

I. Introduction

- A. New York City's Grand Central Station stands as an incredible achievement of architecture and art. If you were to stand inside the station, and look upward, you would see a barrel-vaulted ceiling 125 feet high and 275 feet long. The ceiling is decorated with the stars of the night sky. The stars are painted, and enhanced by electric light bulbs. They show the major constellations set against a cerulean blue oil paint. A breathtaking achievement back in 1912, four years shy of the last time the Chicago Cubs won a World Series.
- B. It would take a person with a very special kind of knowledge to notice that something is wrong with the stars depicted on that ceiling. If you had a deep knowledge of the night sky, you would notice that the constellations are depicted upside down. Flipped vertically.
- C. How did this happen?
- D. When the architects designed that ceiling, they turned to a professor of Astronomy at Columbia University. Dr. Harold Jacoby provided the final figures for the constellations.
- E. But he provided those drawings as an astronomer, which meant that he expected the painters to hold the drawings UP to the ceiling, and then start placing the stars.
- F. What do you think they did?
- G. They set the draws down on a table, and then copied them upwards.
- H. Upside down from reality.
 - 1. *Never underestimate the human ability to turn truth upside down and backwards.*
- I. What do movies like The Matrix, Inception, and Source Code have in common with the Bible?
- J. Answer... they all tell the story of people locked in unreality. Of people whose definition of reality is backward...What they think is real isn't real. What is real, they have no clue about.
 - 1. They're walking in a dream state, a fantasy land, a virtual reality with an opposite underlying reality. So somehow, something or somebody has to wake them up to what is real.
- K. They need a shock to the system. They need a reality check.
- L. Enter the Living, Breathing, Unalterable, All-Purpose Word of God.
- M. What is truth?
- N. Truth is reality.
- O. What is truth?
- P. Truth is reality as God experiences it, God sees it, and God defines it.
- Q. To walk in truth is to walk in reality.
- R. To walk in untruth is to walk in unreality.
- S. To walk in unreality is to be crazy...
 - 1. C.R.A.Z.Y. — Contradicted Reality Always Zaps You
- T. You can't break God's truth; you can only break yourself against God's truth.
- U. In my message today, I want to invite you to step out of unreality and into reality in your life with God.
- V. I'd like to get right into Scripture today, to show you what I mean. Then we'll rewind and get some backstory.
- W. Scripture:
 - 1. *Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. (1 Kings 18:17, 18, NKJV).*
- X. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel are the villains in the story. They've been looking for Elijah for three and a half years.
- Y. Elijah is the hero of the story. He is prophet of God, the Bible says. So he's God's spokesperson for this incredibly important moment of world history.
- Z. Elijah has been in hiding all this time. Now, in what is one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture, he comes out of hiding to present himself to Ahab.
- AA. And look at what Ahab says: "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"
 - 1. Israel is in trouble. They are in a drought. They are in a famine. Their economy is in ruins. And they are not experiencing the good stuff God promised them. They are in deep trouble.
 - 2. And who is it that King Ahab blames? Elijah.
 - 3. He calls him a troubler, a trouble maker. The root word paints the picture of a pot of water at a rolling boil.
 - 4. Hey you, God-follower, you're making waves, and all our troubles are traceable to you. It's all your fault.
- BB. There's the set up for my message today which is called Reality Check.

II. GRIT

- A. Welcome to part 6 in our summer series called G.R.I.T.
- B. Grace Revealed in Trials
 - 1. G.R.I.T. is the spiritual toughness to face the tyrants that would steal your dominion and the faith to crush them with supernatural weapons of grace.
- C. For a case study in Grit, we've been using the story of one of God's great prophets, a man named Elijah. And let's see how today, Elijah delivers a world-class reality check to a nation utterly convinced of an upside down unreality.

III. *Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. (1 Kings 18:17, 18, NKJV).*

- A. So here is a King and a nation that is backward. God is forsaken, and Baal — the sun-god — is worshipped. The people built temples to him. They raised up altars to him. They made sacrifices to him, including human burnt offerings (Jer. 19:5).

