



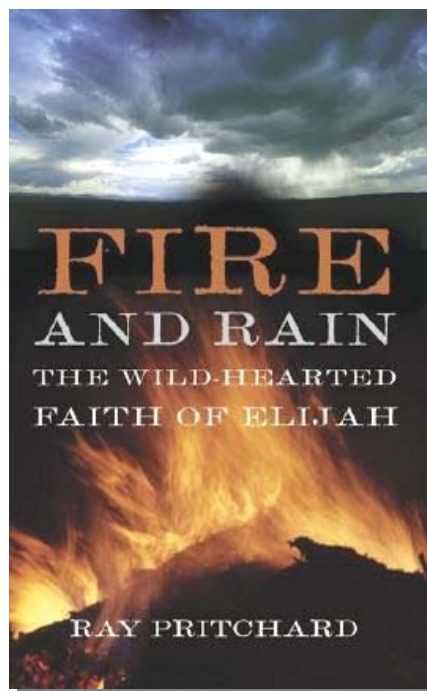
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 27, 2010

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:





How good are you at making choices? Choices are a part of everyday life. As I was flipping through the TV channels recently, I came across an old episode of *“Who Wants To Be A Millionaire”* when Drew Carey was the featured contestant during Celebrity Week. Drew Carey was playing for a charity and had already won \$500,000 – then he was asked the million dollar question: *“Who was the first athlete to do the Disney commercial ‘Hey, you just won the Super Bowl. What are you going to do now? I’m going to Disney World...””* The choices were (A) Doug Williams, (B) Marcus Allen, (C) Phil Simms, or (D) Joe Montana. Well, Carey had a choice to make—either he was going to give his final answer or he was going to have to take the \$500,000 and stop. He stopped! He made a choice. No real hesitation. When it mattered, he was taking no chances. No fence sitting.

Today, we’re talking about a guy named Elijah who also was faced with making a choice, but one dealing with life’s ultimate choice. Notice the title on the board today—NO FENCE SITTING! How do you feel about people who won’t take a stand—for anything? Do you know anyone like that? *It’s sometimes said that a crisis never makes a man—it only reveals what he already is.* That thought is both comforting and frightening because we all wonder how **we** would react if everything we held dear was really on the line: Our family ... Our health ... Our career ... Our life ... We wonder, would we have the faith to make it? Or would we collapse? All the things we say we believe—would they still **be enough** when the crunch comes? We all wonder what we would do in that moment if everything we held dear was on the line.

Maybe you heard the story just last week about Oprah Winfrey lavishing gifts on her employees? In celebration of the 10 year anniversary of her magazine, Oprah Winfrey personally handed out

Apple iPads and \$10,000 checks to every staffer at *O*—The Oprah Magazine—regardless of how long the staffer had worked there. Along with those gifts, each staff member received a monogrammed leather iPad case. A spokeswoman for Hearst, which publishes *O*, said that “these were personal gifts to the staff from Oprah to thank them for their hard work and dedication to the magazine.” Oprah’s big on giving lots of things away to all kind of people. You may recall that in 2004, Oprah gave each member of her show's studio audience a new Pontiac G6 car.

How does that make you feel? Excited for the staffers? Jealous? Angry? Or maybe frustrated at your boss—wishing maybe that you worked for Oprah instead? See if this video clip from an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* impacts your thoughts. [PLAY YOUTUBE CLIP STARTING AT **1:55** INTO VIDEO ABOUT JESUS AS THE ONLY WAY]

[HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=XM5ILOSHLNW](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XM5ILOSHLNW)

Did you hear what Oprah Winfrey said? This woman influences millions and millions of Americans every day, week in and week out, and says, “*There couldn’t possibly be just **one** way!*” What about the words of Jesus Himself from **JOHN 14:6** that say, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” Would you have stood up to Oprah in that audience and said what that woman said to her? It isn’t easy to go against the crowd, is it? It’s hard to do the right thing and make the right decisions when everyone else is making the wrong ones. The prophet Elijah knew all about that—as you learned this week in your Bible study. Do you take a similar stand for your LORD when faced with a tough choice that goes against the crowd?

