

# The One Essential Thing

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Kings, 1 Kings 12. We're going to begin reading at verse 25. The title of last week's message, we're doing a brief series from the books of Kings 1 & 2 Kings, in which we're looking at big themes of the book as a way of sort of focusing our hearts as a church corporately on the things we need to be about today to honor the Lord, and also individually. We talked about how last time the things that we see happening in our culture can be discouraging and we can feel overwhelmed or we can feel afraid or we can find ourselves fretting, worrying, and really we need to come back to the priorities, what does God want us to do. So we saw last time that for people that received the book of Kings, 1 & 2 Kings, those who were in the exile in Babylon, that God gave them a reminder in the book of Kings that there is really only one priority, the ultimate priority, which we saw last time, is to worship. That's something that's emphasized in the book of Kings, to worship God truly and rightly. So that was last week, the ultimate priority, and today we're going to look at another one of the themes that we see in the book of Kings and that is, the title, "Only One Necessity," or you can say, I've been battling around, "Only One Necessity," or "One Essential Thing." Take your pick. I think I'm going to go with "One Essential Thing."

There is one essential thing. There is only one priority, that's to worship. We're created to worship God and what we should always be about every day in every circumstance is worshipping God. That's what we're created to do. That's the one thing that we should do but how do you do it? So the Lord shows in Kings not only what the priority is but the how and the one essential thing that you must have to worship God truly and rightly is the word of God. The one essential thing is the word of God and it is so essential, much more than we realize. We all would say, "Yes, of course it's essential," but we just don't have any idea how much we need it; how we need it every moment of every day. We need the word of God and the book of Kings shows us this. It shows us this.

So it shows us that if the ultimate priority is worship, to worship God truly and rightly, and we saw last week that means to worship him where he said to worship him, at the temple which is Jesus, if our ultimate priority is in every moment to worship God by going to Christ, then the one essential thing to help us do that is the word of God. If we don't have the word of God, we will not go to worship and we will not worship rightly. In fact, if we don't have the word of God every moment of every day, the inevitable consequence is idolatry because, as John Calvin said, the heart of man is an idol factory.

And you see this is what happened in Kings, they didn't seek and submit to the word of God, therefore they became idolaters. An idol is something you worship in place of God and the New Testament tells us we need to continue to flee from idolatry. The last words of 1 John, "Little children, flee from idols." Or 1 Corinthians 10 shows that we need to flee from idolatry; it's said twice in that chapter. And idolatry is when anything stands in the place of God, where we look to anything else other than God for our sense of well-being, our peace, the shalom. God intends our relationship with him to be the source of all our well-being; but we tend to continually look to other things. And it's the word of God alone that continues to redirect the heart. It's kind of like you can't coast through the Christian life. If you coast, you go backwards.

When I was learning to drive, back then, you remember what it was like to have a manual transmission car? Some of you drove manual transmission cars, learning to drive a manual transmission, I imagine teaching someone to drive a manual transmission car is a lot of fun. I haven't done that but I was taught and I'm sure it was fun for the people that were teaching me, my dad and my uncle and stuff. So anyway, and mom. But a manual transmission car, you know, you have the clutch and so one of the challenges in driving a manual transmission car is learning how to get started with the clutch, to change gears, but the biggest challenge is when you're on a hill and you have to stop at a red light, so many times sweating that, "Oh no, I'm on a hill. That car is really close to me and I've got to start out," because as soon as you engage the clutch and you take your foot off the brake, what happens? You begin to move backwards unless you give it the gas at the same time and release the clutch so that you move forward.

So, the Christian life is lived on an incline. It's a fallen world. If you're going to try to live the Christian life without actively seeking to move forward, you will go backward and the thing that you fall backward into, that you and I fall backward into, is idolatry. Trusting, hoping, loving other things more than God and this is the source of all the ugliness, all the brokenness, all the pain that we bring to other people is idolatry. It's that first commandment, "Have no other gods before Me," anything that takes the place of God, and the second commandment, "Don't make for yourself an idol." Those two commandments are at the heart of addressing this. It's the ultimate issue for man. We're to worship God and yet we tend to want to worship the creature rather than the Creator and the gravity is pulling us that way unless we're continually engaging spiritually. And how do you engage the clutch and give it the gas? It's the word of God. It's the word of God. It's the word of God. It's the word of God.