- B. But God loves his people too much to subsidize their self-destructive unreality. So he withheld the rains, and brought the people to this point, where they have to look in the mirror and decide who will be their God.
- C. So let's do a reality check.
- D. Why are the people in trouble?
- E. The people are in trouble because they have forsaken God and turned to idols called Baal. And it was King Ahab and Queen Jezebel that led the conga line into that false worship. This is reality. This is why the people are in trouble.
- F. In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis said,
 - 1. "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."
- G. And these people are experiencing the reality of that truth. Baal wasn't working for them. False gods never work. Contradicted Reality Always Zaps You.
- H. But who gets the blame?
- I. Elijah. Ahab looks at the world upside down... and he says, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"
 - 1. 1. People locked in unreality routinely scapegoat others for problems they caused themselves.
- J. Let me ask you... where do you point the finger of blame today? Who is responsible for your unhappiness, for your needless drama, for the unnecessary complications in your life?
- K. It might not all be you — this fallen world is a morally broken pain machine... so bad stuff happens.
- L. But could it be that some bad stuff, we've brought on our own heads?
- M. Sometimes, the first reality check we need is to admit that we have caused much of our own trouble, and used it as an excuse to turn away from God.
- N. Just like Ahab and the people of Israel. Elijah is about to deliver an epic Reality Check to the nation.
- IV. *"Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18:19, 20, NKJV).*
 - A. The "Asherah" here is the title for another set of idols. Baal was the male god, and "Asherah" was the female counterpart.
 - B. And look, both false religions were organized enough to have a large number of official prophets, 850 in all.
 - C. I'd like to point out that the priests of the "Asherah" goddesses "ate at Jezebel's table." That means they got the official stamp of approval from the highest leaders in the land.
 - D. Here's the reality check:
 - 1. 2. No ruler, no power, no majority, and no crowd can ever bend God's truth.
 - 2. You can't break God's truth. You can only break yourself against God's truth, because Contradicted Reality Always Zaps You.
 - a) But today, I want to help you align with reality... and that is by receiving Jesus as your Savior. I won't single you out, but I do want to help you cross that line today. I won't embarrass you... you don't have to be ready, just willing, and you can adjust your life to God's reality in a huge way today by being saved.
 - E. I don't care how many people call a lie the truth. It can be 850, or 850 million. It can be all the kids in school. It can be all the colleagues at work. It can be all the players on the team. It's still a lie even if the majority embraces it.
 - F. And I don't care how powerful the authorities are who back a lie. It's still a lie. It's still unreality. It's still Crazy, and unreality always comes back to bite you. I don't care the might. I don't care the numbers.
 - G. One follower of the Lamb of God, armed with the Truth of God, and possessing even an ounce of G.R.I.T. is mightier than a host of willfully-deceived sleepwalkers.
 - H. And in our story, that one, solitary follower of the Lamb is gritty old Elijah. Look at what he does.
 - V. *And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21, NKJV).*
 - A. People locked in unreality never examine their underlying premises.
 - B. The word falter means to limp. How long will you limp between two opinions?
 - C. Notice how LORD is written.
 - 1. Lord — Adonai, Master and Commander
 - 2. LORD — Yahweh, God's Personal Name, the Self-existent, Uncreated, Non-contingent Being. He Who Is.
 - 3. God — Elohim, the Supreme Being.
 - D. If Yahweh is the Supreme Being, follow him. If Baal is the supreme being, follow him.
 - E. What's he doing?
 - F. He's digging beneath a lifetime of unexamined habit. Some people have not thought through their beliefs. They've gone with the crowd. They accepted what they've been told. They've taken the path of least resistance.
 - G. And what they find is a huge house of cards built of lies, with an un-inspected foundation.
 - H. Along comes a person with true grit to cut through all the lies, and make it as simple as possible.
 - I. If the God of the Bible is God, follow him.
 - 1. That's what I want to help you today. To declare in your own heart that Jesus Christ is your Lord, which means your God, and he is your Savior and only Hope.
 - J. And that would be my appeal to you today.
 - K. You can reject God, but you can't ignore him and claim to be honest. You can't pretend that Jesus never came to earth. You can't pretend that he didn't claim to be God. You can't pretend that he didn't die on the cross. And you can't pretend that he didn't promise to rise again, and that his followers and many others claimed he did.
 - L. You have to do something with those claims. You can't just ignore them, unless you want to live in a dream state and walk in unreality — which is ultimately crazy.

