

1 Kings 18:17-46

Let's tune back in to the "Showdown on Mt Carmel," the "Battle of the Gods." Will Ahab have Elijah executed on sight!? Will Elijah humiliate and eradicate the prophets of Baal!? and What about this dreaded drought!? All this and more in the exciting conclusion of, "Showdown on Mt Carmel," the "Battle of the Gods."

You recall from our last gathering that God told Elijah to go and present himself to king Ahab and He would send rain on the earth. There had been a drought for 3 ½ yrs, things weren't only drying, they were dying, and rather than respond in repentance we read in vs 4 that Jezebel responded in massacring the prophets of the Lord. But a man by the name of Obadiah who feared the Lord greatly, had (at the risk of his own life) taken 100 prophets of the Lord and hidden them 50 to a cave and fed them with bread and water via his own resources in the midst of this famine. Now Obadiah worked for Ahab, God had as it were one of His own on the inside, Elijah exhorting him from the outside, and Obadiah being an example to him on the inside. And you recall we noted how people need both, they need to not only hear the Word of God *exhorting* them, but they need to see it lived out in our lives as an *example* to them. But through all this rather than seeking after God, Ahab was seeking after grass for his livestock, and as they were out and about, Obadiah going one way, Ahab going the other, Elijah comes suddenly upon Obadiah and he says, "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

And after Elijah reaffirmed to him that he wasn't going anywhere and that as sure as the Lord of Hosts lived before whom he stood, he would present himself to Ahab that day. Vs 16 tells us that Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him that Elijah was there. And in the culmination of this confrontation is where we left off last time, so we pick it up in vs 17.

Vs17

Now this is par for the course, how often the wicked blame the righteous for their trouble. They want to go their ways, do their thing, live from sin to sin, but then when the ramifications of their lives catch up to them it's always God's fault. Or the liberal's life is so miserable because of the conservative Christian. Ahab is easily the most wicked, and base/ungodly King that Israel ever had and yet he doesn't hesitate to blame the man of God for all of the nations present problems. He blames the ramifications of *his personal sin* on someone else, and unfortunately this is all too common. How often people refuse to simply humble themselves and say, "I've sinned." Instead they make themselves out to be a victim of circumstance, and they blame their current crisis on *anything* or *anyone* other than the one who's truly at fault –them self. They sow to the flesh, but the harvest of corruption is God's fault, or blamed on the people of God. And that's what Ahab is doing here, he made his bed but refuses to lie in it, won't assume responsibility for his own actions. It's not God's fault he's chosen to refuse to serve God, and give himself over to idolatry, but for some reason the ramifications of his choices are being blamed on Elijah. All he had to do was repent and the rain would've come, but all this "heat," all these "dry times" that have come into his life, and the lives of everyone around him (in his case ripping out into the entire nation) hasn't broken him.

He hasn't repented, he refuses to be accountable for his sin. It's amazing how many lives we'll allow to be hurt, and watch crumble around us due to *our* sin, and yet refuse to repent. It's no wonder that God hates pride. Well, Elijah quickly realigns the perspective for Ahab in a proper way, notice.

Vs18

Notice Elijah doesn't mix words, but rather he calls the situation for what it is. "Don't blame the ramifications of *your sins* on me, this is all *your doing!* and He gives him 2 things that make for trouble, #1 *Forsaking* the commandments of the Lord, and #2 *Following* the Baals, or other things in the place of God. A sure way to invite trouble into your life, or my life is to forsake the Word of God. You're no doubt familiar with these scriptures, "*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.*" Ps 119:9 Or another way to understand that, if you want to live a defiled life full of unnecessary trouble, don't take heed to the word of God. Again, "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.*" Ps 119:11 W/out the word of God to guide you, you're going to inevitably sin against the Lord, which is to invite trouble into your life. "*Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*" Ps 119:104-105 W/out the word of God to guide us we lack understanding, and with out understanding we're susceptible to deceit, (false ways) we'll be prone to walk in darkness apart from the light of the Word of God being shed into our lives. Ahab's ways were defiled, he was sinning against God, he lacked understanding, consequently he walked in ways that were false, just leading his life in the dark. The bible says, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*" Prov 14:12 It just doesn't matter how right you think you are or how right I think I am, if my ways don't accord with the word of God, its end is the way of death, it makes for trouble, a sowing to the wind, & a reaping of the whirlwind. Ahab had forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and what else?