This is why, Jesus quoted, remember when he was tempted by Satan? He had been 40 days not eating, fasting in the wilderness, and Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread," and Jesus said, "It is written you shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," quoting back Deuteronomy 8:3 where Moses told the people at the end of his life, his last series of sermons in Deuteronomy, he says, "The reason God tested you in the wilderness and made it so that you didn't have food so that he could feed you from heaven for 40 years, every day you had to get the food that he gave from heaven, was so that you might know that man does

not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." This picture that he gave to the people was to say, "What we need more than anything else is the word of God. We need it more than we need our food. We need it more than we need anything else. We need the word of God because our hearts go astray." It's the word of God that gives salvation. God works through his word. You were born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed, according to 1 Peter 1; that is, through the living and abiding word of God. The seed of the word and it's the word that continues to instruct us to worship because it is the word that reveals Jesus who is the place you go to worship. You say, "I want to know more about Jesus." Well, don't sit around and just think and empty your mind, get in the Bible. This is where you see Jesus. The written word reveals the living word.

So, the one essential thing. We're going to go to a passage that illustrates for us the inevitable consequence of not seeking the word. So, let's read 1 Kings 12:25, this is the sin of Jeroboam I mentioned last week. We're going to read this passage. We're going to read through verse 10 of chapter 13. So, beginning at 1 Kings 12:25,

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there.

Now remember, the two kingdoms have split. There was one kingdom, Israel. Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam takes over. Rehoboam handles things unwisely. Well, God had already told him he was going to split the kingdom and so the kingdom is split under Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Jeroboam, the king of the north; Rehoboam, the king of the south. Remember, the great emphasis in the first part of the books of Kings is there is only one place that you can meet God, only one place you can worship, it's the temple that God built in Jerusalem which is in Judah. That is in the southern kingdom. So God intends all of his people to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. They're all to go down to Jerusalem. That's the one place God has appointed to be worshiped because there's only one place you can as a sinner meet God. One place and one place alone and we now know it's Jesus Christ. He's the true temple.

Now that was last week's focus. Now what we see is, I want to show you how almost somewhat innocently, it wasn't innocent, seems that way, it was really ignorant. Ignorance, the danger of it. Now as we read, back to verse 25.

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel. 26 Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the house of David.

He's worried that the northern kingdom that belongs to him is going to return to the house of David, that is, the southern kingdom. "My people in their loyalty may go to the south." And he goes on to say in verse 27,

27 "If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to

Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." 28 So the king consulted,

He took counsel but not with the Lord, not with his word.

and made two golden calves, and he said to them [to the people], "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." 29 He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. 31 And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. 32 Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. 33 Then he went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised in his own heart; and he instituted a feast for the sons of Israel and went up to the altar to burn incense.

1 Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD,

So, Jeroboam is heading up to offer incense on the day of the feast, everything's ready, and a man of God from Judah comes up by the word of the LORD,

while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. 2 He cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" 3 Then he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken, 'Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.'"

So, the man of God comes and he, by the word of the Lord, Yahweh, the Lord sends him up there and he pronounces judgment on the altar. One day, the altar, there's going to be priests burned on it; their bones are going to be burned on it. And the sign is going to be that you know I'm speaking from the Lord, the altar is going to be split. Now verse 4,

4 Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. 5 The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 6 The king

said to the man of God, "Please entreat the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to him, and it became as it was before. 7 Then the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward." 8 But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water in this place.

Not just because I don't like you or I think you're a really messed up fellow, look what he says next, "The reason I won't do that is,

9 For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way which you came.'" 10 So he went another way and did not return by the way which he came to Bethel.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask that you might speak to us through your word by your Spirit, that your word might open our hearts, that you might help us to see the thoughts and intentions, to lay them bare, and to point us to Christ. We pray this in his name. Amen.*

