

# 1 Kings 18:21

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Preacher: Mr Alexander MacRitchie

[ 0 : 00 ] If you could please turn back with me to 1 Kings, chapter 18, on page 985.

I'd like to take this text, 1 Kings 18, verse 21. 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. I'd like to look at this under a few headings.

This is, well, just an introduction, but decisions generally. And then some examples of, biblical examples of good and bad decisions. That's where we have some background.

And then really the meat of the text is the challenge to the undecided. And Elijah's challenge broken down between his distinguishing between God and the gods or the idols.

[ 1 : 18 ] Elijah rebuking the dilatoriness, the delay of the people. Elijah reminding them of the peril of that delay. And Elijah calling upon them for an immediate decision in light of the facts.

And then a little conclusion by recapping to apply that, hopefully. So decisions generally. Well, everyone knows what decisions are.

At least we know what the word means. It means making a choice. Now, we may not be very good at making choices. We may be very indecisive.

But we do need to make simple, mundane, ordinary decisions every day. Very simple things. I mean, even, I mean, I think it's well known that you can't go into a Starbucks and get a cup of coffee unless you make at least six decisions and make them known to the servers just to get the cup of coffee.

Now, some decisions like that are really pretty trivial. Others are significant decisions. And others still are more important than that. Highly important.

[ 2 : 31 ] I mean, some decisions make little difference to us. Others can greatly affect our lives. Like choice of career. Whether and whom to marry.

That will impact on our whole lives. But there's only one decision of truly eternal significance. Whether we stop faltering or halting, as the King James Version has it.

Halting between two opinions. That's to say, whether we accept that God is God and serve him. Or whether we don't. Now, to reinforce that point, important decisions, I'd like to say, can be good, but they can be bad.

Because a decision that's good is important. It doesn't mean to say you make the right decision. I think that it was the night in the film Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade that said, when he was guarding the so-called Holy Grail of the villain, he chose poorly.

And that was the last thing he ever did. But there are examples from Scripture of good decisions and bad decisions. And I think you'll find it very easy to recognize which they fall into.

[ 3 : 42 ] I'm going to list them in the order of bad first and good later. So that makes it even easier if you had any difficulty, which I'm sure you wouldn't have. Adam and Eve first made the wrong decision, the tragic decision, the one that affects us all.

That's why we're here in a fallen state. They chose not to obey. They chose to disobey God. And hence came the fall. The worst decision ever, you could say, because it brought in sin and misery.

Then Lot, righteous Lot, we're told. Righteous Lot vexed his soul. He was a good man, but he made a bad decision. He chose to go to the city of Sodom. He chose what he thought was the good land.

When Abraham gave him the choice, you go left or right, whatever, and I'll go the other way. He had the first choice, and he went the wrong way. And he ended up having a lot of heartache, a lot of trouble in his family.

And in the end, of course, he lost his wife, even when he escaped by the skin of his own teeth. Another bad decision maker was Samson.

[ 4 : 51 ] Samson, usually because of a woman, made bad decisions, foolish decisions. Although a judge of Israel, he made wrong decisions.

Ahab, of whom we've read, he married one of the most wicked people. Even her name nowadays is known. It's synonymous with wickedness, Jezebel. But he was totally against God.

I mean, he was only one of many kings of Israel. Notice all the kings of Israel after the split of the kingdom. None of them were good. None of them were holy. None of them were righteous. You can read through them.

Not one of them, please, God. Kings of Judah, some did and some didn't. But not the kings of Israel. Ahab was one of the worst. He made the wrong decisions here. He was all for Baal.

He was all for Asherah. He was all against God. And how did that kingdom come to be split? Rehoboam. Solomon's son. Son of the wisest man.

[ 5 : 46 ] Took foolish advice. Didn't listen to the old men who gave him wise advice. Treat the people gently and they'll do anything you want. He took the advice of his young, the young bucks, his pals, his drinking buddies and so on.

Said, treat them hard. Tell them you're going to really give them a hard time. He lost 10 of the 12 tribes and they never came back. The prodigal son.

At the beginning of his life. Or at the beginning of the story. He chose poorly. He chose wrongly. He made the wrong decision. He took the money and spent it. And wasted it.

And left himself in the gutter. The rich young ruler. He went away sorrowful. Because he would not give up his riches. To follow Christ.

