

Decision Time

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[0:00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in 1 Kings 18. And we find the challenge in verse 21 that Elijah is throwing out towards Israel.

! And Elijah came near to all the people and said, How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him.

But if Baal, then follow him. And the people did not answer him a word. As a boy growing up, Elijah was one of my favorite characters in the Bible because he seemed to be tough as nails.

And he seemed to be just a man who was utterly fearless and would do anything and go anywhere. And that one mission was to serve God. And he was, I suppose, like a lot of young boys, Elijah was a hero to us.

And I used to think it was very fitting that when God was taking, as he took Enoch, he also took Elijah, that he was to take this incredible servant of his out of this world, never meeting death.

[1:16] But Elijah, although he may appear otherworldly to us, because sometimes when you read through Elijah, apart from the one lapse that he had when he ran away from Jezebel, everything else about his life was unbelievably passionate, zealous.

And you'd almost think he was kind of different to us. But he wasn't. James, in his letter, tells us, Elijah was exactly like you and me, with the same passions, the same kind of character.

They're no different to the likes of you and me. So James tells us this. Now in this chapter that we meet here, there's a crisis has come in the land.

And the idolatry of Israel is just beginning to overwhelm the whole place. And because of that idolatry, God has sent a drought on the land, so that they were without water for three years.

And it's in light of this that Elijah comes to bring this challenge to Israel. And they have to make a decision. Now you and I know life is full of decision making.

[2:28] We're always having to make decisions. Some of these decisions are so small, we don't realize that they're actually decisions. The likes of, what am I going to eat? Or if you have leisure time, will I read?

Will I watch something? Will I go for a walk? These are the kind of sort of little decisions that we make within the day that have no great consequences at all.

But then there are bigger choices, bigger decisions. The likes of, when it comes to marriage, who you're marrying, where you're going to live, the job you're going to have. These are much bigger choices, bigger decisions.

But the biggest decision, the biggest choice that anybody could ever make is what we do with the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we follow him? Or do we push him away?

Do we side with Jesus? Do we ask Jesus to be our Lord and our King? Or do we walk away from Jesus? Do we push Jesus aside every time that he comes near us in the Gospel or in Providence?

[3:28] What is our reaction to Jesus? Because we're always making a decision at these times, either accepting or rejecting.

And so we find that Israel has come to this point where a choice has to be made. Now as we read here, Ab was searching the whole land for Elijah because he blamed Elijah for the drought.

You see, Elijah, according to God's word, had come to Ab and said to him, As the Lord God lives, there will be no rain for three years.

Because Ab was leading Israel in a downward spiral of idolatry. It was getting worse and worse and worse. And they were going further and further and further away from God.

And so God said, My judgment. And this was a judgment in order to bring Israel back to repentance, to turn again to God. But it was doing the very opposite.

[4:30] And you know, when we look at our own country, our own land, can we not see a similar picture? Because you and I were very conscious. Things are not improving. Despite all the advances in technology and medicine and all these, and we're thankful for all these advances that are being made and do make life better.

As a nation, it's not getting better. It's not getting any safer. It's not getting any wealthier. It's not getting... We're struggling. Even our politicians will talk about us being broken as a society. And God is speaking to us through these things. And rather than turning to God and repenting of where we are, that's what should be happening nationally.

It's like digging our heels in and saying, No, we won't. We'll go further away from God. And that's exactly what was happening here in the time of Ahab and Elijah.

So chapter 18 opens here with God telling Elijah to show himself to Ahab because he was going to send rain. And as we could see there, the land was in a crisis.

[5:42] There was so much drought and people were suffering. People would be dying because of the famine, because there wouldn't be the crops due to the lack of water. And what is King Ahab doing at this point?

When his people are in a crisis, he's looking for a bit of grass and water for his mules and horses. No word about the people. All he's concerned about are his mules and his horses.

He's looking for a bit of grass and water for them. And it's here we see, here's this king who's supposed to be caring for the people, looking after the people.

But he's so self-centered, so self-obsessed, that his horses and his mules count far more to him than the people that he's looking after.

And you know, it's almost like the picture of the rich man and Lazarus. Remember the rich man and he had all the wealth and he was there indulging himself in all his finery and the beggar Lazarus at the door starving, full of sores and he had no word of him.

[6:50] And you know, the sinful heart that becomes self-obsessed, can't see others, can't empathize with others, can't sympathize, void of compassion.

And it's an awful picture of how we can go. Anyway, we see here that the time has come there's to be a showdown.

And we've got to remember it's a fearful thing to be instrumental in leading people away from the Lord. And it's a, I'm not going to go bad, I'm not making this any political sermon in any shape or form, but you know, when you think of our governments and the policies that they are passing, the laws that pass, everything that takes us further away from God, everything that pushes God further out is not to our well-being, it's to our detriment.

And it's an awesome responsibility before God for people to do that because one day they're going to have to stand before him and to give an account as we all have for everything that they've done. Well, the thing is, Ahab was somebody who had sold himself to sin, to idolatry. But bad and all though Ahab was, he was nothing like his wife. Jezebel was the power behind the throne.