Two points this morning titled "One Essential Thing." Two points. First, the inevitable consequence of not seeking and submitting to the word of the Lord. You might even add the word, the adverb, "actively." The inevitable consequence of not actively seeking and submitting to the word of the Lord. Jeroboam, when you look at this and you don't read into it we see later, if you're reading from the beginning and you see it, you can almost understand some of his thought process. Now, we know, last week we talked about the sin of Jeroboam is very bad. God did not see it the way we see it, but it's as we would normally read without thinking, spiritually instructed from the word of God. I mean, he has a reasonable concern. He rules over ten tribes but if they go to the south three times a year for the three pilgrimage feasts that they are required to go to Jerusalem for, if three times a year all the men in the northern kingdom go to Jerusalem, the capital city where the king's palace is along with the temple, it doesn't seem like a very good idea for national unity. We need to solidify our oneness. We're a brand-new kingdom. We haven't even got our flag figured out yet. You know, they are brand new.

So, he's thinking, "You know, this is something I'm concerned about," so he takes counsel. Now, to have the question and to ask the question, okay, that's reasonable, but he consulted but he did not go to the Lord clearly. The king consulted. He took counsel. He gathered men around him and he said, "What should I do about this?" and they said, "Hey, we've got a great idea. What you need to do is encourage worship. Yes, we all need to worship. We know we're created to worship. Worship is an important thing, but let's have them worship the Lord who brought us out of Egypt here in the northern kingdom." So, they make the two places of worship, the two golden calves.

This act of rebellion, because it really was an act of rebellion though it didn't seem like it at the time, it was an act of incredible rebellion that resulted in an avalanche that destroyed the entire northern kingdom. This was the moment. This moment the northern kingdom begins to fall. And it flows from ignorance. I mean, what he does seems somewhat reasonable. It seems reasonable to him. It seems reasonable to his friends. He did what made sense to him. He did what felt right. He trusted his heart. "I mean, I want to, I know we need to worship the Lord. I'm not saying we don't need to worship. I'm not advocating atheism. I'm advocating that we continue to worship the Lord but I'm just going to tweak that process some." He trusted his heart and the astonishing thing is that you and I do that on a daily basis. We trust our hearts and that is foolish. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? The world says trust your heart, God says never trust your heart. Trust my word.

So, that's where it started. It's astonishing that they built golden calves, isn't it? I mean, you would have thought, "Hey, golden calf, there's something that rings a bell about that." And you realize it's only 30 years after the completion of the temple; 30 years is all that's passed since that wonderful glorious moment when Israel gathered in Jerusalem for the dedication of the temple, the glory cloud came down. I mean, that would be something that if you would've experienced it, you would remember it and you'd be telling people. "I was there." How many of the people in the northern kingdom were there? Jeroboam was probably there. How? It all starts by not continually trusting in the word of God. The inevitable consequence of not actively seeking and submitting to the word of the Lord is idolatry. If he had instead sought the counsel of the word of God, "Even though it seems to me that we should not do this, the word of God is clear; we will go and worship in Jerusalem."

It's that simple and everything would have changed. The problem comes when you and I begin to do things according to our own thought process, our own understanding. This is why the Bible says, "Do not lean on your own understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." Leaning on your own understanding is deadly.

You know, it comes in the attitude, the application, there are several ways we can apply this and I want to start with the general. This applies to how we worship corporately. How are we to worship God? Can we trust our own hearts to devise ways to worship God? I mean, we're worshipping the true God, we want to lift up Jesus, let's devise ideas, let's work on it. This is how in evangelicalism today, modern evangelicalism, we see so many crazy excesses, weird things happening. It starts when people stop submitting to the word of God, actively seeking the word, because they overestimate the ability of their own hearts. They underestimate the incredible darkening effects of sin that God says that even though we are redeemed now, we have a new nature, we still have an old nature as well and in that old nature the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?

You know, you start with apparently reasonable ideas like, "Hey, let's reach people for the Lord Jesus Christ," and we want to reach people and so this means that we should make our worship services aimed at seeker-friendly services and we want to make the unbeliever feel welcome, we want to help them come to know Christ. We do want to see people come to know Jesus but the question is: what does the Bible say about how we worship? Why we worship? What is worship supposed to be about? When you look at what the Bible says about worship and the gathering of God's people to worship, it's not primarily about evangelizing unbelievers out there, it's about the body coming together, gathering together to lift up Christ, to be built up to be more like him, and then to go out to evangelize. Do you see? It's not come and see, it's go and tell.

