

Worship

1 Kings 18

Life is a battle. We feel the struggle in different ways, but we all feel it. We know from Scripture, that:

“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:12

There is a spiritual war being waged and we are in the thick of it, whether we realize it or not. The exhortation of Ephesians 6 is to suit up in the whole armor of God. The first piece of that armor is the **BELT OF TRUTH**. If we are to survive this war, the first tool we need is truth – we must ***accurately perceive what is going on.***

Our story today in **1 Kings 18** gives us ***a window into the war we experience every day.*** For **the battle, above all, is for our hearts.** Gods are at war for our worship. The question is not WHETHER we worship but WHAT we worship. All of us love, trust and serve SOMETHING. The question is whether we worship the One True God or whether we have been deceived – led astray by false gods that cannot save us or satisfy our deepest needs.

Here is how Pastor Timothy Keller defines idolatry:

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give...”
Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

“An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.’ There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship.*”
Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

What do YOU worship? Deep down, what are you looking to for your security, happiness and fulfillment? We might quickly say, “Jesus,” but let’s pause to be honest. ***Do we truly love, trust and serve CHRIST ALONE?*** Or, if we’re honest, do we actually try to worship Jesus AND money; Jesus AND success; Jesus AND sexual fulfillment; Jesus AND our own happiness...

Consider how that would work with your husband or wife. “Honey, I love you! I’m committed to you alone. But you have to understand that I also love this other person. You are wonderful and amazing and I so appreciate how you provide financially for the family or how you take care of the kids or how you manage the home – but I have other needs too. This other person meets

my emotional needs, my physical needs, my recreational needs. No offense! I just need a little more than you can offer me..."

Would that fly in your house? I can tell you for sure it would not fly in mine. What is the emotion we feel when we hear something like that? **JEALOUSY**. We don't want to share the devotion of a marriage relationship with anyone else. Marriage is an exclusive bond between one man and one woman.

Elijah the prophet tells us that God feels the same way:

"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 1 Kings 19:10

Israel had gone beyond the syncretism of worshiping the Lord and Baal and Asherah and had committed completely to the worship of the Canaanite gods, forsaking the God of their own fathers. Ahab and his Sidonian wife, Jezebel, had torn down the altars to the Lord and killed the prophets of the Lord – all except Elijah – and they were after him now too!

Let's walk through this dramatic story in 1 Kings 18 and we'll see a contrast between the three actions of an idol alongside the three actions of the LORD.

First – here is what idols do:

Idols:

1. Deceive

"How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." 1 Kings 18:21

Elijah called a huge **church business meeting**. The whole nation of Israel assembled at Mount Carmel to see the faceoff between one prophet of God and 950 prophets of Baal and Asherah. How could there be 950 prophets in Israel for these two Canaanite gods? Well, Ahab was one of the worst kings of Israel.

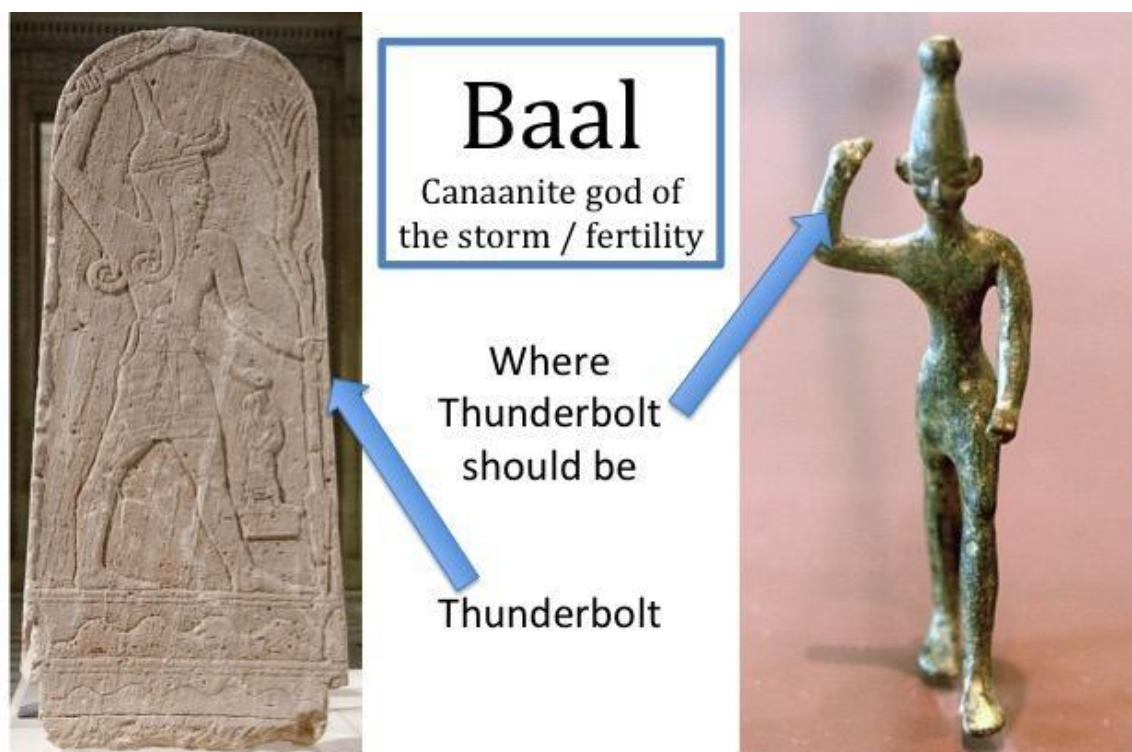
"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him." 1 Kings 16:30-31

