance before God. And the cry then coming from that heart is, Lord, just ignite a fire within me, your holy fire in my heart, until every power of my being unites in manifesting your glory. May God reveal the transcendent folly of compromising when it comes to the things of God.

Let me just pray briefly, and then I'll hand back to Peter. Father, we thank you, Father. We thank you for your grace.

We thank you for your gospel. We thank you for your Holy Spirit who not only inspired the words of Scripture those years ago, preserved these great stories for our learning. But Lord, we thank you for his present activity right here where we sit right now.

We thank you for his gracious ministry, bringing the word of God like a sharp two-edged sword down into the depths of the human heart. Lord, I pray that with that same pleasing smile, you may speak to many hearts this very day as we consider the challenges before us from these texts. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Hallelujah.

Well, it seems a shame to bring everything to an end. We trust that perhaps we're not ending but freshly or beginning a new phase freshly in our lives and our commitment to the Lord Jesus. I'm going to ask, I know Fred's just prayed, but if Malcolm, can you just officially commit us all to the Lord, brother? And then just one announcement before he does that.

For those of you who are interested to continue, we will have our breakout rooms, two six-minute sessions that we'll have opportunity to enjoy some fellowship together with each other on a more informal basis.

And if you'd like to stay, you're very, very welcome to do that. And if that's not convenient, then of course, you're completely free to leave.

But Malcolm, can you just commit us all to the Lord, brother?

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