

1 Kings 18:21

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Date: 17 February 2019

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- [0 : 0 0] Perhaps you can look back together at 1 Kings chapter 18. And desiring and seeking the Lord's help as we look at this together.
- Let's read one verse again. 1 Kings 18 verse 21. And Elijah came unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions?
- If the Lord be God, follow him. But if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. How long halt ye between two opinions?
- I'd like to look at this under these headings, first of all in the introduction, but decisions generally. Then some background by way of biblical examples of good and bad decisions.
- And then really the substance, I think, of the text, which is really about a challenge to the undecided. And then breaking that down into these aspects of Elijah's challenge to the people of Israel there on Carmel, which is just as relevant to ourselves and our situation, in that he distinguishes between God and the gods.
- [1 : 3 1] He rebukes the deleteriousness of the people. And a slightly different aspect, he reminds people of the peril of delay. And he calls for an immediate decision in the light of the facts.
- And then a conclusion by way of application. So, first of all, introduction. Decisions generally. Well, we all know, everyone knows what decisions are, don't they?
- What the word means, that is. We might not be very good at them. We might find them challenging. But we need to make simple, temporal decisions every day.
- If we, and if we go to one of our cities and we go to a Starbucks, I think it's a fact you cannot get a cup of coffee unless you make at least six decisions.
- They can't give it to you because you have to make a choice all the way along the line. So some decisions are really quite trivial. Some others are significant.
- [2 : 3 2] And others are still more important than some hugely important. Some make little difference to us. But others can greatly affect our lives, of course. Like choice of career.
- Whether and whom to marry. That will affect us through our lives. But there's only one decision of truly eternal significance.
- And that's whether we stop halting. Stop faltering. Stop wavering. Many different words are used in different translations. Between two opinions.
- That is, whether we accept that God is God and serve him. Or we don't. And if we do accept it, that's one thing.
- But if we don't make a decision, that's effectively making a negative decision. That's saying no. Saying no to God. So to reinforce the point.
- [3 : 3 6] Important decisions can be good or bad. That's saying no to God. That's a good idea. In the film Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.
- The knight who was guarding the so-called Holy Grail. Spoke of the villain who chose the glitteriest cup. And was burnt up. He said he chose poorly.

Well, some people in the Bible chose poorly. And here's some people that you'll recognize. And you'll know before I say it. Whether they chose wisely or not. The first, I'll give you a clue.

The first list is people who made a bad decision. First of all, Adam and Eve, of course. In the garden. They made that tragic decision. That's affected all of us.

The whole of mankind since then. They chose to disobey God. They chose to eat the forbidden fruit. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[4 : 35] Later on, Abraham's nephew, Lot. Righteous Lot, we're told. He vexed his soul. He was a good man. But he made a bad decision.

He chose to go to live in Sodom. A place marked for destruction. Not only did he almost lose his own life.

He lost his wife. And, of course, tragically then. He fell into sin with both of his daughters. And gave birth to nations. Moab and Ammon.

One that would always be a thorn for centuries in the side of Israel. He made a bad choice there. Samson.

Almost all his choices are bad. Especially with Delilah. Led to his falling from being the judge over Israel.

[5 : 30] Ahab. Ahab. We read about him here. Ahab. He chose the wicked Queen Jezebel. Legendarily wicked. And he went against God all the way down the line.

He claimed to be following God. But he wasn't. He was doing the very opposite. As Elijah says here. Rehoboam. Solomon's son.

Listened to his young buck friends. Instead of to the wise counsel of the older men. And lost ten out of twelve tribes. And the nation was divided forever.

At least for centuries. Then the prodigal son. The prodigal son. At the start at least. He made the wrong decisions.

Didn't he? He said no no. I don't want anything from you dad. Except my inheritance from you. In other words. I wish you were dead. But give me the money in the meantime. I'm going.

[6 : 29] And he went. And lost his money. Made the wrong decisions. The rich young ruler. Looked like he had it all made. But he made the wrong decision. He said no.

I cannot give up my riches. That's the one thing I will not give up. I'm not prepared. To get rid of my plenty. That's my God.

That's what he said. Naaman. Going back to the Old Testament. Naaman. The leper. He said no no. This is no good.

I've come here. I've come here. For healing. And this man tells me. Go and wash in the river. We've got better rivers at home. I'm not going to do that. He said no I will not.

And he went away angry. And then the prosperous farmer. In Luke chapter 12. Read those few verses here. This is Jesus speaking.

[7 : 25] And he spoke a parable unto them. Saying. The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself. Saying. What shall I do? Because I have no room where to bestow my fruits.

And he said. This shall I do. I'll pull down my barns and build greater. And there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul. Soul. Thou hast much goods laid up for many years.

Take thine ease. Eat. Drink. And be merry. But here's the thing. God said to him. Thou fool. This night thy soul shall be required of thee.

