

Showdown on Mt. Carmel

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[0 : 00] 1 Kings 18, we're going to be looking at the showdown of Mount Carmel.

This was kind of a passage that I really wasn't kind of thinking about when I started to look at what I was going to preach on. But as the more I kept going through and looking at different scriptures and things like that, I kept going back to this one.

So starting in verse 17, So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

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.

Then Elijah said to the people, I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord. But Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it to pieces, and lay it on the wood.

[1 : 29] But put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call upon the name of your God, and I will call upon the name of the Lord and the God who answers by fire.

He is God. And all the people answered, It is well spoken. Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose for yourselves one bull, and prepare it first. For you are many, and call upon the name of your God.

But put no fire to it. And they took the bull that was given to them, and they prepared it, and called upon the name of the Baal, from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, answer us. But there was no voice, and no one answered.

And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon, Elijah mocked them, saying, Cry out loud, for he is a God. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey.

Or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened. And they cried out loud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation.

[2 : 28] But there was no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. And all the people came near to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down.

Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the son of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be your name. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed.

And he put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. And he said, Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering on the wood. And he said, Do it a second time. And they did it a second time. And he said, Do it a third time. And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar, and filled the trench also with water. And at the time of the offering of ovulation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known that this day you are the God in Israel, and that I am your servant.

And I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord. Answer me that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and you have turned their hearts back. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

[3 : 42] And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God. So, a lot of scripture to kind of unpack tonight.

So, we're going to kind of dive right in here. So, obviously the scripture is set at a low point for Israel. They are, for the most part, have turned their backs on God. And they are going after the Canaanite god, Baal. Now, it is against this backdrop of idolatry that Elijah comes onto the stage. And we see him kind of first introduced in 1 Kings 17.1. And when he makes his appearance, he comes with a message from the Lord. And it is a call for his people to repent and a call for the renewal of the loyalty to God. So, and all of these things are going to come to a head in these verses. Now, on one side we have Ahab, Jezebel, and the priests of Baal, and most of the nation against just one man and God. [4 : 46] Now, the odds kind of look stacked in evil's favor at this point. But Elijah is about to experience the truth that one plus God is a majority.

And when we look at this passage tonight, there's a few things that I kind of want you guys to see as we go through these. One, there is a need for spiritual heroes who will stand against the tide of hearsay and apostasy.

There is a need for the people of God to gauge their allegiance to him and determine where they stand. There must be a willingness to flee from the evil that surrounds us and be a people separated for the glory of God. And four, there must be a willingness to renew our commitment to God and place him above everything else.

So, we have these four truths that are laid out in front of us. And we are going to take a closer look at the day when there was a showdown on Mount Carmel.

Let us take this time to allow God to speak to our hearts and reveal the things that might not be as they ought to be. We have to have a willingness to follow God with a single-mindedness.

[5 : 50] So, the first thing we're going to see here is the dilemma of the people of God, verses 21 through 24.

So, verse 21 says, 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.

So, here we see the people of Israel have a waywardness. They can't decide which path to take. They're completely divided on their allegiance.

So, on one hand, these people are still enjoying that name of God's people. But on the other hand, they love the sensual and fleshly appeal of Baal worship.

Elijah describes this as one that is limping along a fence. I mean, I don't know if any of you guys have ever tried to straddle a fence. It's not very comfortable. And a lot of times, we end up falling one way or the other when we try to straddle that fence.

[6 : 58] We don't go the way that we should. So, they were torn. The people of Israel were torn between the idea of being God's people and the sensual desire of Baal worship.

They were torn between two competing ideas, and they were not getting anything accomplished. So, these people had clearly fallen from the nation that they once were.

They obviously came into this land of Canaan as a conquering people. They came to root out all of this evil. When they went into the land of Canaan, they were told by God to destroy all of these people.

And what did they do? Well, they didn't listen. They left some people around. And now we're back here to where Baal is still around, and he's still playing a role in the nation of Israel's lives when it never should have been.

So, now they were divided in an apostate nation. So, I think we can kind of say that today I think the church is facing a lot of the same problems.

[8 : 03] Whether we'd like to or not, the visible church is in the middle of apostasy and waywardness. The Lord did say that things would be this way. 2 Thessalonians 2.3 says, It was coming.

It's here and present in our churches today. You can see churches that have moved away from the truth of what God has said.

And you see these churches and these denominations, they grapple with issues like abortion and homosexuality. We see them turn from the truth and produce error.

Now, when we see these kinds of things taking place, is it not plain to see that we are living in a time of apostasy? Some, I think, refuse to see the truth even as it stares them in the face.

And some will attempt to give weak excuses. But I remind you that our loyalty is to the Lord. So, they have a warning, right?