[8:11] She was utterly evil. She was the one who was just, she had a hatred for God and for the cause of Christ. And she was just somebody who wanted to obliterate, out of the land, everybody that followed the Lord.

Bad and all though Ahab was, he wasn't that bad because we find as we look at the life of Ahab, there was a side somewhere in him because he knew, he knew who God was.

There was a God consciousness in Ahab that was not in Jezebel. And we find that there's a period later on where Ahab actually humbles himself before God because of the judgment that's going to come.

And God said, because Ahab has humbled himself in this way, I won't bring it in his day but in his family's day. So you see that bad and all though he was, there was this God side, God awareness in his heart.

But as I said, he was nothing like his wife who was the power behind the throne. And we see another instance of this is that the chief man that Ahab had, the man who was his governor, like his lieutenant, his main man in operations was Obadiah who was a devout God-fearing man.

[9:30] And there's no doubt that Ahab had to intercede or had to plead for Obadiah's life when Jezebel was doing a purge of trying to remove all the God-fearing people in the nation.

So you see there was this side to him. And Obadiah tells us there was a period when Ahab was killing all the prophets, when Jezebel was killing all the prophets of God, that Obadiah took a

hundred prophets and hid fifty in one cave, fifty in another, and he fed them with bread and water, probably out of his own expenses.

But the thing is he tells us in verse 13 that Ahab actually knew what he did. Has it not been told, my lord, what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets?

So Ahab knew what Obadiah was doing. So that shows us that there was this other side to Ahab who was totally different to his wife. Anyway, the time comes and Elijah meets Obadiah and tells him, go tell Ahab that I'm going to meet him today.

And Obadiah says, I can't. I can't do that because Ahab has searched the whole land and the land is round about and I know what's going to happen because when I go and tell Ahab, Elijah's going to meet you, the spirit of the Lord will take you away.

[10:56] And then Ahab's going to kill me for this. But Elijah gives his word and he said, I am going to meet Ahab today. And it's very interesting how Ahab addresses Elijah in verse 17.

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, is it you, you troubler of Israel? Isn't it incredible how sin distorts the picture?

The one person who was capable of turning things, this great man of prayer, and yet Ahab is the one who has caused all the havoc and yet he blames Elijah.

You see, that's what sin does. Sin distorts our understanding. There's no discernment, there's no awareness, there's no spiritual understanding. And we can see it so often what people call evil good and good evil, and that's the way they look at it.

And they genuinely think because sin has so distorted their thinking, they think good is evil and evil is good. And we see it, we see it in our own nation. Anyway, Elijah is saying enough is enough.

[12:10] And Elijah says, you're the one who has troubled Israel. And he said to Ahab, I'm throwing down a challenge to you and to the whole of Israel.

Enough is enough. And I want you to meet on Mount Carmel, all the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the Asherah, that would be 850 altogether, 450 prophets of Baal and 400 of the Asherah.

and I will meet and where there's going to be a challenge to see who is the living and the true God.

And so we find that they gather together, there's to be two altars and two sacrifices and two bulls, one, Elijah is going to sacrifice one bull and the prophets of Baal will sacrifice another.

And there's no doubt that Elijah in planning for this would have, or because people wonder where does the water come? Well, Mount Carmel is just beside the Mediterranean Sea.

And there's no doubt that Elijah, in order to prove what was happening, would have asked people to bring up water from salt water from the Mediterranean because he was going to soak the sacrifice as well, just to prove to the people what was happening.

[13:23] And so everybody comes together to watch. Now, I wouldn't imagine the whole of Israel would have been there, but representatives from all the different tribes would have been there.

And Elijah throws down this challenge to Israel. How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him.

If Baal is God, follow him. And the God who answers by fire, he is the Lord. And the people initially said nothing, but then when he threw out the challenge again, they said, more or less, they said, this is well spoken or this is a fair challenge.

And you know, it's a solemn thought because this challenge that Elijah threw out is a challenge that is relevant today as well.

Probably nearly 3,000, not far off, 3,000 years ago, when that challenge boomed out across Carmel, it echoes out to this very day. How long will you go limping between two?

[14:33] How long will you go halting between two decisions? If the Lord is God, follow him. And can I say that that's a question that we have to ask ourselves today.

If the Lord is God, if you're here today and you have never yet begun to follow the Lord, you have to ask yourself why not? Now I don't believe there's anybody in here today who isn't at one level or another interested at some point.

There's some level of interest in your heart or it's not very likely that you would be here today. But the thing is, it's not enough simply just to come to church.

It's important that we deal with what we see and what we hear and what God requires of us because he's our maker. He's the one who we have to give an account to at the end of the day and he has made a provision for us in Jesus Christ so that everything can be right.

At the moment it's all wrong. The Lord alone can make it right. And so he says, come on. Now maybe there are people, might even be people here today are saying, well you know, I intend one day to get this sorted.

[15:50] It's my, as sure as I'm sitting here, one day it's my aim to become a Christian. I want to get, before I die, I'm going to get this sorted. But right now, don't push it.

Because if I became a Christian just now, it's going to really interfere with my schedule, with the plans I have. I have certain things I'm going to do.