Ahab's father, Omri, had been the Army General for Israel – but he overthrew the previous king and Omri became king. Omri then followed in the ways of the corrupt, idolatrous kings of Israel and devoted himself to the worship of Canaanite gods. Ahab grew up in this household and

continued the pattern. In fact, he went beyond his father and married a Sidonian, taking the idolatry of his kingdom to another level – which led to the 950 prophets of Baal and Asherah lined up against Elijah, the only remaining prophet of God.

Consider the deception that led to this point. The God of Israel had proved His supremacy over all other gods with unrivaled acts of power. 10 plagues – each designed to humiliate an Egyptian god. The Red Sea divided in half – an unparalleled visual miracle of salvation that not only set Israel free from their bondage but destroyed Pharaoh’s whole army in the process! The giving of the Law at Mount Sinai with thunder and lightning. Dramatic provisions during 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The conquest of the promised land through impossible victories like the one at Jericho when the walls fell down by marching and blowing trumpets.

What could lead any generation to turn away from the God who could do all of that to this guy?



Baal was the god of the storm – the overlord deity of the whole region who was supposed to provide rain for their crops. Three years before this event at Mount Carmel, as a judgment on Ahab for his idolatrous worship of the storm god, Elijah prayed that it would not rain – **and it did not rain in Canaan for three and a half years!** When Elijah prayed for a drought, the rain stopped. When Elijah prayed for the rain to come back, it came back.

This contest with the prophets of baal came at the end of three years of drought. You can see why Elijah taunted baal, wondering if he’s been on vacation for the last three years... These images crack me up because the cute little bronze baal statue shows his little lightning bolt broken off.

How sad for him! But how totally fitting to this story! This is what idols do! **They deceive** – making promises they cannot keep. And therefore, **they disappoint**.

Idols:

1. Deceive

2. Disappoint

“They called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying ‘O, Baal, answer us!’ But there was no voice, and no one answered.” 1 Kings 18:26

Baal, the Lord of Thunder, the god of rain and fertility, promised the Canaanites abundant crops for their devotion to him. **But that promise was a lie**. He had no ability to deliver. Elijah made that clear through the 3.5 year drought. And he brought it to a dramatic finale here on Mount Carmel with 950 prophets calling out to their god.

2. Idols Disappoint

“And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.’” 1 Kings 18:27

The nation of Israel was limping between two opinions – now the prophets of Baal are literally limping around his altar as they slash themselves with swords in an effort to get the attention of their distracted or distant deity.

2. Idols Disappoint

“And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.” 1 Kings 18:29

The Bible is history, theology, poetry, wisdom. But, come on – it is also **COMEDY!** This is one of the funniest moments in Scripture. A prophet of God **talking trash to 950 prophets of Baal** and Asherah. The god and goddess who promised life and fertility are utterly absent, totally silent. **The Storm god** who supposedly wielded the thunderbolt finds himself **suddenly impotent** – his little lightning bolt broken off. The only sound on the mountain is the maniacal ranting of these frantic prophets and their screams of pain from their bleeding gashes. Baal and Asherah did not show up. They made no sound. There was no lightning; not even the tiniest spark; not the smallest wisp of a cloud in the sky; not the first sign of a storm.

