

**PP Standing In the Gap: *Elijah, a Man Like Us***

Part 8-*The God Who Turns Hearts, 1 Kings 18:20-29*

12/10-11/2011

Illus Vanderbilt University built its All Faith Chapel, dedicated to Hindus, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, the Bahai'I and Orthodox Christians Fellowship. There are no religious symbols in the chapel, instead there are cupboards. In the Muslim cupboard, students can get their prayer rugs; in the Jewish cupboard their menorah and Star of David; in the Christian cupboard a cross and some bibles, etc. At the dedication ceremony, Chaplain Beverly Asbury said, *"This place is for all faiths. Its dedication consists of many acts and of one. There is diversity in our unity, and there is unity in our diversity as we dedicate this space and add to its light, each in the way of a distinctive tradition."*<sup>1</sup>

As we are going to see with Elijah, God is not inclusive, rather He is exclusive  
He will not come to the table and dine with other gods, and other religions  
Will we have the courage to confidently call people to make a decision regarding God?  
Elijah did, as we saw last week his confidence in God gave him unparalleled courage, even as he received the hatred and threats of King Ahab  
He told Ahab to bring all Israel and her false prophets to meet him, and Ahab did  
***"Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel."***

**PP** Mt. Carmel was in the Northwest corner of Israel, standing over 1700 feet high, about 30 miles west of the Sea of Galilee

It is more a mountain range than a peak, and one Jewish scholar said there was *'no spot in Palestine more beautiful'*; its name means *fruitful garden*

**PP** It was right on the southern edge of Phoenicia and was a stronghold for Baal worship  
Elijah chose it purposefully, to give Baal's prophets home field advantage

**1 Kings 16:32** tells us that Ahab had built a temple for Baal right in Samaria, but high up on Mt. Carmel, there would be room for thousands of spectators to witness this contest

They gathered on the slopes of that mountain and then Elijah spoke to the people: ***"How long will you go limping between two different opinions?" 18:21***

**PP** The word *'limping'* means to hop, leap or pass over like a bird hopping from branch to branch, looking for one to settle on

The people hopped back and forth in their allegiance between Elohim and the gods around them

Here is the fundamental problem, the reason for the drought: Israel was double-minded

James wrote that a double-minded man ***'is unstable in all his ways.'*** **James 1:8**

And they had been for a long time

For nearly 600 years, Israel had been a wayward, willful nation vacillating between their devotion to God and their allegiance to other gods

Since the days of their deliverance out of Egypt, God's people had displayed a divided mind

**PP** God had told them: ***"You shall have no other gods [besides] Me...You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God."*** **Exodus 20:3**

Yet repeatedly they ran after the gods of the nations around them

Friends, this same question is for us as well, for double-mindedness is alive and well in the church today

Are you limping back and forth between following Christ and following the world?

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<sup>1</sup> *First Things*, 11/1993, 54.

Does money have more of a hold on your life than God?

Some people sell their souls to the corporate ladder and worship success

Others are pursuing luxuries, or beauty, power, sex, control, big home, clean home

There is nothing that our hearts cannot worship, the Baals are all around us and they are familiar in the church and outside it

Divided allegiance to God, double-mindedness is nothing new

**PP** *“Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.”*

**PP** Joshua challenged the people: *“choose this day whom you will serve”* Joshua 24:15

**PP** Jesus said to the church at Laodicea, *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”* Revelation 3:15-16

Elijah said, *“If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”*

You’re either all in or all out

A woman once said of her willingness to put up with her husband’s continual unfaithfulness:

*“I’d rather have some of him than none of him.”*

God will not say that, instead He says *‘I purchased you, you are all Mine, I have loved you, you are to love Me and serve Me with all of who you are’*

If nothing else comes from this sermon, know this: *God will settle for part of our allegiance*

And when we believe the lie that God isn’t too concerned with our double-mindedness, He still sends His bold Elijahs to bring us back to Him

Sometimes Elijah is a friend, or a pastor, or a song, or a book, or a verse of Scripture, or a job loss, or a marriage crisis, or a heart attack or stroke

God has more Elijahs than we have idols, and these servants of God speak for Him right into our hearts to turn us away from our idols and back to our jealous, loving God

Notice the response of the people to Elijah’s challenge: *“And the people did not answer him a word.”*

Guilty, and so far, unwilling to repent, which brings us to the main point I want to share

God must do something in the hearts of His people to help them stay faithful to Him

It is the gracious work of the gospel and it is seen throughout this passage

Rebellion is hard-wired into us from birth, inherited from our rebellious first father, Adam

We’ve all been born with a nature to go our own way, and we’ve all proven it through immoral

**PP** actions so that the Bible can say without mincing words: *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”* Romans 3:10-12

We’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and Holy God will not and cannot just wink at our sinfulness, giving us a free pass into His presence

He not only detests sin, He is incompatible with it; God and sinful people cannot be together Israel must repent and turn back to God or they have no hope!