Well, so they start with something small like that and then they start thinking, "Well, okay, we want to make unbelievers feel welcome so let's make our music accommodate them." And, you know, so many wacky things come up from that. "Let's make our messages relevant." So what does that mean? That means we start with felt needs. Again, once you start...how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time, but the first bite you take and you start in that process, it starts at this point when you depart from the word of God. It's not that we don't want our messages to be relevant, we do, but we understand that the word of God must direct the message more than the preacher's idea about what is needed out there.

There are people that survey, take surveys of the community and then come up with a series to preach. Not just the church community, they take surveys of the people around. "What would you like to hear preached on?" And then they preach messages. This is something that has happened for many many decades. That's just crazy. We can see it because we're looking at the word. Once you start biting and eating that elephant, you get so far along and that elephant begins to taste pretty good and, "Hey, we're really making a difference here." But really, we're missing something.

I believe that you would have had a rewarding experience at Dan or Bethel. I think many people went there and left after worshiping there with, "Hey, man, that was great! I'm charged up for the week!" But God has not been lifted up and glorified and therefore the real needs of the heart have not been dealt with. And the reason that we believe in the regulative principle of worship, that's a term that theologians have used to say that we believe that the Bible teaches that God tells us how we're to worship him. Scripture regulates every part of worship so we must have a biblical mandate for doing everything we do. It's not just up to us. The other idea, the normative principle, was something that actually Luther was off on this. On so many things he was right on, but he believed that if it wasn't forbidden by Scripture you could do it. Calvin argued if it's not commanded by Scripture you ought never do it in worship.

We come at it more from that angle because you look at verses like this or you think about Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. Remember the two sons of Aaron who wanted to go worship God, they were priests, ministering in the tabernacle, the tent of meeting and they were going to offer incense but they didn't bother to get the right incense? They had been drinking a little bit in a celebrative time. It doesn't say they were necessarily that

drunk or anything but they weren't thinking as clearly, maybe, as they should have been and they offered strange fire. They took strange incense to offer it on the...not the incense that God had carefully prescribed, and the fire of the Lord came out from the altar and killed them both. And when Aaron found out about it, Moses tells him under the inspiration of the Spirit, "Do not weep or tear your clothes. Normally you could do that when your child dies, but you cannot right now because God's holiness has been violated." There would be time for mourning later. That's a very powerful way that God shows he determines how he's worshiped.

And Scripture makes that point over and over again. Now, it's a wonder that there aren't more things like that because men do things they shouldn't have done and it's rare when God makes that kind of emphatic point. It's really rare. When you look at the whole of Scripture we see the overwhelming grace of God. Normally he doesn't respond like that. There are moments when he does, though. So he tells us how we worship.

Now, that also means that this is the reason that we spend a significant portion of our time under the preaching of the word because we need the word of God to worship. So we don't call even, we shouldn't, we sort of can do this. I do it myself. "Hey, that was a wonderful time of worship," and I can say that meaning the music time, right? Isn't that how people say it, right? The worship is great. The preaching is not so good but the worship is great, right? So they can say that but in reality, worship happens when you see who God is and gladly reflect back to him the radiance of his word. When do you see most clearly who God is but through the preaching of the word? Because it's the word that reveals Christ and when we see him, we see God, and when we see God in his glory, we worship.

So we gather together to see the Lord as he is and to worship him; to have our hearts drawn away from the idols that we tend to gravitate toward and now to pursue his glory in his Son. This is why, one of the reasons that we also believe it's best to preach expositively, that is, to let verse by verse go through the Bible. What that does is it lets God set the agenda for the sermon. One of the challenges of actually doing a topical series like I'm doing right now, you have to figure out what you're preaching on and I don't like doing that. Honestly, I like just the Lord, here's the passage, that's what God wants. But that's not the reason I really believe in expository preaching, the reason I believe in it, because I don't think it's easier, I think it's harder. It's much easier to come up with felt needs and just tickle ears but the reason I believe in it is because what you're doing when you exposit a passage, you're trying to hear what the Bible is saying. You come to God on his terms. You say, "Lord, what is this passage? Why did you inspire this passage? What are you saying here?" Not, "Lord, I want to know what you say about this. I've got this problem, this problem, this problem and I need an answer to this, this, this, and I want that." No, you come to God and you say, "Lord, what is your agenda for me? And I want to attend to your word." This is how we should approach it in Bible study when we study the word. "What are you saying here? What claim are you making on my heart? What is your agenda for me?"