[9 : 17] And Elijah's admonishment is very direct. He tells them they have a choice to make. Now, Elijah sees this compromise of what they were doing with Baal as an affront to God.

And he is telling them that they have to make a choice on which side they will choose. You cannot serve two masters. So, now obviously there's been some time that's passed between what Elijah was facing with the prophets of Baal and now.

And our culture is not the same as it was then. But something that has not changed is God. He is the same as he was then as he is today. And he will always be the same.

And if a person is right with God, then he must take a stand apart from the world. There can be no compromise. And I think we sometimes need to have the same attitude that Joshua had when he declared that he and his house would follow the Lord.

It is either God or it is the world. We cannot have both. And so, after this, he tells them to decide. Or tells them to decide.

[10 : 27] And what's the response? It's silence. They have nothing to say. Right? And many think that if you just ignore the problem that it's going to go away on its own.

But it doesn't feel that way in reality. That problem is never going to go away. You're only deceiving yourself.

So, let's take a look at verses 22 through 24. Then Elijah said to the people, All right.

So, here we see their willingness. So, Elijah lays out the challenge and they accept it. Now, I do find it interesting that these people have the gall to ask that God proves himself.

You see it throughout the Bible. People asking God to prove that he is God. And what's interesting here, even more so than for us, is the people of Israel, right?

[12 : 00] Even though it's just a few hundred years ago, had already seen the amazing things that God had done to bring them out of captivity. Had brought them into the promised land. And yet, here we are again.

They see themselves as God's people, but wanted to be separated from who God really was. So, the people decided to give God a chance.

And for that, we can give them a little bit of credit. Not much. They decided, oh, we'll let this God guy give it a try. Maybe he has it right. And the problem is, is that they really should have been humbled before the Holy God.

Instead of trying to find a way around his will for their lives. So, verses 25 through 48, we see the power of God.

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first. For you are many and call upon the name of your God, but put no fire to it.

[13 : 05] And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it, and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, answer us. But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.

And at noon, Elijah mocked them, saying, Cry out loud, for he is a God. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.

And they cried out loud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation. But there was no voice, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. And all the people came near to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. Elijah took the twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be your name.

And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about that altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood.

[14 : 06] And he said, Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering of the wood. And he said, Do it a second time. And they did it a second time. And he said, Do it a third time. And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

And at the same time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am

your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word.

Answer me, O Lord. Answer me that the people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

All right. So, a lot to unpack there. But the first verses that we see, 25 through 29, talks about the fealty of following Baal.

So, we see the contest is set up. You have the priests of Baal. You have Elijah. And they both make altars. They both go to offer a sacrifice.

[15 : 08] And the priests of Baal prayed and cried out to their god. All morning, all afternoon, all the way up to that evening. And Elijah saw the folly of what they're doing and starts to mock them.

I think these verses always kind of make me laugh a little bit. You know, he said, I love that we have a God who is always present.

That we don't have to cry out loud to our God. That even in a still, simple voice, he hears us. And he mocks them for trying to reach out to this God in this way because he knows the power of who his God is.

But when all the dust had settled, Baal was still as dead as he had ever been. They stood there defeated before a single prophet of God.

Now, this will happen to anyone that attempts to follow the false gods of religion of this world. They are all dead and can do nothing for those that cry out to them.

[16 : 28] I feel that those that are caught up in this feel that they are right and that they are fanatics to be pitied. I would like to remind you that anyone who thinks they can combine God and worldliness are doomed to fail.

And when the dust of life settles, God will still be God and his way and word will still be right and everything else will be wrong. So verses 30 through 37, we see the faith of the prophet.

So after the prophets of Baal get done, Elijah then steps up. So first he repairs the altar of God and he chooses 12 stones to remind Israel that they are one nation under God.

He takes these 12 stones to represent the 12 tribes of Israel and to remind these people, to remind Ahab, to remind Jezebel that they are one nation and that they are under God.

Then he has 12 barrels of water poured over the altar and the sacrifice. And he does this final thing to remove all doubt as to who was to receive the glory.

[17 : 36] And when we talk about, I like how they use the word in the ESV barrel because it kind of makes us imagine this kind of these giant barrels that you would see. But really it was probably like a giant vase.

It's probably about my height that would have been filled with water that they poured over these things. And they did that 12 times. enough so that they filled a trench with water that he had dug.

And he prays a simple prayer at this point. A 63 word prayer. And fire falls from heaven and consumes everything including the dust that is around the altar as well.

God answered in a spectacular way. Now it takes a lot of faith to be an Elijah. I don't know if I would be standing up there with 450 other people staring me down along with the rest of the nation.

I get nervous just standing up here in a crowd of 20 people let alone trying to do so in front of that many. But it took a lot of faith to be who he was.