It was too big a price. He wouldn't pay it. All faced with the decision. So was Naaman. Naaman. The mighty general of the Syrian army.

[ 6 : 44 ] Everything going for him. Everything in the world going for him. Except one thing. He was a leper. He had the chance to be healed. To get out of jail free really. For nothing.

To go to Israel and be healed. And he wouldn't do it. He said, no. I'm not going to wash myself in that grimy river. I'm going to go. But I'd rather do it in Damascus. We've got better water there than you have here in Israel.

He was too proud. He wouldn't do it. He made a wrong decision. And he remained a leper. But then.

And one more. The prosperous farmer. The prosperous farmer who said. I'm doing really well. I've got so much stuff. I don't have enough room for it. I'll build bigger ones.

And I'll say to my soul. You've got much laid up. For many years. Many years. Remember that. He thought he was going to do a lot. God said to him.

[ 7 : 43 ] You fool. Tonight your soul will be required of you. And then whose would your barns be? These were all bad decisions made by some good men. Some bad. But good decisions.

Moses. Moses chose. To be treated with the people of Israel. The people of God. Rather than to be counted as a prince of Egypt. He left the tents of sin.

And went. To serve his God. Joshua. A great text. Very like what we're reading today. Choose you this day. Whom you'll serve. Whether the gods which your father served.

That were beyond 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. That's what Joshua said. What a great testimony.

What a great thing. What a great challenge. He brought. And he made that decision for himself. And his family. And others followed him. Solomon made the right decision. Remember we talked about his son Rehoboam.

[ 8 : 43 ] Solomon made the right decision. Went on the throne first. What do you want from me? God said. What do you want? What do you want me to give you? Do you want. Well he didn't say which do you want. But he could have had riches.

Or long life. Or anything else he wanted. But he asked for wisdom. He asked for wisdom in ruling the people. And that's what he got. And God added all these other things. Unfortunately he didn't ask for wisdom in choosing a wife.

But that's another matter. But he chose it as a king. As he chose wisdom. He was foolish in many other ways. But he was wise as a ruler. Daniel.

Daniel would not defile himself with food offered to idols. Daniel said no. I won't do it. And he gave reasons for it. And he. And God vindicated him.

And made him greater than any of the other wise men of Babylon. So that he was more highly regarded than any. Because he trusted in God.

[ 9 : 41 ] And he was obedient. Now the prodigal son. You heard me mention him already. You probably thought he'd given him a bad time. Because the prodigal son we all know came back to the Lord. He did. That was the decision he made later.

In the end he made the right decision. Because he thought to himself. Look. This is all wrong. I have to go and confess. And humble myself. And he did these things. And his father wouldn't even let him humble himself fully.

He said no no. Here's the coat. Here's the ring. Here's the fatted calf. You're back. This is the great thing. You've made the right choice. Now that's a picture of a sinner returning to the Lord.

And what about the great Paul. As Saul. He made bad decisions. But he made the right decision on the road to Damascus. When he changed from being the greatest oppressor of the church of Jesus Christ.

To become. To start off as being the greatest missionary there's ever been. In my opinion. And an opinion of many.

[ 10 : 44 ] And then Naaman. Again. Another guy I gave a hard time to earlier. He's a great character. One of the greatest non-Israelite characters in the Old Testament I think. Even though there's not much about him. But Naaman in the end.

With help from his friends. Help from his servants. They loved him. They called him father. They said. Is it such a great thing? Is it such a great thing? That the prophet has asked you.

Is it so difficult? So hard to do that? Why can't you just do it? And he was persuaded. To wash himself. Seven times in the River Jordan. And he was cleansed.

He lost the leprosy. And of course. Leprosy you know. Especially in the Old Testament. Is seen as a sign of sin. It's a metaphor for sin. When he was cleansed. And we know he became a believer.

And he said. I want to worship your God. He said to Elisha. But.

[ 11 : 43 ] Those are all. Examples of good and bad decisions. Those are people. That actually make the decision. So just to say. Decisions are easy to make. In some cases.

They're difficult to make in others. And it's easy to make the right. Wrong decision. But. With God's help. We can make the right decision. But it's more. Today. More of a challenge.

To those who haven't made a decision. Who are undecided. Who. For some reason. Are sitting under the sand of the gospel. And not deciding for Jesus Christ.