He had, "Followed the Baals." He had fallen into the flow of the world, had other idols in the place of the One True living God. You want to invite trouble into your life? Than cause your master passion to be the pursuit of *something* or *someone* other than the True and Living God, forsake God as the priority of your life, and follow after Mammon, (the pursuit of riches). Is there anything wrong with being rich? Not in and of itself, but the bible says, "*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" 1 Tim 6:9-10 It's not being rich that's the problem, it's the insatiable desire, when everything else falls to the wayside in your pursuit of the brass ring, it's not money, it's the love of money. When you forsake God, to follow after riches, you're inviting trouble into your life. Or instead of following after God, always follow after the bigger/better, pursue the material things of this world as your master passion. Is there anything wrong possessing things? No, but when those things possess you it's a major problem, and makes for serious trouble.

You no doubt remember the incident with the rich young ruler, he wanted to follow Jesus, Jesus said, “Sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come follow Me.” and We read, “*But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*” Matt 19:22 Jesus said, “*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*” Matt 16:26 Yet how many people have forsaken God to follow after the material benefits of this world? But such are the Baals of our culture, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, and people forsake the word of God, and follow after these things and wonder why the world is in such trouble, must be those Christians. But like Elijah, “It’s not we who’ve troubled the world, its you, because you’ve forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and have followed the Baals.”

Vs19-21

Of course this reminds us of what Joshua said when *he* was reprimanding the people for their instability, and vacillation when he said, “*Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*” Josh 24:14-15

Elijah says, “How long will you falter between two opinions?” and The word, “falter” speaks of shifting from one foot to the other, or even to limp, the idea is that of a double mindedness, or an instability. Of course James said that the double minded man *is* unstable, in *all* his ways. And the thought here is that they were trying to have the best of both worlds and in reality it was only crippling them, creating an unhealthy double-minded instability. We’ve spoken of inviting trouble into our lives, forsaking the Word of God, and following after the things of this world. Well, herein lies the key to instability, seek after the Lord one day, and the gods of sensuality, or some other carnal desire the next. Start partying on Friday and Saturday, and try to continue to serve the Lord on Sunday. It’ll hobble you, destroy your life, create great instability in you. Elijah is saying you need to commit somewhere, you can’t ride the fence, be hot, or be cold, but this lukewarm business will destroy your soul. And you know where I’m going with this. Jesus said in Rev 3:15-16, “*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*” and Here Elijah is calling them to commitment, to make a stand one way or another, but you can’t have both. You know intermingling pagan practices and philosophies in their worship of God, yet we find that to be a common cultural phenomenon even in the church today. But Elijah calls that “faltering” it’ll cripple you.

Perhaps they thought that some of the philosophies of the pagan frame of mind made sense, and made for a good addition, but in reality they were subtracting from their faith. Psychology would be a prime modern day example of seeking to incorporate and integrate pagan practices and philosophies into biblical Christianity.

As so many Christian colleges and universities seek to add and integrate the psychological theories of men like Maslow, Jung, Adler and these guys to our understanding of the Bible. John MacArthur, in his book *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, said: “The focus has shifted from God to people and their problems, and counseling has replaced worship and evangelism as the main program of many churches. Most seminaries now put more energy into teaching ministerial students psychology than training them to preach. Evidently they believe therapists can accomplish more good in Christians' lives than preachers and teachers. That mindset has taken the church by storm. Evangelicalism is infatuated with psychotherapy. Emotional and psychological disorders supposedly requiring prolonged analysis have become almost fashionable... Virtually everywhere you look in the [Christian] subculture, you can find evidence that Christians are becoming more dependent on therapists, support groups and other similar groups.”

Elijah would say, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if psychology is the way, then follow it. If psychotherapy is the answer than go for it, but if the counsel of God’s word is sufficient, than stick with *it*, don’t vacillate back and forth.”

Of course Elijah will demonstrate the fact that the power of God is sufficient to deal with our sin, and cause the refining fire that comes down from Heaven to refine and purify our lives. Most of what the world refers to as some type of psychological disorder the bible simply calls sin, and a refusal to confess/repent and submit to the authority of the Word of God.

Now there’s another application that we can glean here real quick and that is that it does make a difference what people believe. Elijah’s appeal to the people makes it real clear that there’s a difference between the service of Baal, and the service of the Lord. Maybe like so many today, they simply thought that there wasn’t a big enough difference to split hairs over.

You know as long as you have *some kind* of religion, and you’re sincere about it, then follow whatever maybe in your heart. But the problem is that our hearts are by nature wicked and deceitful. So either serve Baal, or serve the Lord, but make no mistake there’s a difference, and your *sincerity* is insufficient concerning your salvation and service to God. And you can sort of see the scene, Elijah compels them to make a choice, and they just stand there in silence, not really the courage to defend their convictions or change them, they’re just kinda straddling the fence.

