

“CONFRONTATION ON MT. CARMEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: I Kings 18:20-29

Introduction

Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel is one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture, one of the most well remembered stories in the OT.

The first question is why all this extra drama? Why didn't God just send rain? Remember we are in the middle of a God-war, God has challenging Baal to a dual. If God had just let it start raining again the people would have given the glory to Baal, that Baal finally answered.

This event is meant to prove the utter impotence of the false god Baal, the god of rain and fertility. Sometimes extreme measures are needed to prove the truth. Extreme sin calls for extreme measures to flush it out into the open. This is a very public repudiation of Baal and of Jezebel (like on prime time TV).

Answers to pray don't always come until God has made us ready to receive the answer. We have be brought to a place to see our need or sin more clearly before the grace comes.

The rod of God's discipline must first work its will, there must first be the pain of discipline before there can be the fruit of righteousness.

God will have us see how impotent we are, how helpless before He shows us His power. He will have us learn that apart from Him we have nothing and are nothing.

The Call to Choose, how long will you go on limping?

I Kings 18:21 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.

How long will you dance (waver, teeter totter) back and forth? How long will you be double-minded? How long will you try to serve two Gods?

There is an important truth stated here that is being lost in our culture especially in the younger generations. There is a foolish notion that all people can have their version of the truth, that all paths lead up the mountain to God.

There is the false idea that Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism and secularism and Christianity can all be true for you and it doesn't matter. Religions that are diametrically opposed, that completely contradict each other cannot all be right. When you put two side by side, one of them is wrong, false. You must determine which one is true and then cast the other aside.

It is a philosophical and logical fallacy to hold opposite and contradictory ideas as both true. Contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. If something is true, then the opposite of it is false.

“If two people give a contradictory understanding of a text, either one of them is wrong or both of them are wrong. Both, however, cannot be right. Otherwise, the concept of truth loses all meaning” (R.C. Sproul).

How do you determine what is true? Should it be by popularity, by the majority? 450 to one.

A terrible example of how muddled thinking is today is when people say the baby in the womb is a life and it is OK to kill it. Either it is a human life or not, and if it is then to kill it is murder.

The Israelites wanted it both ways, they wanted their cake and eat it too. They wanted to please God and win His favor, and they wanted to please Baal and win his favor.

II Kings 17:41 These nations feared the Lord and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children's children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

God will not accept a divided heart. We cannot serve two gods. The Lord is a jealous God and demands our whole affection. There is no compromise, either you are for Him or against Him.

As Joshua said to Israel, choose this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.

Matthew 12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

There is no neutrality with God, no middle ground. We are either friend or foe. With God it is either all or none. Remember to be lukewarm is repulsive to Christ.

If you can find one better than God to love and worship and serve, then so be it. But you better be sure, you better put him to the test and see if he can do for you what Jesus has done.

Notice the deafening silence. They said nothing. No one had courage or boldness to stand. The preacher preached and their consciences rebuked them, they were guilty as charged. They had no grounds for arguing. Their silence is a guilty silence.

Why would anyone choose Baal worship? What was the attraction?

First, Baalism had the government stamp of approval, it was PC. If you want to get along you should go along. It was the path of popular opinion, it is what all the cool kids believed.

Second, Baalism was on the right side of history. It had historical and cultural relevance, this was not just a new fad. Baalism had been around for a long time in Canaan and it had a certain appeal to the Israelites ever since they crossed the Jordan, 600 years before.

Third, Baalism appealed to felt needs. Baal brought blessings of fruitfulness, fertility, rain, weather, storms. He gave grain, oil, wine. He could bring healing. He was what every Canaanite farmer needed. This is the god of peace and prosperity, of comfort and ease.

Fourth, Baalism appealed to sensuality and lust as many false religions and cults do. False gods and idols always have an appeal to our needs, wants, desires, otherwise they would be nothing to us.

Remember what we have said about idolatry. Man is incurably religious, we all worship something. We are all in search of a god, we all desire a god. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in a god, and restless still until they rest in the true God. We are all made in the image of God to worship God.

The confidence of true faith, you call on your god and I will call on my God.

We see the nature of Elijah's faith and the nature of theirs.

Elijah gave the Baal's every possible advantage. He stacked the deck completely in their favor. He gave them all the aces. He gave them a 50 point lead. He gave them all the first round draft picks.