That's what we're trying to do and that's essentially what I'm trying to do even in 1 Kings but in a very big broad way. The whole book of 1 & 2 Kings. What is God saying in this book to the people he wrote it to in the exile? He's saying to them in the exile, "Listen, guys, you need to understand how you got where you are. The reason that you're in bondage and that you're far away from the land, far away from my presence and my blessing, is because you've failed in the ultimate priority. You've failed to worship me in spirit and in truth. And the reason you've failed to worship me in spirit and in truth, the second point, is that you did not heed the word of the Lord. You devised things in your own heart, in your own mind just like Jeroboam." You hear that refrain, "which he made, the calves which he made, at the high places which he made, to the altar which he made in the month, the day, in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised in his own heart."

So, it's the word of God that destroys idols and lifts up the heart to see God as he truly is. The inevitable consequence, though, of neglecting to seek and submit to the word of the Lord is idolatry. When the word is not directing, then eventually you see this departure and practice in the church becomes more and more distant from the biblical reality because you can't stay still. You're on an incline. You've got to be engaging the clutch and pushing the gas in the word or you'll go backwards. It may feel kind of fun. There is some roller coaster that you go backwards on the whole way at Six Flags, I think, isn't there? You go forward and then you go backwards the whole way. I haven't read. I haven't ridden that. I haven't read that lately, have y'all? I don't think I want to, either. I might have when I was younger, but it probably is fun when you're young and your ears haven't...your vestibular system is not messed up by age, to do something like that. So people might think it's fun. "Hey, it's a nice ride going backwards. This is really cool!" But it's not really beneficial or helpful to your soul. It's deadly. It may feel good but it's leading you away from God.

You know, this subtle principle and how much we need the word moment by moment to keep us from idols, I want to just think about that in another way, more individualistically, more adamistically, focusing on our own hearts, not so much about corporate worship for a moment but our own hearts because we need the word of God every moment of every day to keep us from idols.

Let me give you an example. You know, we can take the word of God and have some truth of God that's really helping us but if we don't keep the word of God coming, that truth won't be enough. We'll mess it up. Let me give you an example. The Bible says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives are to submit to their husbands, honor their husbands, respect their husbands. Husbands are to care for them as their own bodies, right? And so God wants our marriage to look like the Gospel. He wants our marriage to look like the Gospel, that Christ loving his church and the church joyfully following Christ. It's a picture of the Gospel. What an incredible thing.

Now, what should you want for your marriage? You should want your marriage to look like that, right? Nothing wrong with wanting that. In fact, it's wrong if you don't want that, right? But that can become an idol because you can want it so much that you want it

more than you want God, and because God may not be working on your time table, your spouse may not be coming along to love you like Christ loved the church or to honor you as the church honors Christ like she should and you just want a godly wife. You just want a godly husband. But when you want it more than you want to please God at the moment, it's an idol. Many people get wrapped up in that, we all can, and then we aren't following God and glorifying God because what you want more than anything else every moment is to obey him. "Lord, what do I need to do in this moment where my spouse isn't doing what they're supposed to do? How can I honor you right now? I want to be pleasing to you. I need your word right now."