Most of us don’t believe in coincidences. But this very week, those of you in my summer bible study on Revelation have been reading the letters from Jesus Christ to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. So, for a moment, I want to ask you to look at the words to the church at Laodecia in **REVELATION 3: 15-17 (NLT)** which seem appropriate: <sup>15</sup>“*I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other!*” <sup>16</sup>But

*since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!* <sup>17</sup>*You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."* The NKJ translation of verse 16 says, "*I will vomit you out of my mouth.*" See, there can be **no fence sitting** as a Christian man or woman of God and Elijah is a great example of just how we too are to respond in today's world—even when Oprah's lavishing gifts on strangers and employees.

As we wrap up Week Four of our study from Dr. Ray Pritchard's book on Elijah called *Fire and Rain*, today we're talking about taking a stand for what you believe—no matter what the odds. Not being *lukewarm* and not being a fence-sitter!

You'll recall that in Week One, in 1 Kings 17:1, we saw God call a mountain man, Elijah, to confront evil King Ahab to announce that there would be no rain or dew for years, unless Elijah said otherwise. Then God told Elijah to leave and hide by the brook Cherith. After spending a year or more there, last week we saw that God sent Elijah to Zarephath—the home town of Ahab's evil wife, Jezebel—where Elijah had to trust God completely for his food and drink. It was there, remember, that God used a widow woman and her son to provide for Elijah from an endless supply of oil and flour. God never failed to provide—in ways Elijah could never have imagined. Months, then years passed. As the earth dried up, Ahab searched Israel and the surrounding nations looking for Elijah, but the prophet could not be found. Meanwhile, Elijah was waiting, trusting by faith, that God would show him the next step.

If you wondered how bad it had gotten for everyone during this time of drought, try to imagine the scene: Three years without a drop of rain in the entire land of Israel. Every brook had dried up. Surely there were carcasses and skeletons of all kinds of animals and beasts everywhere. Imagine what the stench of death must have been like. Also, by this time, Ahab himself is reduced to scouring the country-side looking for grass to feed his animals—or

else they would die. Elijah was a hunted man and the God of Israel was a hated God. So intense was this hatred that Jezebel went on a killing spree, hunting God's prophets down and killing them with the sword. It was bad—real bad—and Elijah was certainly the regular and permanent feature on "Samaria's Most Wanted..." The Bible says, *"Ahab...did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him"* (1 KINGS 16:30 NIV). *The Message* calls him a *"new champion of evil!"* The *Holman Old Testament Commentary* says *"by that time the effect of the drought had reached catastrophic proportions. Life for many people in Israel was stretched to the breaking point."*

Listen to what **1 KINGS 18: 10 (MSG)** says about much of a wanted man Elijah was. This is Obadiah talking to Elijah: *<sup>10</sup>...there isn't a country or kingdom where my master hasn't sent out search parties looking for you. And if they said, 'We can't find him; we've looked high and low,' he would make that country or kingdom swear that you were not to be found.*

After three long years, God speaks to Elijah and instead of telling him to hide himself again, God tells him to go show himself—it's show time! Let's look at the events you read about this week in **1 KINGS 18**, starting back with **verses 1-2 (NLT)**: *<sup>1</sup>Later on, in the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!" <sup>2</sup>So Elijah went to appear before Ahab. Meanwhile, the famine had become very severe in Samaria.* **How do you imagine Elijah felt as he approached the king?** Notice there appears to be no hesitation, argument or fence straddling here on the part of Elijah. Verse 2 is clear, isn't it? *"So Elijah went to appear before Ahab."* Period!!! **Is that a picture of you when God tells you to do something that might result in persecution or pain or run against the crowd?**

I heard recently about a woman getting onto a sky lift in order to see some magnificent views from the top of the lift. As she was entering the lift, the attendant gave her instructions that the

moment the lift's chair touched her backside, she was to SIT DOWN and lift her feet off the ground. When the lift chair came against her, however, she sat down but was so nervous about the height of the lift that she forgot and kept her feet firmly planted on the platform. With her feet on the platform, the seat began to wind back and then like a slingshot hurled her off the platform causing severe injury to her legs and back. The woman wanted to see the magnificent view from the top of the lift but also wanted to be firmly planted on the ground. Her indecision was a dangerous thing. Straddling between two positions can be hazardous to your health.