Because let's be honest about it. I mean. The thoughts of death. And judgment. And eternity. Are really dreadful things. Dreadful. And I mean that in the right sense. We talk about the weather being dreadful.

It's not dreadful. It's not today anyway. But it's. Even on a bad day. It's not dreadful. It might be horrible. And nasty. And wet. And cold. And miserable. But it's not dreadful. Because dreadful.

[ 12 : 37 ] Is something that fills one with dread. These things do fill us through. We don't want to think about death. Or judgment. Or eternity. Generally speaking.

We tend to skirt around these things. We avoid them if we can. But sometimes people are brought up short. By the circumstances. By things that happen externally. By things that happen to people round about them.

By things we hear about. By their own family situations. Maybe by their own health. Something like that. And if you're faced with or confronted with that choice. Between two opinions.

Between truth and error. Between duty and transgression. Between life and death. You might only have that one opportunity to make that decision.

You can't let it pass. See if Jesus Christ is walking through. He'd be passing here in the gospel today. You cannot let him pass. I make no apology for the fact that I'm preaching mainly to the unconverted here.

[ 13 : 36 ] Because I think any believer has made that choice. And rejoices in it. And rejoices to see others make that choice. And is praying that others would make that choice for Jesus. Jesus. But if this is a momentary thing.

If this hasn't happened to you often. Or maybe it has happened often and you've rejected it. Or pushed it away. Or said next week. Next time. When I'm older. When the kids are grown up. When I paid off the mortgage.

When I'm retired. Whatever your situation. Or maybe you're a young person. Say when I go to university. When I graduate. When I get married. Whatever. Whatever. We don't know if these things will happen to us.

We don't know what a day or an hour will bring forth. In our experience. So if it is your experience. It's this passing. Idea that you have to make a decision. But you put it off.

Or don't. Put it off. And if you've never come to that situation. If you've never thought really hard about it. Well pray that you might. Because you're in a really bad position.

[ 14 : 34 ] If you haven't made that choice. Don't move away from the decision time. Don't move away from the decision time. Without making the right decision. Because here.

In this situation. Elijah. Is confronting the people. He's not just confronting the prophets of Baal.

He figures pretty much they're lost. They've had it. They're not going to come back. They're convinced. He's talking to the rest of the people. I said to the kids earlier. There's 850 on one side. And one on the other.

But there's also thousands beyond that. Watching. The people came together as well. It wasn't just the prophets. The evil prophets that were there. They were all the people that were being addressed here. And not making a decision.

And remember too. The Elijah isn't for a moment saying. And the word of God isn't saying. It's an even choice.

[ 15 : 36 ] Hey. Might be God. Might be Baal. Take your choice. He's not saying that. He's not saying it's. There's a balance of any kind. He's just pointing at the manifest.

Obvious fact. That nothing is more unreasonable. Than not making a decision. If God is God. Serve him. That's the decision he's calling for.

He's not calling you to. Say. Oh well. Actually. It might be Baal. I'll stick with Baal. No. He said. That's unreasonable to do that. And making no decision. Is a decision for Baal. Remember.

Because that's where we are to start with. So you've got. You've got. You've got a contract in. Because doing nothing. The status quo is nowhere.

So. If we could look a little bit more closely. At the. There's challenge by Elijah here.

[ 16 : 33 ] It's God's challenge to us. Through the. Through the voice of Elijah. The first thing he does. Is he distinguishes between God and the gods. Between the God and the idols. The Baal. The Baal. Because all the.

The heathen people then. They thought of gods in their own terms. They're local. They're tribal. They're regional. They're a bit like people.

The Greeks and Romans had the same idea. They're capricious. They're nasty. They're tricky. And they. They be gods of the plain. Or gods of the. Gods of the mountain.

We see that many times in the Old Testament. But God isn't like that. God's none of those things. He's not tribal. Local. Or anything like that. He's universal. So. Because he is.

God. And they are just. They're just the figments. Of people's imagination. They're just. Created by people. There is no. Other God. God. The devil may make us think there are.

[ 17 : 33 ] And the devil himself. Of course. Is the God of many. And there's no way. That you can reconcile these competing claims. He's distinguishing there.

There's no way. You can't. Ride these two horses. You can't hedge your bets here. There's no.

