

#387-October 22, 2017

[Opening Video- www.youtube.com- "Elijah on Mt. Carmel" by Brian Eric Abeleda]

Gods and Kings - Elijah & King Ahab

1 Corinthians 10:12- "Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall."

(Turn to 1 Kings 18) Continuing our series, "Gods and Kings," you remember that it is a story of the Old Testament kings who rose to power, but had challenges that accompanied their success. Many of us may pass the test of adversity; but how many of us could pass the test of prosperity? But, it is not just a story about kings; it is our story- ordinary people- you and me. We may not have the power or prestige of kings and princes, but we share the same human experience. We share the same struggles.

The books of 2nd Kings & 2nd Chronicles tell the story of Israel, and events that led to the division of the kingdom of Israel into 2 kingdoms- the northern kingdom (Israel) with Samaria as its capital, and the southern kingdom (Judah) with Jerusalem as its capital. The northern kingdom did not have one good king- not one! But, the Lord sent them prophets (specifically, Elijah and Elisha) in an attempt to call them back. The southern kingdom had some good kings and some kings about whom it is written, "He did not do what is right in the sight of the Lord." Today, we will learn from one of the evil kings in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, **King Ahab, and his wife, Queen Jezebel, and their confrontation with Elijah on Mt. Carmel.** **Mt Carmel- The Mountain of Decision (1 Kings 18)**

Israel's situation- Ahab & Jezebel's leadership into idolatry

King Ahab was one of the many kings in the Northern Kingdom about whom it was written, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord"- but, even moreso! **1 Kings 16:30-31**- "*Ahab... did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.*" The theological term for this is "Syncretism". "Syncretism" may be defined as "The attempt to synthesize or combine many different religions, philosophies, or schools of thought into one system." In other words, Ahab & Jezebel would put it this way, "You may worship Yahweh (Jehovah) if you like; but, don't be so closed-minded, intolerant and bigoted to insist that you must *only* worship Yahweh. Why not worship Yahweh *and* Baal? Perhaps they are even one in the same God, with 2 different names. You worship Yahweh in the way that *you* want, and we will worship Baal in the way that *we* want."

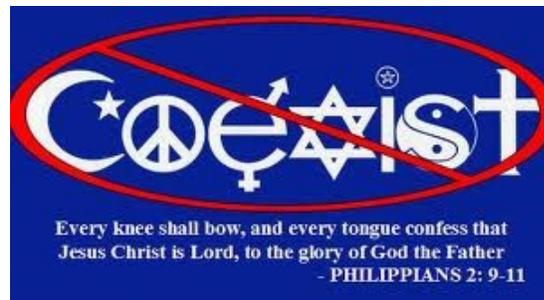
That sounds reasonable, doesn't it? And, it sounds much like the "Postmodern" culture of our day, doesn't it?

(Ex.- signs, bumper sticker- ) C is the crescent moon & star, symbol for Islam; O is the peace symbol; E is the symbol for males/females (feminism; gay liberation); X is the Star of David, the symbol for Judaism; I is a candle dotted with a Wiccan Pentangle; S is the symbol for the yin-yang or Confucianism, Buddhism; and T is the cross, the symbol for Christianity. What is implied in this bumper sticker? "All religions are the same"; "All religions are responsible for all the conflicts that are occurring around the world"; "Any claim to a final or exclusive, ultimate truth is the cause for this violence"; Others-



John Lennon's "Imagine"- "Imagine there's no heaven, hell, religion or country- Imagine all the people, living life in peace!". It's a Utopian vision; an empty vision; but, beneath this symbol is a "syncretistic" assumption- that all religions are essentially the same, and that any suggestion that any one of them has the "ultimate truth" is bigoted, intolerant and even dangerous!

Answer- Phil. 2:9-11!



And, then an Elijah dares to enter the scene, and he has the nerve to say, "No- the Word of God says, 'You shall have no other gods. You shall love Yahweh, your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; but, a god by any other name is *no god*.'"

Elijah's challenge- Truth must confront power!

There are moments in life when ***truth must confront power***. This is a big theme in the scriptures:

Moses before Pharaoh- truth confronts power!

The prophets- truth confronts power!

John the Baptist before King Herod- truth confronts power!

Jesus before Pilate- truth confronts power!

Elijah before King Ahab & Queen Jezebel- truth confronts power!

Sometimes truth must confront power. We live in a culture that seeks power, not truth. Money represents power; big business represents power; big government represents power; the media and the arts represent power; and, sometimes truth must confront power!

God's pressure- drought in the land

And, so the story goes on in **1 Kings 17:1**- *"As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."* Sometimes, the Lord applies pressure upon leaders and false teachers to acknowledge Him as Lord (ex.- Pharaoh & the 10 plagues). And, we can see that the pressure began to get underneath Ahab's skin. After 2 1/2 years of drought, people were sick and dying from hunger, and they were getting angrier at the king. And, Elijah appeared on the scene again. He called for a meeting with King Ahab and his 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. He would try anything to get it to rain again in his dry land.

Ahab's accusation- Elijah was a troublemaker

Vs. 16-21- They met, and the tables were turned. Elijah was the master, and the king was the subject. Upon their meeting, Ahab's first words to Elijah was, **vs. 17**- *"Is that you, you **trouler of Israel?**"* My friends, whenever *truth* confronts *power*, the one who speaks the truth will be called, "a trouler of the nation." It is OK if you keep your truth in your church building, and if you confine your religion to the small, religious portion of your life; But, one who speaks the word of God in the public realm, who calls upon those in power to account for

their actions, who speaks as the conscience of the nation will be called a "troubler."