Then who shall those things be which thou hast provided. He was rich. But he was a fool. He made the wrong decision. But there's good decisions in scripture as well.

Aren't there? Moses. Moses. Moses refused to be counted amongst. The royal family. He refused to be treated as an Egyptian. He would rather be treated with his own people.

[8 : 23] And endure the affliction. He would rather suffer. Joshua. His successor. One of the great phrases that ties in so closely with this chapter.

What he said to the people of Israel. Choose you this day whom you'll serve. Whether the gods which your father served beyond the river. Or the gods of the Amorites. In his land you dwell. But as for me and my house.

We will serve Jehovah. We will serve the Lord. Now that was a great leader. Isn't it? What would we do to have a leader like that? Now they would say.

I don't care what you people are going to do. Well I do care. But I'm not going to be influenced by it. I'm going to serve the Lord. Would we ever hear that? Now. Well we could.

By God's grace. By the power of prayer. Just because it hasn't happened. Doesn't mean it can't happen. Let's be prayerful about that. Solomon.

[9 : 24] When he was given the choice. Whatever he wanted. He chose wisdom. He didn't choose long life. He didn't choose riches. He didn't choose all the other things he could have asked for as king.

And he got those things anyway. Daniel. Daniel. Made the right decision. He said. I'm not going to defile myself. With Nebuchadnezzar's. Idol offered.

Food and so on. I'm going to be faithful to God. And it was blessed to him. The prodigal son. In the end. Earlier. We saw he made the bad decision.

Later on he says. No. I'm going to go home. And I'm going to say. I'm not worthy of anything. And he tried to say that. But his father wouldn't listen. His father gave him more.

Than he could possibly have asked for. Because he already spent his inheritance. So there was nothing to go home for. But he was given. And then Naaman.

[10 : 19] Again. Another guy. Wrong decision earlier on. Didn't he? But now with some help. His servants must have loved him. Like he said. Father. Isn't the little thing the prophets asked you to do.

Why don't you do it? What can go. What can be the harm? So he said. Okay. I'll do it. And he went into the river. Jordan. And washed. And was cleaned.

And leprosy. In the Old Testament. Is a symbol of sin. That was a symbol of him. Washing off his sin. Putting on the righteousness of Christ. Although Christ didn't come for centuries later.

This was him coming to faith. Coming to believe. And then. Saul. Who became Paul.

Saul of Tarsus. Who became Paul. He made the great decision. He still had to make it. Didn't he? He was converted. That wonderful conversion. On the road to Damascus. But he had to accept it.

[11 : 19] God doesn't do any violence to our wills. He makes us willing. But we still have to accept it. It's allowed to ask. We're required to. Whosoever will. Will be saved.

He chose to obey Christ. Because he had no option. That's what he felt. What can I do? What else can I do? Like C.S. Lewis.

When he was converted. I think he was in Oxford at the time. And he finally. Having been an atheist. And an agnostic for years. He finally had to give in.

And he said to himself. I was the most reluctant. Christian. In England. He just had to give in.

He said. I can't fight you anymore God. You're telling the truth. I must. And he did. But he wasn't reluctant. Very long was he. Because he did.

[12 : 17] Such wonderful things. He wrote such wonderful. Christian apologetics. And Christian books. Experiential books. Okay.

So those are some examples. Of the good and bad decisions. But the main point. Of the sermon. Is got to be. About this challenge. The challenge. To the undecided. Are you in this undecided. Here today. I'm not asking you.

Are you a member. Or not. I'm not asking you. Are you an office bearer. Or not. I'm asking you. Are you undecided. In any way. Because it's not. Simply.

A matter of. God. Or Baal. But also. Is it God all the time. Or is it God part of the time. Is it God on Sunday.

But not through the week. Is it God in some aspects of life. But not in others. Because that is not making a decision for God. Let's get that right. We can't make a half hearted decision.

[13 : 13] Well we can. But we mustn't. There's no value in it. So let's be honest about it. Thoughts of death. And judgment. And eternity. Are really dreadful thoughts.

We don't. That is to say. They fill us with dread. We don't want to think about these things. Do we? But sometimes people are pulled up short in life. By events. By things. By illness.

By loss. Bereavement. Whatever it is. We're confronted with. The choice then. Between these two opinions. Between truth and error.

Between duty. And transgression. Between life and death. Now that could be a momentary thing. It can be a thing that's passing. It can be an emotional thing.

It could be in church. And then you go out the door. And you forget about it. Have you had that happen to you? I have. But if you have such thoughts.

[14 : 11] Don't let them go. Don't give them up. You don't know if they'll come back. If you let them go. Don't let them go. Don't let them go. Don't let them go. Don't let them go. Don't let them go.