I was reading a book the other day by Brad Bigney. and he referenced a quote by David Powlison. related to this where Powlison points out in counseling, people that have been through infidelity in marriage, when they're trying to rebuild and you see some wonderful things where God can, he can restore the years the locusts have eaten and he can give you beauty for ashes. He can do wonderful things. There is no limit to his power, right? But he says how when a man, he's talking about this one woman who had been unfaithful to her husband and the husband had forgiven her and they were being counseled and he had shown such grace to her and she was growing, he was growing, but then something happened. It took a while to figure it out but the man had suddenly shifted from wanting a good marriage for the glory of God to in his heart wanting to make sure that it never ever happened again and he began being suspicious of his wife. He wanted to control things. He wanted to know things and he wasn't loving and serving more because, why? He had put that as an idol. He wanted to know that he could control the future. He didn't want to submit and trust God. "Lord, even if it happens again, I'm going to worship you. I pray it doesn't for your glory, for her good, but even if it does, I'm going to serve you and I'm going to be okay because your word instructs me that I'm not to make that my source of confidence. I will be alright because I've got Christ." But when you feel like, "I won't be alright if I don't have..." you have an idol. You can want godly children. Every parent should want godly children but when that becomes an idol, you see that your level of contentment and joy and ability to walk in love is affected because of the circumstances that are happening around you, you have an idol. We all are prone to these things. What do we need? We need the word of God every moment of every day redirecting our focus to Jesus so that we will not be idolaters. That's what this book is saying.

Now, the good news is, the first point, the inevitable consequence of not actively seeking and submitting to the word of God is idolatry. We've covered that. Now the second point: the indescribable power of seeking and submitting to the word of the Lord. When you seek and submit to the word of the Lord, it is amazing.

Now, the reason that, let me explain this. The word of God is, I would say that worship is the main point and the word of God is the main actor in the book of Kings. Let me show you this. There are 47 chapters in the book of 1 & 2 Kings, 22 1 Kings, 25 2 Kings. Forty-two kings are talked about. There are two kings in the united kingdom, David and Solomon, 20 kings of the north, 20 kings of the south, 42 kings. Now, the book of 1 & 2 Kings you would think that the main characters are kings, right? Well, I would submit to you that the main characters, actually humanly speaking, are prophets. Elijah and Elisha.

When you look at the way the chapters unfold, you have the first 16 chapters, David, Solomon and the first story of Rehoboam, Jeroboam, but in chapter 17, Elijah steps on the scene and he is the main character from chapter 17 all the way through the end of chapter 22 of 1 Kings and the first two chapters of 2 Kings. He's the main character until he dies. Now, there are other kings he's interacting with, most notably Ahab, Jezebel, but they're only there because they're the antagonist. Elijah is the main character. Then when he dies, what does he do? He passes the baton to Elisha. So, Elijah is the main character for 7 ½ chapters, Elisha is the main character for 11 ½ chapters, from 2 Kings 2 all the way through chapter 13.

No king gets that kind of coverage. The closest is Solomon but like I said, really Solomon is not the main point because it's the temple. What you see at the end is Solomon getting out of the picture. And the main reason the prophets are the main character is because God wanted them to show, "Listen, yeah, the way that we get back to the presence of God and the blessing of God is through the prophetic word of God." That's what we need and so that the phrase "the word of the LORD" is one of the key phrases in the book. We heard it a number of times in what I read to you already: the word of Yahweh, the word of the LORD. It occurs 49 times in the books of Kings, 1 & 2 Kings.

And another key phrase is the phrase "man of God," which occurs 50 times in the book of Kings, and the man of God is the person who speaks the word of God. That's what makes him a man of God. It was first used of Moses in Deuteronomy and Joshua. Twice he's called the man of God. It's used of an unknown prophet speaking to Eli in 1 Samuel. And then it was used of Samuel himself. And the next time you find it is in chapter 12, Shemaiah, a man of God, speaks to Rehoboam. And then you find it 15 times in chapter 13, this man of God. He doesn't tell us the name of this man of God but it's amazing to see what this man of God who has the word of the LORD and who comes by the word of the LORD does and how powerful the word of the LORD is because, really, that's the main thing that you see throughout the book of Kings. It's continual. I encourage you to read 1 & 2 Kings and look for all the times that it says, "This happened by the word of the LORD." I mean, stuff like Elijah, he prophesies how Ahab and Jezebel are going to die. They don't die until after he's gone and exactly what he said of how they were going to die and what was going to happen afterwards happens.

Over and over again. The same thing with Elisha. I mean, that's just one example. Over and over they say something's going to happen and then a couple of chapters later it happens "according to the word of the LORD spoken by the man of God, Elisha." Exactly what happens so that the word of God is determining the future. The word of God is controlling history. The kings, they're not ruling, the word of the living God is ruling and reigning. This is what the main point: how can you worship? You need to be under the reign and rule of the word of God.