This is what idols do: they deceive. **They promise life and happiness but deliver only empty promises**. Consider the top 3 idols: sex, money and power. It has been observed that these are the idols of men – in their 20s, men worship sex; in their 30s they shift to worship money and in their 40s and 50s they shift again to worship power, influence, status. For women (I’m guessing) it’s romance, family and legacy – or something like that.

Popular Idols

For Men:	For Women:
Sex Money Power	Romance Family Legacy

- **Sex and romance** promise happiness, fulfillment – the good life! A great secular study was done a few years ago that came to be called “revenge of the church ladies.” It surveyed hundreds of people asking about their overall sexual satisfaction from young city singles to old, long time married couples. The demographic with the consistently highest happiness rate in the bedroom turned out to be middle age, married Christian women - revenge of the church ladies! The devil’s lie is that happiness can be found apart from God and His rules. The truth is that when you step out of bounds you step into trouble.
- ***Relationships are one of the most common idols*** because they are the best God-substitute we have. But everyone who is in a long term relationship knows that the relationship takes A LOT of work and if you look to a husband, wife, child or friend to meet ALL of your needs (like a god) you will be severely disappointed. ***No human being can possibly meet your needs*** – for physical intimacy, emotional intimacy, perfect security or total happiness. It simply cannot be done. The movies tell us otherwise. But the idol of relationships deceives and disappoints.
- **Money** is even easier to expose as a lie. It promises security and happiness but just turns us into slaves. Countless people have devoted themselves to work and financial goals only to wash up late in life with a large bank account and an empty life.
- **Power and legacy** seem more alluring, especially later in life – but eventually you realize that once you’re dead, you’re dead. You can’t take anything with you. Yes, you may leave behind some imprint on history, some impact on a few people (or a lot of people) but you can’t take that with you either.

Idols are like plastic fruit. They may look great at first – but if you try to eat them you will quickly be disappointed. There is only ONE GOD who can meet all of our needs. All other gods are liars. All other idols are just like that bronze statue of Baal – things we construct with our own hands. How could a handmade idol save anyone? It can’t even stand itself up if it gets knocked over! Idols deceive and disappoint.

And then there’s the final outcome to consider. Look to the end of this story:

“Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.’” 1 Kings 18:38-39

3. Idols Destroy

“And Elijah said to them, ‘Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and **slaughtered them there.**” 1 Kings 18:40

Idolatry is the ultimate offense against God. Ahab was the King of Israel. His job was to LEAD the nation in the worship of the LORD. Instead, he led them into the most flagrant idol worship. In marriage terminology, he divorced the covenant God of Israel and committed adultery with Baal and Asherah. What greater offense could he have committed? He tore down the altars of the Lord and built altars to Baal, planted trees to Asherah.

The consequence for this rebellion against the One True God was **immediate death for the false prophets.** The faithful prophet commanded that these evil false teachers be immediately purged from Israel. Judgment on Ahab and Jezebel would come a little later but it was coming. And it would not be pretty.

Idols promise life but deliver death. They promise happiness but deliver slavery. Ultimately idols destroy a person spiritually by bringing them under the just condemnation of God. By worshiping something other than God you are saying to your Creator: “You are not enough for me. I need something more. I prefer a god who will give me this or that...” Imagine how terribly offensive this is to the One who on top of giving you life and many physical blessings sent His Son to die for you and pay the price for your sin...

Now let’s look at the contrast between what Idols do and what God does:

<i>Idols...</i>	<i>The One True God...</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Deceive2. Disappoint3. Destroy	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Speaks the Truth2. Saves3. Satisfies

The central issue in 1 Kings 18 is **TRUTH.** Elijah called the whole nation together and said, “How long will you go limping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is god, follow him.”

Solomon introduced idolatry to Israel by marrying hundreds of foreign women and helping them set up shrines to their various gods. **Early in his reign** Solomon built a glorious temple for the One True God of Israel - setting up Jerusalem as a beacon on a hill in the middle east to showcase the supremacy of their One God. But **by the end of his life** he had set up shrines to every other

god around. He fell prey to the false promises of sex, money and power - and ***the corruption of that idolatry wreaked havoc*** on his son and all the kings to follow him. Idolatry destroys.

Knowing the truth opens the door to freedom. **What is the truth in YOUR heart?** Have you honestly assessed the places you have compromised - the ways you have turned from God to worship idols? Have you experienced enough of the disappointment and destruction from this path of rebellion that you are ready to ***move from the darkness of DENIAL into the light of God's GRACE?***

The first step is seeing the truth. This is what God does. He helps us see the truth.