Vs22-24

We’ll notice all the way through this thing that Elijah is careful to give them every advantage and he takes the disadvantage. There’s only 1 of me here, there’s 450 of you, that would seem to be to your advantage, we need 2 bulls, you can take the one of your choice, then you can begin your proceedings 1st, and when you’re done with your gig, it’ll be my turn, and the God who answers by fire, He is God. And the people say, “Fair enough.”

Vs25-29

What's this showing us? The fire of Heaven doesn't fall via pagan practices or philosophies, these guys had some weird practices... And there are a lot of weird practices out there today. One ministry tells you that, as you are being freed from certain bondages, you might vomit... Others teach out-of-body meditation... Others encourage visualization... or any other # of psychological methods that they may seek to subject you to. They are like the Psychiatric Hotline. You know what you'll hear if you dial the Psychiatric Hotline? Listen to this, "Welcome to the Psychiatric Hotline. If you are obsessive-compulsive, please press 1 repeatedly. If you are co-dependent, please ask someone to press 2. If you have multiple personalities, please press 3, 4, 5, and 6. If you are paranoid-delusional, we know who you are and what you want. Just stay on the line until we can trace the call. If you are schizophrenic, listen carefully and a little voice will tell you which number to press. If you are manic-depressive, it doesn't matter what number you press. No one will answer. If you are delusional and occasionally hallucinate, please be aware that the thing you are holding on the side of your head is alive and about to bite off your ear."

God's will, done God's way, as prescribed by God's Word is where it's at. How sad are the words, "No voice; no one answered, no one paid attention." Hey, they were a people of much dedication when it came to their prayer lives, from morning till noon they prayed. They were energetic in their prayer lives, leaping about the altar and all. Of course Elijah couldn't resist calling into question the foolishness of their faith, he's all, "Maybe he's hard of hearing, and you need to shout a little louder. Or perhaps he's occupied, (literally he's saying, maybe he's on the toilet and can't get to you just yet) or maybe he's taking a nap, and you need to wake him up!" and He's just railing on them, and so that just infuriates them all the more, and they start crying out all the louder, and as you see in so many pagan practices, they start cutting and lancing themselves till their blood just starts gushing out all over them. If the blood of the bull won't arouse him, perhaps our own blood will, they were willing to sacrifice their own blood for their god. But you know what? It doesn't matter how much sincerity or sacrifice, dedication or devotion, energy or enthusiasm you offer to the god you serve if he's not the True and Living God, because there's no voice, no one to answer, and no one to pay attention. There is no other God. Isa 44:8 *"Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one."* This is a situation like Paul wrote to Timothy when he said, *"Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was."* 2 Tim 3:8-9 Notice vs 30

Vs30-32

Take note of the fact that Elijah doesn't leap around, he doesn't get all mystical, he doesn't get loud or unruly, he simply approaches God based upon His Word in the confidence that God honors His Word. And he tells the people, "Come near to me" this is the beginning of the turning back of their hearts. Obviously what you thought to be an adequate path in life didn't pan out, Baal was unable to truly meet the need, now draw near to me.

That's what Jesus says to us, when we get out there, we've walked away, we've tried to do our own thing our own way and it just didn't pan out.

"Now" Jesus says, "Draw near to Me." Plus he wants to assure them of his integrity, he's got nothing to hide, wants them to observe the situation carefully and intently. And he takes 12 stones, (a reminder to them that they're one nation under God, right now they're politically Israel, and Judah, but they're still one nation under God.) and He repairs the altar that they'd allowed to fall apart. You see exposing the folly of Baal was only ½ the battle, Elijah didn't want to just *reform* them, but he wanted to *revive* them. And the 1st step in regaining that fire from Heaven is what? Repairing the altar that we've allowed to crumble over the years, that altar of personal devotion, the family altar, the altar of sacrifice *to* God and communion with God. If the fire's gone out of your life, how's the altar looking? Maybe it's in need of repair, if so, do it, get it together and begin to worship at the altar of personal devotion, or sacrifice to God, communion with God or whatever it is that's lacking now in your life in your relationship with God that at one time was so fervent and full of passion. Renew your 1st love relationship with Jesus. Remember from where you have fallen, repent of the things that have gotten you to where you're at, and repeat those 1st works once again. Elijah rebuilt the altar in the name of the Lord.