So, in **verse 2** we see that Elijah obeys the LORD and heads off to see Ahab. WOW! The encounter between Elijah and Ahab must have been something to behold. Elijah had been the most-wanted man in the land and King Ahab had his minions searching high and low for the prophet. Let's pick up our story in **1 KINGS 18: 17-18 (NLT)**: *"<sup>17</sup>When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you **troublemaker** of Israel?" <sup>18</sup>"I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the Lord and have worshiped the images of Baal instead."*

Dr. Charles Swindoll, in his book on Elijah, says that the noun form of the Hebrew verb in **verse 17** that means "to trouble, to bring calamity" is here translated **troubler**, which he says is another way of saying, "Is that you, you sorry snake in the grass?" In other words, Ahab leaves no doubt about how he feels about Elijah. To him, the prophet is a snake. He's behind all the trouble in the land. And there was plenty of trouble, to be sure. So, into the midst of this terrible scene walks the man who is being blamed for it all: Elijah! Ahab confronts him with fire in his eyes, spitting out his condemnation: *You troublemaker of Israel. You sneaky snake.* Think about the courage it took for Elijah to go to Ahab. Think about the faith it took for him to walk into that scene. Yet, Elijah was not intimidated at all. On the contrary, he had the audacity to shift the blame back where it belonged. Look at **verse 18** again:

*<sup>18</sup>“I have made no trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the Lord and have worshiped the images of Baal instead.”* He’s simply saying, “Don’t blame me for what’s happened.” God brought his drought of judgment because of people like YOU! You’re the reason we haven’t had rain. Elijah didn’t back down one inch.

Think about why Elijah’s message was so severe. Ahab had been shamelessly disobedient. The monarch had broken the very first commandment, “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (**Exodus 20:3**). Ahab needed to know that the God of heaven is supreme and Elijah was ready to prove it, and so the lines are drawn and the showdown began: Ahab vs. Elijah. Let’s look at the plan, as we continue reading **1 KINGS 18: 19-40 (NLT)**:

*<sup>19</sup>Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel.”* (We see it’s going to be 850 to 1—plus GOD!) *<sup>20</sup>So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. <sup>21</sup>Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, “How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!” But the people were completely silent. <sup>22</sup>Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets.*

So, here’s the scene: Representatives were present from all ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, and it was this group that Elijah addressed as the meeting began. His purpose was not only to expose the false god Baal but also to bring the compromising people back to the Lord. Because of the evil influence of Ahab and Jezebel, the people were “limping” between two opinions and trying to serve both Jehovah and Baal. Elijah called for a definite decision on their part, but the people were speechless. **Why were the people silent?** Was this because of their guilt or because they first wanted to see what would happen next? They were weak

people, without true conviction, trying to hold on to two positions—straddling the fence. Elijah wanted to eliminate Baal from consideration whenever Israel decides theological matters, so to achieve this goal Elijah suggests a contest. Let's continue with **verse 23:** *<sup>23</sup>Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. <sup>24</sup>Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed. <sup>25</sup>Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls, and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood."*

*<sup>26</sup>So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made. <sup>27</sup>About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!" <sup>28</sup>So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. <sup>29</sup>They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.*

**What keeps people from firmly deciding to follow God?** We don't believe it is in our best interest. We don't believe God is a rewarder. We don't believe life will be better if we do. Continuing, **verse 30** says: *<sup>30</sup>Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. <sup>31</sup>He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, <sup>32</sup>and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the Lord. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. <sup>33</sup>He*

*piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood." <sup>34</sup>After they had done this, he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said, <sup>35</sup>and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench. <sup>36</sup>At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. <sup>37</sup> O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself."*

Let's stop and look at those last two verses (36-37). **How does Elijah's prayer differ from Baal's prophet's prayers? What do we learn about prayer from this?** Elijah's prayer contrasted sharply with the frantic and prolonged activities of the Baal prophets. It was brief and simple, without any of the elaborate antics of the Baalists. He was a man of prayer, not a worker of magic who needed to manipulate a reluctant god by formulas or actions. He was not coaxing the Lord or seeking to convince him. Rather, in complete confidence, he addressed his prayer to the covenant God.

Continuing with **verse 38**: *<sup>38</sup>**Immediately** the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! <sup>39</sup>And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!" <sup>40</sup>Then Elijah commanded, "Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don't let a single one escape!" So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there."* Notice how the story ends: God's answer came at once—*immediately*. No sooner were the words out of Elijah's mouth than the fire of the Lord... burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. This fire fell

out of a clear sky, as the following verses make clear. The Lord alone was God.