The One True God:

1. Speaks the Truth

"After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.'" 1 Kings 18:1

God raised up the prophet Elijah to expose the falsehood and dangers of idol worship. How much more clear could this contest make it?

The One True God:

1. Speaks the Truth

"You call upon the name of your God and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." 1 Kings 18:24

Elijah gave Baal home field advantage. This was his territory. Lightning was his tool. He had 950 prophets crying out to him. Surely most people thought Elijah was in serious trouble. But this was Elijah's prayer, after pouring so much water on the altar and sacrifice that no one could conclude he had brought some kind of pocket lighter up there to fabricate a fire trick:

"O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God." 1 Kings 18:36-37

The whole purpose of this contest was to reveal the TRUTH - that there is only ONE GOD and He has no rivals. There are other parts of Scripture that talk about spiritual warfare and remind us that demons are powerful. But this story shows us that ***idols are NOTHING*** - they have NO POWER AT ALL. Idols like Baal are simply the fabrications of human minds - with no more power than a Precious Moments figurine.

The same thing is true for the idols in our lives. Sex, money, power, family, romance, legacy - whatever. They have NO POWER. They will only disappoint us. There is only ONE true and living

God. And the wonderful teaching of this passage is that the God of the Bible not only speaks the truth - He also SAVES.

The One True God:

- 1. Speaks the Truth***
- 2. Saves***

“Then the fire of the LORD fell and *consumed the burnt offering* and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.” 1 Kings 18:38

Picture the scene. All day the prophets of Baal and Asherah have been yelling and screaming with no effect. Now Elijah steps forward and with a few words of prayer fire somehow comes down from heaven. If you suddenly saw the fire of God above you and you knew you had several Baal statues in your house and that you had recently been to the temple of Asherah for some pleasurable company - think how you would have felt in that moment: utterly exposed to the just wrath of God.

You were guilty of idolatry. You had not given the One True God the wholehearted worship He deserves. Now His judgment was about to be poured out and you knew that it rightly should fall on you...

BUT that’s not where the fire falls. Instead, it consumed the animal Elijah had placed on the altar. For good measure the fire also consumed the stones, the wood, the dust and water. But the relevant point if you had been there is that **the fire DID NOT CONSUME YOU.**

This is how the One True God SAVES idolatrous sinners - ***by providing a sacrificial substitute.*** This was the whole reason for the sacrifice system and especially the annual Day of Atonement - to teach Israel that “without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sin.” When sins are committed, a sacrifice must be made.

The One True God:

- 2. Saves***

“And when all the people saw it, *they fell on their faces* and said, ‘The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.’” 1 Kings 18:39

Here was a mighty act of divine revelation and merciful salvation. The LORD made it absolutely clear that He was the only DEITY on the mountain, the only God in the world and that He was a merciful God, willing to deflect His wrath onto a substitute. Of course this points ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus.

When the soldiers and Jews gathered around Jesus on the cross, having convicted him through a farcical trial, beaten and mocked him and then crucified him - when the fire of God’s just wrath

fell it did not fall on the people, it fell on the sacrificial substitute. **Israel was guilty of the worst kind of rebellion and idolatry.** They rejected God's own Son - their long awaited Messiah. Instead of worshipping and serving Him they mocked and flogged him. **The Romans were guilty of executing an innocent man** - violating the basic laws of justice, that Pilate the Governor knew full well he was violating.

Yet God willingly poured the full strength of His fury not on those who most deserved it but instead **on the ONE who did not deserve it at all.** On the cross the fire of God's judgment fell from heaven onto Jesus. Just as the altar, stones, wood and dust on Mount Carmel was consumed to show how God feels about idolatry, so Jesus' body was consumed in the agony of being forsaken by His Father.

- Jesus was condemned so we could be acquitted.
- He suffered so we could be healed.
- Jesus was crucified so we could live forever.
- He was forsaken by the Father so we could be adopted.
- Jesus endured the agony of God's wrath so we could experience the joy of God's love FOREVER.

But God not only SAVES, He also SATISFIES.

The One True God:

1. Speaks the Truth
2. Saves
3. Satisfies

Idols always disappoint us because they have no actual power. The devil leads us into suffering because his mission statement is to steal and kill and destroy. Only Jesus can save us from our sins. **And only Jesus can satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.** Everything and everyone else will let us down.