Don't let them go. Don't let them go. Don't let them go. Don't let them go. A young person. Going off on the life of sin.

Sinful indulgence. Might well have qualms of conscience and so on. Over his or her behavior. He might hesitate. And not be sure about which way to go.

Like here. This is the idea of limping. Which. Are you limping? Are you halting? Are you wavering? You're undecided. Over two opinions. But then.

That becomes easier. As you go on in the life of sin. Not to be so. Equivocal about it. It would be better to try to avoid it in the first place.

[15 : 09] Wouldn't it? But those resolves that we might have. I want to resolve. To give up sin and so on. These resolves. We can't do them on ourselves. It would be like the. The ropes that they tried to balance Samson with.

When he said. Oh that's how to bind me. But when the vital signs came upon him. He just broke them off like that. As if they were toe in the fire. So we need more than resolve.

We need more than self-help. There's lots of self-help books. Aren't there? All you can be. And all that kind of stuff. We don't need self-improvement. Self-improvement. Self-improvement. Self-improvement. Self-improvement. Self-improvement. Self-improvement.

Because self-improvement. Because self-improvement is not the way. It doesn't do any good. Ultimately. Oh yes. For many things in life perhaps. But not ultimately. Not for our souls.

Not for our status with God. Not for our relationship with God. We all need. All of us. All of us in this building. And everyone else.

[16 : 04] We need to make that decision. And if we have made it. We need to keep on making it. And keep on with it. And not change it. And please realize as well.

There's one thing here. In the chapter. I really want us to make clear. I'm sure you understand this. But I just want to emphasize. In case anybody's in any doubt. Elijah isn't for one moment.

Suggesting it's an equal contest here. You could choose God. You could choose Baal. He's not saying that. He's not saying Baal is God. He's saying. It's not an even choice. You can't legitimately come down for Baal.

He's pointing at the manifest obvious fact. That nothing is more unreasonable. Than not making a decision for God. That's what he's telling them. Because no decision. Like I said earlier.

Is really a bad decision. As Jesus said. When we read in Matthew. He is not for me. He is against me. I read about someone the other day.

[17 : 10] Who said. I'm not against Christ. I just don't care. Well that is being against Christ. I just don't think he's relevant. That is being against Christ.

Apart from being blasphemous. We're told. We'll be forgiven blasphemy. Against the Son of God. If we come to faith. Like all sins. And be forgiven. The one that won't be. Is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Why? Because ultimately. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Is refusing to accept. The testimony of the Holy Spirit. That Jesus Christ is Lord. Refusing all the way. That's what won't be forgiven. And that's.

The only reason it won't be forgiven. Is because. You determined it won't be forgiven. Because you're saying. Right. Holy Spirit. I'm not paying attention. To what you say to me. In your word. We can't say that.

We mustn't say that. And if we've said that in the past. We must stop saying that. Because there's always room for repentance. When we're still on mercy's ground. When we still have the word of God.

[18 : 09] When we still have the Holy Spirit. Witnessing with us. A little bit more on.

Challenges. Looking at what Elijah said. He. Distinguishes between God and the gods. Or the idols. Or the Baalim. The false gods.

All the heathen people. Of the Bible lands. And the Bible times. They had their own gods. They had localized gods. They had. Gods for different purposes.

Just like the Romans. And the Greeks later had. They didn't have. An idea. Of an overall god. Like the Hebrew people did.

There were local gods. There were tribal gods. There were capricious. They had their own agendas. But God's. Elijah's God was the exact opposite of all that.

[19 : 07] Universal. Omnipotent. Consistent. Pure. Holy. Righteous. All the things we associate with.

The notion of God. That's not things they knew. I thought of as God. But we have the advantage. Because we've got the word of God. God. And you can't reconcile these two ways.

People are trying to do that. But you cannot sit in the fence. It's a bit of a. A tourism. Isn't it? You can't really sit in the fence. You can sit on a broad wall.

The coping. That's fine. That's easy enough. You can't sit on this kind of fence. Because this is. This would impale you. You cannot do it. Comfortably.

Or even at all. You may try to do it. But you'd never be happy. Doing it. If we're hedging our bets. Because there's no neutral ground.

[20 : 09] We might say we've hedged our bets. In various things. In various ways. Common sense. In many ways. Many things in life. But not here. Not for eternity. We say well.

Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe there's something in this. Is either God. Is God. Serve him. Or he's not. Well don't serve him. If you do. If you do believe he's not God. Don't serve him. That's.

What. Elijah was saying to the people. He wasn't saying it's a reasonable decision to make. But he was saying. Don't try to kid yourselves on. Don't try to pretend. That you're serving God.

If you're really serving Baal. Half of the time. Well. For Baal. Read in any God. You care. Whether it's materialism. Whether it's to do with your health. Whether it's to do with music.