Can you not leave it another year or two? And honestly, I have every intention of seeing to this, it's one of the things, it's on my to-do list. Well, the thing is, we can't guarantee a day or an hour.

And the very fact that today you might be saying, I do want to be a Christian at some point, there might come, the Lord might spare you a few years, and in a few years you might not want to think like that.

I sadly know people, and there was a day that they appeared interested, and today they're as far away with not as far as I can see, no interest at all.

[16:56] That's a solemn thing, it's a challenging thing. So God is saying to us today, this is absolutely essential, and it's important that we confess the Lord Jesus Christ.

And can I say to those who have come to faith, and there might be some here like that today, you've come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you've come to trust him. you love Jesus, but you've never publicly confessed him.

We had a communion last week, and that's the time for the public confession. Because remember what the scripture says, we are to believe in our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And Jesus wants that public confession. That's what you do when you come before the church says, it's not a big question, all the session wants is to hear your confession, that you love the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he is your savior.

And so it's important, some people they just say, I can't do it. Well, think of what Jesus has done for you. Because there's going to come a day when you have to meet him.

[18:14] And he's going to say to you, think of all I did for you. And all I asked you to do was to publicly confess my name. And maybe you're saying, oh, I'm not worthy to do that.

None of us are. There's not one single person who is worthy. All the worthiness belongs to Jesus. It's for unworthy people that the Lord's Supper has been given.

And it's a wonderful privilege. church. So, I want you, if you love the Lord and have never done so, to think seriously and pray for the grace to do that when the next communion comes.

So anyway, we find, and just in a word, we find that the prophets of Baal, they shout, they dance, they sing, they call, and nothing happens.

Nothing happens. Elijah begins to mock them. I might be sleeping. And of course, nothing happens. They cut themselves, the self-mutilation, all the process that goes on.

[19:22] And of course, Baal is a dead God. Nothing. And then Elijah rebuilds the altar of God, puts the slain bullock on the top, the wood, everything on there, and then he asks that they'd be soaked with water.

and then prays to the Lord, and the Lord answers with fire. And the people just fall down on their faces. It must have been the most extraordinary, awesome spectacle that they'd ever seen in their lives.

This visual representation of the power of God, answering the call of this lonesome prophet, Lord, show that you are God.

By sending down fire on the sacrifice. And the fire came down, consumed the bull, consumed the wood, consumed even the stones, dried up, nothing left, obliterated.

And the people fall down on their faces saying, the Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God. I hope today that that's what you're seeing in your heart. The Lord, he is God.

[20:33] The Lord is my God. Because the alternative doesn't bear thinking. Now, we find that Elijah orders that they get all the prophets of Baal, and they're taking them down to the brook, and they're slaughtered, and people say, oh my goodness, that's harsh, that's brutal.

So it is. But the point that Elijah is so on fire for the Lord, he's saying if they continue to live, they will continue to take people away from the God, and they will lead people to hell, they're doing the devil's work.

And so there is a pictorial representation here of the judgment that faces those who spend their life taking people away from God. It's an hopeful thought. There are people today, and you know and I know, there are people who give their lives.

God gives them their life, sustains them, blesses them, and yet they give all their time and energy in trying to lead people away from God. There is no God.

What an end, unless God has first mercy on their soul. But the wonderful thing for us today is the fire of God's wrath has fallen on his son, and his son was consumed on the cross in order that we can go free.

[21 : 56] And all we have to do is accept and believe. well will you? Let's pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us.

And we give thanks that you are God of heaven and earth, and that you have set before us life and death, and you have shown us the way of salvation. And we pray that we will not have resistant hearts, but hearts that are molded, and hearts that are willing to be embracing Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Lord, bless and pity us, shine on us with thy face. Have mercy upon us, we pray. Take us to our home safely, forgiving us of every sin. In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. We're going to conclude singing in the 80th Psalm, Psalm number 80, and this is from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 80, from the Scottish Psalter, and we're going to sing the last three verses of the Psalm.

Psalm 80, from verse, from verse, it's verse 17, maybe I put the wrong, did I, if I put 19, I'm sorry, it's verses 17 to the end, the last three verses of the Psalm.

[23 : 19] O let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand, the son of man, whom for thyself thou made us strong to stand, so henceforth we will not go back, nor turn from thee at all, oh, do thou quicken us, and we upon thy name will call, turn us again, Lord God of hosts, and upon us about safe, to make thy countenance to shine, and so we shall be safe.

Verses 17 to the end of Psalm!

Oh, let thy hand be still upon the man of thy right hand, the man of thy right hand, the son of man who call thyself, a mede strong to stand, a mede strong to stand, a mede strong to stand, a mede strong to stand.

Oh, hand from the evil Lord go back, nor turn from me at all, nor turn from me at all, O, do thy quicken us and we upon thy name will come, upon thy name will come, upon thy name will come, upon thy name will fall.

Hark us again, Lord God of holds, and upon us our save, and upon us our save, through it thy fountain and to shine, and so we shall be saved, and so we shall be saved, and so we shall be saved.

[25 : 54] I'll go to the door on my left. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest and abide upon each one of you, now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.