We see a picture of this in the story of Elijah as it continues beyond this contest with Baal. Remember, **it hadn't rained for three and a half years.** The drought was so severe that most of the livestock was dead, most of the streams and ponds had long since dried up. We see this when our ponds get low after a few weeks without rain. Imagine a few YEARS without rain.

Then, at Elijah's word, the rain lets loose. In ancient times **rain meant LIFE.** Without rain there were no crops; there was no water - ponds and wells dried up... everything and everyone died. This is why people got into the worship of gods like Baal and Asherah - they figured any little thing might help - why not offer a little sacrifice here, chip in some cash there, toss up a prayer... In this account God made it clear that HE ALONE is the giver of life. God alone gives rain.

The One True God:

3. Satisfies

“And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind and there was **a great rain.**”
1 Kings 18:45

Right after this King Ahab and his Queen, Jezebel, set out to capture and execute Elijah the prophet. So Elijah ran for his life. Alone in the wilderness, just a little while after this momentous victory, the prophet of God hit rock bottom:

“It is enough; now, O Lord, **take away my life...**’ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree.”
1 Kings 19:4-5

Here we see the mercy and love of God.

3. God Satisfies

“And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Arise and eat.’ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.” 1 Kings 19:5-6

For his despairing servant, God provided food and water. Jesus taught us to pray “Give us this day our daily bread.” God knows what we need and provides for us like a good and loving Father. But He doesn’t stop there. God knows that the main thing we need is HIM. So God gave Elijah supernatural power to travel for 40 days on that angel-delivered meal, up onto a mountain:

“And behold, **the Lord passed by**, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.” 1 Kings 19:11-12

The One True God: Speaks, Saves & Satisfies

“And after the fire the sound of **a low whisper...** And behold, there came a voice to him and said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” 1 Kings 19:11-12

We come full circle. God speaks to show us the truth. He saves sinners so we can enter a relationship with Him that allows us to hear His voice. And He satisfies our souls by teaching us to feed on His Word.

Two applications as we close:

Worship Must Be:

1. Focused on the One True God

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24

Our culture says that as long **as you are sincere what you believe doesn't matter**. You could be a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian. Just don't judge anyone else and as long as you're sincere, you'll be fine. Think how absurd that would be if you applied it outside of religion!

- You could be a murderer, a thief or kidnapper but as long as you're sincere, it's all good!
- You can drive 40, 80 or 120 mph, but as long as you're sincere, you're fine.
- No need to study for your math test tomorrow - as long as you're sincere in your love for math, you'll do great!

We all know that **TRUTH matters**. It doesn't matter how sincerely you believe you can fly. There was a time I really thought I could make Spider-Man web-slingers and I really wanted to test them up on my garage. I would not be here today in my current physical state had I tried that. Sincerity doesn't matter in the end - truth does.

The 950 prophets of Baal and Asherah learned that the hard way. They were tremendously sincere in their devotion to those gods - so committed they slashed themselves with knives. But they were sincerely wrong and died for it. **Worship must be focused on the one true God - whose name is Jesus**. God proved His supremacy over all other gods through the mighty miracles of the Old Testament. But the ultimate proof that there is only One True God is the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Worship Must Be Focused on the One True God, whose name is JESUS

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:30-31

As incredible as it was that fire fell from heaven to consume that sacrifice on Mount Carmel, it was even more amazing that the Son of God came down from heaven to be born as a human baby. It was still more remarkable that the Glorious God-Man allowed Himself to be crucified and killed for a world filled with idolatrous, rebellious sinners. **But the greatest miracle of all was that Jesus walked out of the grave on the third day.**

This is the cornerstone of our faith. **He is risen**. The tomb is empty. We believe in a crucified Savior but we worship a Risen LORD. Jesus is not on the cross anymore. He defeated death and hell forever. He rose and later ascended into heaven where He reigns at the Father's right hand.

One more point of application:

Worship Must Be:

1. Focused on the One True God and

2. ***From an Undivided Heart***

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24

God will not share His glory with another. He is a jealous God. Just as you don't want to share your husband or wife's love with another man or woman, so God does not want to share your heart with anyone or anything else.

Israel's idolatry didn't start with 950 prophets of Baal and Asherah - it ended there. It started with one little compromise - one little statue. Let's surrender every part of ourselves to the Lord in true, wholehearted worship! He alone is worthy of our praise! Every other god deceives, disappoints and ultimately destroys.

Only Jesus is the full revelation of God's truth. Only Jesus is the Savior for sinners. Only Jesus can satisfy your soul. Let's pray and then sing out our worship to our Risen and glorious Lord!

Because He Lives