On bands. Whether it's to do with sports. Especially in this part of the world. Football. Or whatever it is. People have lots of things. They put up there. It might be prosperity. It might be their own career.

[21 : 06] It might be their business. It might be their relationships. It might be anything. But the ultimate thing. The only one. That we can serve.

Properly. It's God. There's no new man's land. And Elijah then says to the people.

Don't delay. Why can't you make a decision? He's almost mocking them. He says. How long are you going to sit there? Not making a decision. He's rebuking them for their slowness.

Why are you halting. Stopping. Waiting. Not sure where you're going to go. It's not a tenable place to be. He says.

He says. Haven't you any convictions. Haven't you any desire. To know what's right. Haven't you got any judgment you can exercise.

[22 : 15] Can't you make up your mind. And he could be saying that to many of us here. Couldn't he? Why are you here?

Are we here to worship God? Are we here for other reasons? But then. He also reminds them.

Of the danger of doing that very thing. Of that attitude. Of the danger in delaying a decision. Lots of decisions in life can be postponed. Often it's not a good thing.

Procrastination is often a difficulty. For many of us. But this is an area in which we cannot. Cannot risk it. Because we don't know what a day or an hour. Will bring forth in our experience.

That's what we're told. In the scripture. So we daren't procrastinate. But we do procrastinate. So what do we do? We need to make that decision. If we haven't already done so.

[23 : 11] And if we have already done so. We need to affirm that decision. Confirm it to ourselves. In our actions. Check ourselves. Are we really living for God? Or are we slipping back into.

Living for God part of the time. And for ourselves the rest of the time. And I'm not speaking to anybody here. Any more than I am speaking to myself. And having drawn.

This distinction. Between God. And the gods. It's the God. You must serve. Or it's these other things. Having rebuked the deleteriousness of the people.

And reminded them of the danger. Of doing that. Of putting that decision off. Then. What does Elijah do? He calls for an immediate decision. In the light of the facts.

And that's what I do. And that's what every preacher must do. When he comes to this text. Or any text really. But especially this. You've got to make a decision. And you've got to do it now.

[24 : 17] Because this is the day of salvation. We're not promised tomorrow. You can't do it yesterday. Because it's gone. These things are. You've heard them umpteen times. From this pulpit and elsewhere. I'm sure.

But we need to make that decision. We need to make that decision for Christ. This is not saying we can will ourselves into the kingdom of God. This is saying. Take God at his word.

That's all he's asking us to do. That's what faith is. Accept what he says about himself. It is not. A mystical thing. It is simply accepting what he says of himself.

Trusting in him. We can accept it. But then we need to put into practice. You know. The well known thing.

There's a stool. Are you satisfied to take your weight? Yes I am. That's fine. That's the faith. What about trust? Trust comes when you actually sit on it. And commit to the stool.

[25 : 17] And say right. I'm going to put my weight on it. And see if it. And accept it will take me. That's the trust. We need to show that trust in God. And in Christ particularly.

As a saviour. As the only saviour of God's elect. As a saviour who has been appointed. By Jehovah. Father. Given the people.

To save. And he saved us. He saved us from our sins. If we're in Christ. Are you in Christ today?

Don't say I think so. Are you in Christ today? Say yes. If you are. And say I desire to be. If you're not.

No one can make anyone believe. It doesn't matter how much we say. How much we pray. Only God can do these things. But he is willing.

[26 : 16] And able to do these things. All we need to do is ask. He says ask and it will be given to you. Knock and the Lord will be opened to you. Seek and you'll find. All these things are promises and they're true.

He does not say sit there and wait for something to happen. That's not the gospel. So don't sit there and wait for something to happen. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what we're commanded to do. Why? Because his blood can make the vilest clean. His blood availed for me. So if you made that decision for Christ.

Be thankful you have and continue on. And pray for those around about you. And your families. In your communities. In the congregation. And elsewhere. Who have not yet. How long.

Will you falter between two opinions. Is another way of putting this. Stop it. He says. Stand. Think. Understand. Decide. These are simple. Straightforward commands.

[27 : 27] This is what he says here. In his word to us. This is what Christ says in the gospel to us. Jesus is walking by in the gospel. Every time his name is mentioned.

Is this the last time you'll hear his name? Pray that it's not. But you might not listen. Other times you're here.

You might sit there and let it go over your head. Don't do that. Make your decision now. If you're not persuaded. Look to him and ask.

Make me persuaded. Make me believe in you. He won't do violence to your will. He'll draw you. Don't delay. That's the message here.

Don't delay. Now. Is an accepted time. Now. Today. Is a day of salvation. Let's trust in God. Let's trust in him for salvation.

[28 : 24] And for everything else. And he will not let that trust down. He will not let us go. He will be true and faithful to every promise he's made. Amen.

Let us pray.