Neutral ground. No. No man's land. Everything here. Is clear cut. There's righteousness on the one side.

And there's unrighteousness on the other. There's light. And there's darkness. There's right. And there's wrong. There's truth. And there's error. There's heaven. To be gained. And hell. To be avoided. There's God.

And the false gods. There's Christ. On the one hand. And Satan. On the other. There's no reconciliation. They're always. Eternally. Antagonistic. To one another. And that distinction.

[ 18 : 30 ] Means we can't combine. The two sides. We can't. Sit in the fence. Because it isn't really there. You may think. It's okay. To sit in the fence.

If it is there. It's not comfortable. Is it? To sit in the fence. But it's not really. It's not appropriate. To even think. That you can't sit in the fence. Because really.

You're on the wrong side of the fence. If you're on the fence. If you know what I mean. So. Secondly. Elijah.

The delay. The delay. In making the decision. Say. Why? How long? Are you waiting for this? Halting.

Stopping. Limping. He's mocking them in a way. Really. Isn't he? Like he mocked the prophets. He's saying. You know. You're limping around. From one foot to the other. You don't know what to do.

[ 19 : 25 ] That's no good. You can't keep on that. That's not a tenable position. To be in. Haltering.

And swaying back. And forth. Is no good. Let's say. The unstable man. Double minded man. Unstable in all his ways. Which James speaks. In the New Testament. Now.

So. Elijah's question. Could be. Expressed as. Haven't you any convictions at all? Haven't you got any. Intelligence. To apply to this? Haven't you got any judgment?

Can't you make up your mind? He's saying. These are things. We don't really want to hear. From someone. It sounds like he's chiding. But. He is concerned. For their souls. And he's concerned. For the glory of God.

And that was. What must every believer. Must be. Concerned for the glory of God. The one who halts.

[ 20 : 25 ] The one who sways. The one who's not sure. The one who's pliable. He's not going to make the decision. Half hearted is no good.

But after. Aside from that. Not content with that poser to the people. Saying. I. You know. Aren't. You're in a bad place. He also then.

Reminds them. Of the peril. Of staying there. The peril. Of such an attitude. There as. I don't listen to Terry. Terry Wogan. Many years ago. He used to. Have to use this word.

You're in a parlous condition. Like. It's like perilous. But it's like an Irish version. Of perilous. Powerless. This is. Or an old fashioned version. This is a powerless place to be.

The danger of delaying the decision. Is immense. Because destiny can overtake us at any time. We see it so often. Don't we? But we can't just think.

[ 21 : 25 ] Well that happened to somebody else. It didn't happen to me. Because we might be the next person. It happens to. So we have to make. Sure. We have to make sure.

That we don't procrastinate. Now anybody that knows me well. And I say it. Not with any. Pride or anything else. Knows that procrastination. Is one of my. Faults.

Now it's not a good thing. At all. Procrastination is putting something off. Not necessarily for tomorrow. But just not today. You know that saying.

That. The Mexican fellow said to the American. You gringos. You said you don't understand manana. You think manana means tomorrow. It doesn't mean tomorrow.

It just means not today. And then the Gaelic speaking fellow said. Ah yeah. But Gaelic doesn't have any word. That it conveys quite that sense of urgency. But it is urgent.

[ 22 : 22 ] We can't put it off. We can't. Maintain the attitude. Of doing nothing. We must stand somewhere. And God won't choose for us. He doesn't do violence to our wills.

He tells us in his word. But he makes us willing in a day of his power. So pray for that. If you haven't yet come to that situation. Of making that choice. Making that decision.

Because the responsibility is mine. The responsibility is yours. Every one of us have to make the decision. Some have made it already. But some have yet to make it. We must all make that choice.

As Joshua said. Choose you. This day. This day he said. Remember this day is used a lot in the scripture. Today is the day of salvation. This is the appointed time. Not tomorrow.

Because it hasn't come. And it might not. Not yesterday. Because it's too late now. But today. Now. Here. Stormy Free Church. Sunday morning. That's the time for you to make your choice.

[ 23 : 25 ] If you haven't yet made it. You may think. I'll leave it till this evening. You may not be here this evening. For various reasons.

Maybe not necessarily a sinister reason. But you may not be here. You may not want to again. If the spirit of the Lord is working upon you. Don't send him away. Because the spirit of God.