The contest will be on Mt. Carmel, a dwelling place of Baal, his home turf. Baal's Bluff. He let them go first, since they are in the majority. 450 to 1, or 850 to 1. He let them have the home court advantage in front of Baal's home crowd. He let them chose the first bull. He let them have center stage. He gives them a head start. He plays into their hands by picking what Baal is best at. Let him answer by fire, after all Baal was known for throwing down lightning. Baal is the fire god and the sun is his flame.

Think about it, this world has the upper hand and evil is in the majority. The children of the father of lies are many, and they are going first and appear to have the superiority. God welcomes being the underdog, being at a disadvantage, making things seem as bad as possible.

Joseph in prison before becoming prince of Egypt.

Gideon with only 300 against the Midianite army.

Daniel in the lion's den.

Jesus on the cross.

This is the confidence Elijah has, his faith is secure. May Elijah's faith be our faith in these days. Does it seem like God is losing? Does it seem like evil is winning?

Elijah's faith encourages us to have the same faith in a world where all the advantages seem to be on the side of evil, where Satan seems to be winning, where things are only getting worse.

Compare Elijah's confident faith, with their fanaticism and fervor. They had faith but no object to their faith. Can you imagine this scene on the mountain? 450 prophets of Baal singing at the top of their lungs, "Come on, Baal, light my fire."

Elijah may be having a little too much fun at their expense. He eggs them on and even ridicules and mocks them. The more he mocked, the more they doubled down. They had been mocking God and laughing at God by all their actions, now their folly is answered.

Psalm 2:4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

There is only silence, utter, absolute, deafening silence. Idols and false gods cannot do one most important thing, they can't answer prayer. This is the equivalent of Toto pulling back the curtain on the Wizard of Oz and exposing him as a fraud.

What is your god that is impotent, failing to give you what you want?

Money, pleasure, ease, comfort, lust, greed, self, sports.

Follow your anger, it may lead you to your god.

Every time my sports team loses I say to my boys, sports is a terrible god, capricious, whimsical, undependable, unreliable.

Whatever god you are pursuing other than the true God, at some point that path will be a dead end? God will see to it, God will expose our idols as impotent, silent, worthless, unsatisfying.

Sin is stupid, sin is a waste of time, sin is the waste of a life, sin is self-defeating. Sin makes fools of us. And nowhere is sin more stupid than in idolatry. Nowhere is our folly more clear.

Conclusion and Application.

Wavering, vacillating.

To waver is to falter, hang back, hesitate, teeter, wobble. To be a bobble head.

To waver is to vacillate, to purpose lightly, to be changeable, undependable.

It used to be said that women were fickle, they changed their mind a lot, but the truth of the matter is, now days men are fickle, refusing to step up, to take responsibility, to make decisions.

We must be thankful for a man like Elijah, who would stand, even alone, when all the world is against him.

Remember the great Church father, Athanasius. He was standing up to heresy in his day. When he was told to give it up, that the whole world was against him, he answered, then it is Athanasius against the world. He would not waver.

How many of us are living two lives, saying one thing and doing another, saying we believe but acting in unbelief? Are we seeking to please man or please God or both?

Think about your love for Jesus. Do you waver concerning him? Do you love Jesus?
Do you love His church?

Are we wavering, sitting on the fence, are we lukewarm, neither hot or cold?
Are you standing up for your faith? Are you standing against ungodliness and sin?

Stop vacillating, stop being indecisive, step up, stop sinning, stop wasting your life, stop being unfaithful to Jesus. Stop being lame, limping through life. If you try to find your life, your meaning, your worth, from anything but the true God, you are limping and you will be lame all your life. We all have a choice, do you trust God? God is at stake, God's truth, God's Gospel.

Psalm 26:1-2 Vindicate me, O Lord, ... I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. 2 Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

Psalm 27:14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Galatians 6:9 Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Hebrews 10:22-24 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope *without wavering*, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

The Christian life cannot be separated from faith. We are saved "by grace...through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). We "walk by faith" (2 Corinthians 5:7). We "live by faith" (Romans 1:17). Believe what God says and act on it. In the moment of decision, don't be neutral, don't be a limper, don't be a waverer.

Following God is a series of continuous choices, again and again and again. Chose this day! Every Sabbath is a covenant renewal ceremony, especially every time we come to the table.

Be proactive, be intentional, be conscientious, be diligent. Pray hard and go hard after God.

Do this even in your old age and in your declining strength.

Choose this day whom you will serve, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.