Vs33-35

Again Elijah setting the odds as far against him as possible, but he knows that with God nothing will be *impossible*. So he has them take 12 buckets of water, probably from the Mediterranean Sea and drench the sacrifice. (1 for each tribe, I don't know).

Vs36-37

Elijah appeals here to the overwhelming grace of God, take note of the fact that it's God who took the initiative to turn their hearts back to Himself. That's grace. And that's always God's desire for you, and for me, we begin to stray and He does what it takes to turn our hearts back to Him over and over and over again. And this is the primary ministry that God had for Elijah, to be a vessel through which He could turn the hearts of His people back to Himself. What's God's plan for you? What's God's plan for me? I suggest to you that in no small way He has the same plan for you and me that He had, and will have (prophetically speaking) for Elijah. He wants to use you, and use me as vessels through which He can flow to turn the hearts of people towards Himself.

And again take notice of how brief, and simple Elijah's prayer is. The strength of prayer is in no way limited to the length of prayer, the most powerfully profound prayers of the bible are very brief. Even John 17 you can read in under 5 minutes and it's the high priestly prayer of Jesus Himself just prior to the cross. Is there value in lengthy prayer? Sure there is, in its proper place, and in the proper setting, i.e. your prayer closet when you're there you just pour your heart out to Jesus until every last drop is drained, or perhaps a meeting set aside specifically for that purpose. But this wasn't the time for 45minutes of intercession. Elijah prayed that the Lord would hear him for 4 reasons, 1 of which we already discussed, so the people would know that God was turning their hearts back to Him.

Other than that #1 That the people would know that the Lord is God in Israel (not Baal), #2 That Elijah was His servant, not some false prophet like the other 450. And #3 That he had done all these things, proclaiming the drought, the showdown at Mt Carmel, and the praying for fire via the command of the word of God. He wasn't just out there showboating, God was orchestrating this whole thing for His own glory. In other words, God do this for Your names sake, and we've talked about this before.

Ps 25:11 "*For Your name's sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.*" There's something about Praying to God for the glory of God that moves His hand. No ulterior motive, but "God do this for Your names sake, for Your glory."

And let them see that I'm your servant, what's the lesson lying in here? Because Elijah is God's *servant* he obeys God's *Word*. See that, "You're the only true God, and I belong to You, because I *belong* to You, I'm *obedient* to You."

Vs38-40

It's not enough to repair the altar and acknowledge that the Lord is God is it? We have to hate that which is evil and eliminate it from our lives. It was absolutely imperative that the prophets of Baal be eliminated before the rains came. Baal wasn't only a god of fire, he was the god of rain as well, and there was to be no confusion as to who it was that "rained down" waters of refreshing into the hearts and land of the people. Not only that the Law demanded the execution of the false prophets, so the altar has been rebuilt, the people have acknowledged that the Lord is God, they've eliminated (we might say repented of) the evil influence, eradicated the pagan practices and philosophies in their lives, and have obeyed the Word of God. Now the course is set for God to bless their lives, notice.

Vs41-46

Somebody call Guinness, we've got a world record here. Real quick, vs 43 is a practical picture of 2 things. #1 Watching and praying, and we don't have time to give a bunch of support text, but believe me it's there. Jesus said, "Watch and pray" we're to be sober, watchful, attentive to circumstance, and prayerful. Praying always, (the bible says) which is the 2nd thing, watching and praying (#1) and #2 Persistent prayer, he didn't just pray once and then go, "Well, I guess God's not going to do it." He refused to quit praying until the hand of God moved in the situation, what gave him the audacity and boldness to continue to pray the same prayer time, after time, after time? Remember what I told you last time, the promise of God's Word #1 Emboldened Elijah's walk, and #2 Empowered his prayers. Elijah knew with out a doubt that God would bring the rain if he was faithful in interceding, how did he know that? Vs 1, God told Elijah, "Go present yourself to Ahab and I *will* send rain on the earth." and God is not a man that He should lie, you can place your life on the promise of God's Word, it's that sure. The bible says, "*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*" 1 John 5:14-15

F.B. Meyer made an interesting observation regarding Elijah's posture before God and I'll close with this. He said, "...as God's ambassador he pleaded with man; now as man's intercessor he pleads with God. Is it not always so - that the men who stand straightest in the presence of sin bow lowest in the presence of God."

In public he prayed with simplicity, in private he prayed with intensity, persistency, with fervency, and yes, longevity. The time you spend on your face and in God's Word, in His presence privately, will prepare you for the plan He has for you publicly. W/out spending time in His presence privately we're of little to no value to God publicly, safeguard your private times with God.