Will not always strive with man. What should it profit a man. If he gain the whole world. And lose his own soul. Like the rich.

Farmer. That we spoke about earlier. Made the wrong decision. What profit is there for him? No profit. That's not good business. If he's talking about. A ledger sheet. And it's not sensible.

If you're talking about a life. Elijah called for a decision. In the light of the facts. And so does everybody. Who preaches from this text. Everybody who takes it upon themselves.

[ 24 : 23 ] To stand up here and do this. Or they're asked to do it perhaps. But you're willing to stand up. And speak. From the word of God.

To other. Sinners. Because that's what we are. If we're in Christ.

We're sinners saved by grace. If we're not in Christ. We're sinners. Without grace. Who need grace. So.

Elijah made that call. You know what the words he used were. You know what it means. I make the call. Anybody who preaches from this. Will make the call.

Choose you to stay. Whom you serve. How long. How long will it be. How long do you have to hear the same message. Preach in many different ways.

[ 25 : 21 ] From many different texts. How long do you have to sit in these pews. I remember when I was first converted. I was in this congregation. I was thinking.

Oh what if I was ever a minister. That wasn't going to happen really. But. If I was ever preaching here. Boy I would blam it out. And the people who are sitting there.

Intransigently. Like I had been doing myself. But that was many many years ago. But there's still some people here. I know. Who are still here. And as far as I can see.

Externally. And we only see what we can see. God knows. But there's no sign of a change. God. Is patient.

Far more patient than we deserve. But his patience. Is not boundless. It's not endless. And there will come a time. When we will not. Any longer. Be. Under the preaching of the gospel.

[ 26 : 24 ] It's not to frighten anyone. It's to alert us to the fact. That this is urgent. This message. Is something we need to respond to. And if we've made the decision.

Let's be thankful that we have. And let's examine ourselves. Is that we are indeed. Really. Continuing on. In the faith. And trusting in him. And not in ourselves. Not in our. Good works.

And not in anything that we're doing. For the church. Or whatever. But. That we are trusting. In him. Trusting in God. Trusting in the grace. Of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But most of this message. Is really for you. If you're not. If you're not yet decided. If you're not yet convinced. If you're not yet bothered enough. There's all sorts of reasons.

Why people aren't. You know. Yourself. What your situation is. You know better than anyone.

[ 27 : 22 ] The person sitting beside you. And certainly better than I do. But you don't know better than God does. God knows. God knows what's in our hearts. Every heart here. And every heart across the world.

He knows exactly. And he's still calling out to us. Jesus Christ is here today. Because I know this sermon is from the Old Testament. But.

It's about. Salvation. And salvation is by Jesus Christ alone. Elijah. Remember. Elijah with Moses. Was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Christ. Elijah.

Of course. This is a man. This is a man who didn't die. Remember that. He didn't actually die. He was translated. Like Enoch was. That he wouldn't see death. He didn't see Jesus.

In his lifetime. But by the eye of faith. He knew. Like Job. That his Redeemer lived. And he's calling upon those. People round about him.

[ 28 : 19 ] To stand with him. For Christ. Well that's what we do here. All of the believers here. Must do that. To all those who aren't yet committed. Don't be put off by anyone.

By anything. By husband. By wife. By children. By parents. By family. By friends. By the church. Or what you perceive as a problem. In the church. Anything else.

Don't let these things put you off. Come to Christ. Make your decision now. And if you're not persuaded. If you're not bothered. Pray that you might become so.

That you might say to God. Look. I don't really think it's that much of this. But. Help me understand that it is all important. Don't delay.

Because procrastination in worldly things is one thing. That's bad enough. But procrastination in this. Is fatal. Or it can become fatal. God bless.

[ 29 : 22 ] Something that's been said to someone here. Let's pray. Father in heaven.

We are so inadequate to the purposes. Which you put us to. Help us to recognize. That anything we do. Can only be blessed.

If we do it in weakness. And in your strength. Looking to you to glorify. Your name. To build up a people for your cause.

To bring more people into your kingdom. For it is your war. We are only soldiers in the battle. You are our commander. Help us to all.

Make that decision. To be on your side. And not to be content. To be in the middle. We ask it in Jesus name for his sake.

[ 30 : 21 ] Amen.