But a man with no legs, no matter how much he is threatened, cannot get up and run

We must first be freed from our slavery to sin, before we can ever pursue righteousness

And it is entirely impossible without the power of the gospel which we are about to see

God made a way for us to be released from the bondage of sin, and set free to worship Him

***“Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.” 18:23***

They didn’t go to the local butcher and grab a pack of steaks, they took a live bull, killed it, collecting its blood and sprinkled it on the altar  
Elijah is demonstrating to the people that they have sinned, and they are in need of forgiveness  
If a double-minded person is ever to choose God fully, he or she must recognize their great need of forgiveness and help  
Why did Israel have all those bloody, barbaric sacrifices?  
Many today in the church want to stop talking about death and blood and sacrifice

**PP** But ***“the wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23***

**PP** God Himself said that ***“the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.” Leviticus 17:11***

**PP** And Cross references:

A. [Romans 6:23](#) : [Romans 2:7](#); [Romans 5:12](#)

***“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Hebrews 9:22***

Sin is such a terrible blight that the only cleansing agent is blood!  
Sin is a *“radical and terrible reality that calls for a radical and terrible cure”* John Phillips  
Now understand that it wasn’t the physical blood that forgave sins, otherwise the animals could have just been bled a little, and Jesus could have donated a pint of blood and offered it  
The ***‘shedding of blood’*** means the death of the victim  
Sin’s penalty is death, and nothing but death, the shedding of blood, can atone for it

But while animal sacrifice could cleanse the worshiper, it could not give that worshiper a new heart that was freed from the bondage of sin

It was just ***“a shadow of the good things to come”***, a better sacrifice, the death of Jesus Christ

**PP** ***“For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Hebrews 9:13-14***

Double-minded Israel, unrepentant, gathered on Mt Carmel that day, and they were in need of a new heart that would not continue to stray from God

That power is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, Who died to take away our sins and give us a new nature no longer a slave to sin, free to worship, serve and obey God  
God must set us free from double-mindedness, and He will through the blood of His Son

Notice that Elijah says to Israel: ***“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.” 23c-24***

Why didn’t Elijah say the God who answers by water is the true God, they hadn’t had a drop of moisture in that land for 3 ½ years

It's because all Israel was under the judgment of God, and His wrath must fall either on them or a sacrificial substitute

He cannot bless them until His justice is satisfied

This makes sense right?

If someone killed a loved one of yours, and the judge was just having a great day and let the killer go with no punishment, wouldn't that seem terribly unjust?

Forgiveness as we've seen requires the death of an innocent substitute

And divine justice must be satisfied: the penalty of the broken law must be inflicted—either on the guilty culprit or upon an innocent substitute

As God's wrath was about to pour out on that bull, it would leave room for His kindness to come to Israel, and it did, in the form of rain

This is the good news called the gospel, that God's wrath was poured out on His Son, not on us as it should have been, and

**PP** *"But he was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed."* Is. 53:5

**PP** *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* 2 Corinthians 5:21

The fire of God's wrath had to fall on that sacrifice before the rain of His favor could come  
And when it did, all Israel would know, the reason for the contest to begin with, that God had accepted the sacrifice

The gospel, the good news can be seen in Elijah's command not to light the fire

Salvation is entirely a work of God, He is the one Who gives it

He is the one who does the impossible, Who saves lost sinners and turns them back to Him

It is faith in God alone which saves

So *"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 aloud, 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 aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them."* 26-28

Baalism was a hideous religion!

The prophets of Baal were priests who were little more than male and female prostitutes

The religion held to the belief that every piece of ground owed its productivity to a supernatural being, a Baal, that dwelt there

The way you get the Baal to make your ground, or your wife fertile, was to kiss wooden images that were constructed, and to pay to have sex with Baal's priests

In extreme desperation, they would sacrifice one of their children to the Baal

Alfred Edersheim, Jewish scholar described this scene on Carmel: "First rose a... wild dry to Baal; followed by a dance around the altar, beginning with swinging motions to and fro. The howl then became louder, and the dance more frantic. They whirled round, ran

wildly through each other's ranks, always keeping up a circular motion, the head bent low, so that their long disheveled hair swept the ground...It was noon and for hours they had kept up their wild rites. With cutting taunts and bitter irony Elijah reminded them that, since Baal was Elohim, the fault must lie with them. Stung to madness, they became more frantic than before...The wild howl passed into piercing demoniacal yells. In their madness the priests bit their arms and cut themselves with two-edged swords which they carried and with lances. As the blood began to flow, the frenzy reached its highest pitch, when first one, then others, commenced to 'prophecy,' moaned and groaned, then burst into rhapsodic cries...uttering incoherent, broken sentences.<sup>2</sup>

It was at noon when Baal the sun god's powers should have peaked that Elijah mocked them Baal was the thunder god, often drawn holding a bolt of lightning, so fire should be easy for him Can't you picture Satan wanting so desperately to bring fire down upon that pagan altar?

**PP** In the end times, he will deceive as the beast will ***"perform great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people"*** Revelation 13:13

But God would not allow it, Baal was utterly dead and mute

**PP** Still, God's mercy was available: ***"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."*** Isaiah 45:22

**PP** Faith must be in the right God: ***"there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** Acts 4:11-12

Do you remember the Wizard of Oz, as Dorothy and her friends are afraid of the Great and Terrible Oz, until her little dog Toto pulls back the curtain and the Wizard is show as he really was: a little old man with a microphone

***"And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention."*** 18:29

Friends, God was taking His double-minded nation, and bringing them back to Himself He does the same in us, by the power of the good news of Jesus Christ, whose death has given us a new heart, freed from the bondage of sin, set free to serve Him whole-heartedly Is the gospel alive in you, do you sense a growing desire to lay yourself on that altar and give God everything in your life and serve Him?

We are saved by the gospel, saved through faith in Jesus Christ, let us continue in that same way

Pray

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<sup>2</sup> Bible History: Old Testament, Alfred Edersheim