- M. If these claims are true, follow him. Because if Jesus is really who he says he is, then he is the source of all reality, and your truest identity, and your deepest joy can only be found in him.
- N. So decide.
- O. Decide.
- P. How long will you limp between two opinions?
 - 1. 3. Sometimes the confusion you feel isn't from a lack of information; it's from a lack of choice.
 - 2. I lovingly urge you to to make that choice today.
 - 3. Gritty people make the tough choice to stick with reality, even if it goes against the crowd.
- Q. So here comes Elijah to call for that tough choice.
- VI. *Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. "Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. "Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken." (1 Kings 18:22-24, NKJV).*
 - A. He proposes a test. We have no idea of how Elijah came up with this test. The Bible doesn't tell us that God promised fire. It doesn't tell us that he saw all this happen in a vision or a dream.
 - B. Maybe he's just making it up on the spot.
 - C. Let's just pause and consider the guts and grit Elijah shows here. He's the only one speaking truth. He's the only one standing in reality. Everyone else in this story has swallowed the devil's lies and doesn't even know it. And they blame him for their problems.
 - D. The king and queen are murderous thugs. The priests outnumber him 850 to one. There's no court or jury in a thousand miles that would let him off the hook.
 - E. But here he stands, one man, one follower of God, against a host.
 - 1. He would rather die in the freedom of God than live in slavery to lies.
 - F. There's an incredible prayer in the Bible that digs this truth in deep:
 - 1. *And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested. (1 Chronicles 4:10, NKJV).*
 - G. Here's Reality Check number 4:
 - 1. 4. You are in a turf war. Every lie you believe shrinks your borders. Every truth you embrace expands your borders.
 - H. Jesus didn't come to shrink your life. He came to give you the biggest, most abundant life you can imagine. If you will receive him, he will start that great work in you. He will expand your borders beyond your wildest dreams.
 - I. What is Grit?
 - 1. *G.R.I.T. is the spiritual toughness to face the tyrants that would steal your dominion and the faith to crush them with supernatural weapons of grace.*
 - 2. Every lie is the devil's rat to nibble away at your dominion.
 - a) God's truth gives life. The devil's lies cause death.
 - b) God's truth heals. The devil's lies sicken.
 - c) God's truth sets you free. The devil's lies take you captive.
 - d) God's truth makes you truly you. The devil's lies make you a clone.
 - e) God's truth satisfies. The devil's lies drain you.
 - f) God's truth creates love. The devil's lies create loneliness. ;
 - 3. God has given you dominion. He has given you right to rule your life and property under the mighty Lordship of Jesus Christ. And ever since the serpent lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden, you are in a turf war, and the devil wants your territory.
 - 4. Time to take it back, amen?
 - J. So Elijah proposes a test, and joins the ranks of heroes of faith who stuck out their necks, and risked everything on God doing the impossible.
- VII. *Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:25-29, NKJV).*
 - A. Welcome to religion.
 - B. It's upside down and backwards. It's crazy.
 - C. Picture this. All the people are watching from the hillsides. And all the priests are worn out. Shouting. Dancing. Praying., Screaming. Imploring Baal to send down fire. They wear themselves out for the favor of their god.
 - D. Nothing happens. So they get desperate. They know Ahab is watching. And I have to believe that part of them knows that no god carved from word or stone is worthy to be worshipped. No god who springs from human hands is worthy of the title.
 - 1. We don't create him; he created us.
 - 2. Religion has it backward.
 - E. They know they live in unreality, but they won't give up.
 - F. So now, they go deeper into the lie. They pull out knives and lances and cut themselves until the blood gushed out.
 - G. What a spectacle.