Now, we see it in the story of the man of God. He comes and he came by the word of the LORD. God tells him, "Go," and he goes. And he cries against the altar, verse 2, "by the word of the LORD, and said, 'O altar, upon you,'" and he prophesies something that's not going to happen for 300 years. He says, "There is going to be man named Josiah of the

son of David, that is, of the kingdom of the south. A man named Josiah is going to come up here and he's going to sacrifice the priests on the high places who burn incense on you and human bones will be burned on you." He pronounces judgment on the altar by the word of the LORD. Then he says by the word of the LORD, he gives a sign. "The sign that I'm speaking to you, the word of the LORD basically, is the altar is going to be broken in two and the ashes are going to fall." Remember the king says, "Seize him!" and he sticks out his hand like this, pointing, "Seize him!" and his hand withers up. Now, you would think that would have gotten Jeroboam's attention in a bigger way than it did. It got his attention but in a bigger way. "Hey, pray and ask the Lord to give me my hand back." So he does and he gives him his hand back, but before he does that, the altar does break in two and the ashes fall out. Miraculously God breaks the altar, splits it in two, and the ashes fall out on the ground.

Now, they obviously rebuild the altar and keep making sacrifices there. That's the astonishing thing. You would have thought that would have been enough. Jeroboam would have repented. Now, he does show some sense of respect. He says, "Hey, man of God, I'd like to take you home and give you a reward and feed you and take care of you because I want to be on your good side." And the man of God says, "No. I would not go eat with you if you gave me half your kingdom because the word of the LORD came to me and said, 'You shall not eat or drink in that place. You shall come back by a different route to Judah.'" The Lord gave him not only what he was going to go up there and do, pronounce judgment on it, but exactly how he's supposed to go and come back.

Then in an astonishing turn in the story, verses 11 to the end of the chapter, I'm going to tell you what happens and you can read it. The man of God gets on his donkey and begins heading back south by a different way than he was told because he's not supposed to stop and eat or drink there. Another old prophet who lived in Bethel hears about what had happened from his son, I mean, like the news is spreading. He checked his iPhone and he saw what had happened. "I've got to find this out." So he sends his son to get him. "Go find the man of God or tell me which way he went," and he goes and finds the man of God. And he tells the man of God, "Hey, come back to my house." He wants to spend some time with him to talk some theology with him. And the man of God says, "I can't stop. I can't eat. I can't drink or eat bread. I've got to go back." And this old prophet lies to him and says, "The word of the LORD has also come to me and God said you can come to my house and you can eat bread and drink water."

So the man of God goes back with him. Believes the lie, goes back with him, sits down and eats with this old prophet. Now imagine this: you're the man of God, you're sitting down eating and drinking, you're kind of relieved because you were hungry anyway and now you get a chance to eat and drink. "Hey, after all, the LORD told me this." So in the middle of the meal, the old prophet cries out and pronounces judgment on the man of God. The word of the LORD comes to the old prophet and he says, "Because you have defied and disobeyed the word of the LORD, truly you will die today." The man of God hears that, gets up, gets on his donkey and starts heading south. We're told, the Scripture says a lion meets him on the way, kills him, stands beside him. There is a man dead, mauled by a lion, the prophet, the man of God, the lion and the donkey stand there like in

a still picture. I mean, I'm sure they moved around a little bit, I'm not saying that, but they stand there and people are walking along the road and they see the man of God dead, a lion and a donkey standing there. What in the world has happened? I mean, the lion...the donkey should want to run from the lion, the lion should want to eat the donkey or eat the man of God. The lion is not eating. Apparently the lion had the same command, "You're not to eat." But he obeyed.

This was a vivid testimony and so the old prophet hears about it and he goes and he gets the man of God, he brings him back to Bethel, buries him there close to that other ungodly temple, and weeps over him. And he says this, "What the man of God has prophesied shall surely come to pass," because everything he said was absolutely fulfilled, including when God told him, "Do not eat or drink in that place and come back by a different way." God meant it. And this is the hard words of Scripture, aren't they? I mean, you read that and it's unsettling. "Lord, this was your man." This man who disobeyed the word, God loved him. He was a man of God but God used his disobedience to make an emphatic point. The word of God, the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God stands forever. What he says stands.