WOW! What an unforgettable story, leaving lasting lessons for all of us this morning on this June 27, 2010! Let's conclude our lesson with several relevant principles of truth that we get from Elijah's life:

**FIRST: *When we are sure that we are in the will of God, we are invincible.*** Nothing makes us more uncertain and insecure than not being sure we are in the will of God. And nothing is more encouraging than knowing that we are. Then, no matter what the circumstances, no matter what happens, we can stand fast. We can be out of a job but know that we are in God's will. We can face a threatening situation but know that we are in the will of God. We are not intimidated to those who KNOW that what they believe is based on what God said. The equation is never 850 against one. It's 850 against one **PLUS GOD!**

**SECOND: *Divided allegiance is as wrong as open idolatry.*** Remember Elijah's question in **verse 21** when he asked how long will you hesitate between two opinions? The easiest thing to do when you are outnumbered or overwhelmed is to remain in that mediocre state of non-commitment. The strongest words that were given to the seven churches mentioned Revelation were those I read earlier that were given to the church at Laodicea about being neither *hot or cold—but likewarm*. And the reason is clear. They were uncommitted. Get off the fence of indecision. Elijah told the people of Israel, either you are **FOR GOD** or **AGAINST** him. William Pen once wrote, "*Right is right, even if everyone is against it; and wrong is wrong even if everyone is for it.*"

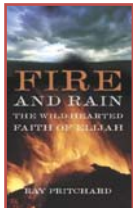
**THIRD: *Our most effective tool is the prayer of faith.*** When it came down to the wire, when Baal had failed and God was about to do His work, the one instrument that Elijah employed was **prayer**. Isn't it amazing how often people try everything but that?

It's like the old saying, "*When everything else fails, read the instructions.*" So it goes with prayer. *When everything else fails, try prayer.* But Elijah DID NOT use prayer as a last resort. Prayer was his first and only resort. A simple prayer of faith was his major contact with the living LORD. It set everything in motion.

**FOURTH: *Never underestimate the power of one totally dedicated life.*** This entire incident revolves around one dedicated life—the life of Elijah. He was a man all alone, overwhelmingly outnumbered by a hostile king, the king's wicked and powerful wife, 850 pagan prophets and priests of Baal, and countless numbers of unbelieving Israelites. Yet all of them were silenced and intimidated by this one dedicated man of God.

You've got a decision to make, too. Will you follow the crowd or will you follow Christ. That's the most important life-changing decision you can make. The path He takes isn't the popular path. There will always be higher traffic on the wide road, than the narrow path. But Jesus came to earth for us to understand that God's opinion is the only one that matters and he wants us to stand up for what is right, even if we're standing alone, because the truth is—you are not alone. He is the way, the life and the truth, no matter what anyone says! The choice is yours!

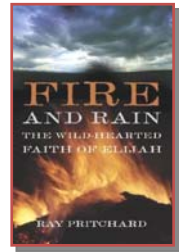
**Let's Pray.**



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1. **JOHN 14:6** says, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. \_\_\_\_\_ one comes to the Father \_\_\_\_\_ through me.*”
2. **REVELATION 3: 15-17 (NLT)**, “*I know all the things you do, that you are neither \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like \_\_\_\_\_ water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*”
3. Notice there appears to be \_\_\_\_\_ hesitation, argument or fence straddling here on the part of Elijah. 1 Kings 18:2 is clear, isn’t it? “So Elijah \_\_\_\_\_ to appear before Ahab.”
4. Dr. Charles Swindoll, in his book on Elijah, says that the noun form of the Hebrew verb in **verse 17** (1 Kings 18) that means “*to trouble, to bring calamity*” is here translated \_\_\_\_\_, which he says is another way of saying, “*Is that you, you sorry snake in the grass?*”
5. They (Israelites) were \_\_\_\_\_ people, without true conviction, trying to hold on to \_\_\_\_\_ positions—straddling the fence.
6. What keeps people from firmly deciding to follow God? We don’t **believe** it is in our \_\_\_\_\_. We don’t believe God is a \_\_\_\_\_. We don’t believe life will be better if we do.
7. Four principles of truth from Elijah’s life: (1) When we are sure that we are in the will of God, we are \_\_\_\_\_. (2) \_\_\_\_\_ allegiance is as wrong as open idolatry. (3) Our most effective tool is the \_\_\_\_\_ of faith. (4) Never underestimate the power of one totally \_\_\_\_\_ life.