- H. And sadly that spectacle is repeated a million times a day, every time any person reduces God to an idol, or imagines a discount salvation offered at a price humans can actually afford.
- I. What is the cost of your salvation? The precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:19).
- J. What is the cost of your salvation? Infinitely more than you could ever afford to pay.
- K. So God came down, and God paid it for you. And he offers you a gift.
- L. People say all religions are the same — and they are if you cut Christianity out of the mix.
 - 1. The religions of the world say reach up to God.
 - a) Christianity says God reached down to you.
 - 2. Religion says, pay the price.
 - a) Christianity says God in Christ paid the price.
 - 3. Religion says, DO...
 - a) In Christianity, God says DONE, and invites you to simply believe.
- M. There are only two systems... the one says work your way to God, and Christianity that says, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us (Titus 3:5).
- N. Religion has it backward.
- O. Unreality.
- P. Crazy... And here, witnessing these priests of Baal, weary, and worn, and broken, and drenched in the own blood — all in vain... has there ever been a greater proof that Contradicted Reality Always Zaps You?
- Q. Imagine 850 tired priests, bloodied, and their voices raw, and they're panting from the exertion, and blooded by the spectacle, and breathing hard and leaning on a spear, and Elijah catches the eye of one of them and smiles, and says, "Hey buddy, try a little louder. Maybe he's napping."
- R. Nice sarcasm, Elijah. But sometimes, you gotta get tough to break through.
 - 1. 5. All religions shrink God and sell his favors at a price (works). Only grace exalts God and offers his favors as a gift, paid in full by Christ alone.
- S. God is infinitely interested in what he can give you, and immeasurably disinterested in what you can give him (Ac 17:25, "as though he needed anything...")
 - 1. He can give you forgiveness of sins. Adoption into his family. The gift of eternal life. He can give you a new start. He can give you strength in weakness, and peace in the storms of life.
 - 2. All this and more is his gift to you if you will only receive.
- T. It's grace.
- U. It takes courage to believe.
- V. It takes Grit to go against the flow.
- W. It takes Grit to say... the picture that I've been looking at is all wrong. It's backward.
- X. And that is what I want to invite you to do right now.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. We dedicate our closing moments to you today if you are here without Christ as your Savior. We want you to know Jesus had you personally in mind when he died on the Cross, and that on that Cross, all your sins were lifted out of you and transferred to Christ. Then God punished Christ for your sins instead of punishing you. Therefore, you can belong to God. Therefore you can be forgiven. Therefore you can have eternal life. Therefore you can be God's child, and an heir of god, and a joint heir with Christ, starting today.
- B. How?
- C. By faith alone. The Bible says so.
 - 1. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.
 - 2. Whoever believes on him, has everlasting life. Not what you do for him, but what he has done for you, once for all, on the Cross.
- D. I want to help you cross that line of faith today.
- E. Prayer:
 - 1. ADMIT: God, I admit I am outside your family today. I need you. I have sinned. I have not lived up to your standards. I can't fix that. I need your help today.
 - 2. BELIEVE: I believe that Jesus Christ died on the Cross to bring me back to you. I believe he is your Son. I believe he died for my sins. I believe he rose again. I don't get how it all works, but I'm telling you right now, I believe that Jesus is my way to you; he is my only way to you.
 - 3. CHOOSE: Right now, I choose to trust in Jesus Christ as my only hope. I choose to believe him. I choose to receive him as my Savior. And I'm asking you, not because of my worthiness, but because of Jesus, right now, dear God, please forgive me, please adopt me, please make me your child and your heir through Jesus Christ alone. Amen.