So Isaiah 66:1-2, the prophet Isaiah in the last chapter of his book says, the Lord speaking through him says, "The highest heavens cannot contain Me but this is the one...you built a house for Me. Will I dwell in that house? I will dwell. To this one I will look." Chapter 66:2, "To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." You want to dwell with God, you want his blessing in your life, you tremble at his word and you realize his word is good and kind. I mean, these things that happened are very rare where he breaks out in judgment and it's just like little instances of punctuation. It should happen every moment of every day. We should be killed. I should be dead a million times over for being irreverent but his grace reigns. But in this moment at this point and time in history, he illustrated that his word stands forever.

Now, 300 years later exactly what happens in 2 Kings 23 you read a man named Josiah, just like he prophesied, who turned back to the Lord with all of his heart went up there, he dug up the priests' bones and he burned them on the altar at Bethel. He didn't even know what he was doing. One of the guys tells him after he's done it, "What you have done has fulfilled the word of the LORD that God spoke through the man of God way back to Jeroboam." You see, the word of God is moving history.

Now what that means is, that the word of God can move history. If the word of God can change events, the word of God can change our hearts. The word of God can redirect our idolatrous hearts away from the things that we would love rather than God and can make us pure and devoted worshipers of Jesus. His word is that mighty but we've got to be in it and we have to be seeking it actively and submitting to it when we find what he says. And when you actively seek his word and submit to it, he's going to redirect you.

I want to end by turning to Hebrews 4:12-16. Look at the power of the word of God. We have idolatrous hearts. We don't understand the thoughts and intentions. We don't understand why we're getting bent out of shape and overwhelmed with anxiety. We can't

even think straight because of what's going on in our lives. We don't understand. We can't figure it out. "What do I need to change?" You say, "Don't be anxious." What does that mean? "Stop it." I can't. You need the word of God. You don't know why your heart is the way it is. You don't understand your thoughts and intentions. The Bible says the purposes of a man's heart are deep waters. You can't look down into your heart and figure out what's going on but a man of understanding can draw it out and when he uses the word of God.

Look at this, Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." When you go to the word and you stay in the word and you let the word do its business and you submit to the word and say, "What is your agenda in this passage?" and you let it come into your heart, what it does is God, the Holy Spirit takes it like a sword and cuts into your heart like a perfect precision cut of the best surgeon and he gets to exactly what the problem is and he can lay it open before you. Then you're sitting there laid open. Now the thoughts and intentions are there and you see in a deeper way the cancer of sin that has been in your heart corrupting the way that you've been trying to love your spouse but you've been loving yourself and seeking what you want rather than what God wants and you see it now. What do you do in that moment?

Continue reading, verse 13, "there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." God sees what's wrong and he uses his word to cut down to the heart. Now there you are and you're like Isaiah saying, "Woe is me! I am undone! I'm coming apart!"

Look what the word of God does, verse 14, the word of God shows you where to go in your misery, in your brokenness. The word of God shows you where to go to worship. "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The word of God lays you bare and then it leads you to the Savior and in the Savior, in that woundedness, in that brokenness, you find the sweetness of a Savior that sympathizes with you, that understands what it's like to be tempted, that does not cast you away but who calls you to holiness and will empower you to be holy.

We need the word of God every day. It is the one essential thing.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we praise you, O Lord. We confess our great need of your word in our hearts, in our lives right now. We pray for those that need to repent and believe the Gospel, that your word would cut and heal at the feet of Jesus; that you would show the sinners that have not yet repented that Jesus has done everything necessary to save them; that his*

*blood has paid the full debt for the sins of everyone who would reach out to him; and that his resurrection proves that God has accepted his offering. Lord, help us to stop. Those of us who already are seeking to follow you and yet do so in such a halting manner, you see the idols that we don't even yet see, the ones you've shown us feel so big and so powerful, but your word is mighty. Your word is all powerful, the word which spoke the planets into being as on the pages of Scripture. Lord, have your way and let us treasure such a glorious Savior more and more and more as we turn from idols to worship our great King. We pray this in his name. Amen.*