[18 : 48] But he had already seen what the Lord could do. Previously he sees that there's no rain that's fallen on the land for a while. He gets food supplied to him by ravens.

There's an endless supply of meal and oil. And then there's the resurrection of the widow's son. Elijah knew that this little thing was nothing for his God.

And he was willing to put his life on the line because he believed in a God that moves when his people pray to him. God will move when we pray. What direction he moves is up to him.

We may not always like the way that he moves but when we pray God will move. We have to have the same faith if we are to take our stand with God and do what he wants us to do.

We need to exercise faith in God. And if you say that your faith would be stronger if you had seen these things as well then I have news for you. The greatest thing that God ever did was to save you when you cried out and faced him.

[19 : 55] If he can do that then helping us stand up for him in truth is child's play. How grateful are we that God saved us? how often do we forget that that's the greatest thing that God has ever done for us that he saved us?

And we would be like oh my faith would be stronger if I had only seen these miracles. Well God has done a great thing in your life. Why can't we see the same miracles happen today that we saw then?

Right? So verse 38 the faithfulness of God now obviously I think there's those that would think and like to attribute this event to anything other than what God did but when all is said and done only one thing can be explained what happened and that is God is that God honored the faith that honored him.

Elijah got up and said that my God can God will respond to that kind of faith and I think that when you and I decide that we will exercise our faith in God and take our stand God will come through for us.

When we as individuals and as a church come together and take a stand for God he will not leave us hanging he will take a stand with us. God will always be there for us no matter the darkest struggles we go through the hardest times that we face he will be there for us.

[21 : 35] I always kind of go back to this poem Footprints in the Sand it's an old poem most of you guys probably know it but the man and Jesus were walking along the beach and they were watching this man's life play out before him and at one point this man starts to look back at the path behind him and he sees only one set of footprints and he looks to Jesus and said why was it that at the darkest times in my life I only see one set of footprints and Jesus looks at him and said it was during those times that I carried you there is a faith that comes from being with Jesus and when we stand with him he will stand with us we have to take a stand in this world that is filled with apostasy the church especially right now is facing a crisis in the states all over the world there is churches that preach the prosperity gospel there is churches who have rewritten their own bible because they don't like certain things that it says we as individuals in a church have to come together and take a stand for

God so verse 39 so the decision of the people of God and when all the people saw it they fell on their faces and said the Lord he is God the Lord he is God so the first thing we see is that they had experienced God in power so he had answered his prophet by fire in their presence and there was no denying what they had seen at this point these were no longer stories they just heard from old people with gray beards these were real truths and there was a reality to what they had seen and when they saw it they responded to it and when we meet the Lord we are changed in the same way we are no longer the same people that we were we once were we are now changed we are now in the image of God we are different than the world around us and God will bless us for that difference no matter the struggles no matter the hardships that we face that we have to stand apart that we are different we are changed and that when we stand apart from the world

God is there for us God will bless that difference so they extolled God in prostration when we see the move in such a way we should fall on our faces before him in genuine humility the people of God signaled their desire to do this and honored the God that is in heaven now this is the indicator that they were changed they are making God the sole object of their faith so when we come to the place where we are willing to separate ourselves from the other gods that compete for our attention and yield to our God then we will find ourselves drawn to him the next thing they see is they exalted God in praise nothing is quite as liberating as finding yourself focused on God alone when he has our attention and our affection he will satisfy us that there is nothing between you and God that all sin has been put away when you get there

God will bless us with gladness of heart and joy of soul remember Jesus came to set us free as we look didn't cover it but I'm going to read it verse 40 it says and Elijah said to them seize the prophets of Baal let not one of them escape and they seized them and Elijah brought them down to the brook of Kishon and slaughtered them there that is our fate if we do not follow Christ our fate is death just as the prophets!

ball faced that they had let apostasy come into their lives they had turned their backs on who God was and what he was doing and at the end of it all they ended up dead because they didn't follow God's will our fate is the same if we do not follow God's will ask this question of you guys tonight are there areas of your life that you would say are worldly and important to God maybe you need to confess those things and experience the forgiveness of God do you see the apostasy that is around us and if so pray for the church that we would be quick to see apostasy and that we are quick to take a stand for Jesus maybe you haven't been saved and would like to meet this all powerful loving God if you come to him he will receive you and he will save you if you let him in whatever the need

of your heart this evening bring it to the

[27 : 01] Lord let us pray dear Heavenly Father we thank you for this day Lord and thank you for allowing me this opportunity Lord to preach your word God let those that heard it tonight Lord have open hearts Lord that they gleaned something from this sermon Lord I know it was short God God but thank you for everything that you do for us and in your son we pray Amen