Throughout history, the church has been blamed for the troubles of a nation. For instance, in the 5th century, as Rome collapsed and was taken captive by Alaric and the Visigoths, there were many who were quick to blame the *church* for their troubles. People said that the church was not loyal to the Emperor, that they were more loyal to their God than the state, and that Rome collapsed because they no longer worshipped the ancient gods of Rome. And, along came a great theologian named Augustine, and "truth confronted power" as he wrote an extensive and very popular classic book called, "the City of God", in which he explained a clear view of history as the unfolding plan of God, and that the church would go on and flourish and grow, even if Rome fell.

Even today, Christianity, the Bible, and the church are blamed for the troubles of our nation. In an issue of "The Humanist" magazine, John Dunphy write an article, entitled, "A religion for a New Age", in which he wrote the following: *"The Bible is not merely another book, or even an extremely influential book; it has been and remains an incredibly **dangerous** book. It and the various Christians which are **parasitic** upon it have been directly responsible for most of the **wars, persecutions and outrages** which humankind has perpetrated upon itself over the past 2,000 years."* And, he proceeded to describe a new religion, the religion of humanism, which will bring peace on earth, with the public school classrooms as the main arena for proselytizing this new faith. So, there you have it- again, the church is a parasitic organization, and is responsible not only for the troubles of our nation, but of the world over the last 2,000 years! Truth again needs to confront power!

Elijah's answer- Who is troubling whom?"

Elijah's response in **vs. 18** is instructive: *"I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals."* Or, in other

words, "Who is troubling whom? Do I trouble Israel because I am calling them back to the God who founded and sustained this nation, or do you trouble Israel because you seek to cause them to serve other gods? Do I trouble Israel because I am standing on the rock-solid principles of God's word which remain for good, for certain and for all time, or do you trouble Israel because you seek to replace it with the shifting sands of human opinion, popular religion and moral relativism? Who is troubling whom?"

Elijah's appeal- How long will you waver between two opinions?

Then, Elijah confronted the people- **vs. 21-** *"Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."* The word, "waver" in the Hebrew literally means, "to hesitate" or "to *limp*." And, truly, one who is indecisive, one who seeks to "synthesize" all opinions into one religion is "limping." Jesus calls upon us to "walk" in truth, to "follow Him"- but, as James says, "The *double-minded man* is unstable in all he does." He "hesitates", he "limps" between two opinions, rather than "walking" in truth. Two opinions, but not one truth. "Christ *and...*(something else)"

"Christ *and* other religions"- For instance, there was an ancient heresy, "Universalism", which is again gaining popularity in our day (Ex.- the "Unitarian Universalist" church- that is, that Jesus is one of *many ways* to get to God; or, another version- that Jesus' death on the cross meant that everyone is somehow saved, whether they believe in Him or not). To many in our culture, the most offensive verse in the Bible is **John 14:6-** *"I am **the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.**"* To those who say, "Christ *and* other religions", Elijah speaks today- "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but, if Baal, follow him."

"Christ *and...*my own system of ethics- "New Morality" (which is nothing more than old immorality); situation ethics, which says that there are no unchanging standards for ethics, only situations. Even many today who claim to

belong to Jesus Christ, yet live by the ethical standards (or lack thereof) of popular culture- to those who say, "Christ and my own system of ethics, Elijah speaks today- "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but, if Baal, follow him."

"Christ *and...humanism*"- Christianity exalts the *Bible* as the supreme authority, even over human reason. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 1:27**- "*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.*" But, humanism states that man and his unfettered human reason is the supreme authority. Christianity says that *Christ* is the measure of all things; humanism says that *man* is the measure of all things. Christianity says that man is by nature sinful and in need of a savior, and this need was met by God Who "...gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Humanism says that man is by nature *good*, and therefore he has no need of a Savior. Yet, there are some who have tried to "synthesize" Christianity and humanism. To them, the prophet speaks today, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but, if Baal, follow him."

Or, "Christ *and...the pursuit of riches.*" Not too long ago, there was a book published entitled, "How to Get Rich." The first chapter basically said that if you want to get rich, you have to want it so badly that you need to focus your entire life on this goal, and desire it with all your heart. Jesus said, "*You cannot serve two masters...*" (you can serve two objects, two entities, but you cannot serve two masters) "*...for you with either hate one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*" (**Matthew 6:24**) You remember the Parable of the Rich Man, who had so much that he had to build bigger barns to store all his crops. "*But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but **is not rich toward God.***" To them, the prophet speaks today, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but, if Baal, follow him."

To these and many other things today compete for our loyalty, the prophet speaks- there is no, "Christ and..." anything else! It is either all or nothing. Either He is your Lord and Master, or He is not. Either He is who He says He is- the Only-begotten Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, or he is not. If He is all of these things, then we ought to live and serve Him with *all* our hearts with *all* our souls, with *all* our minds and with *all* our strength, and not divide our loyalties with anything else.

On the other hand, if He is not all that He says that He is, then perhaps it would be better not to bother with Him at all. You may have heard it said, "He is either *Lord of all*, or He is not *Lord at all*."

And, the question you need to ask yourself today is- "Is He *my* Lord? Totally? Completely? Am I holding out on Him in some way? Am I *"...limping between two opinions?"* Or, am I worshipping Him with an undivided heart, a singleness of purpose, a clear conscience?

Such was the plea of Elijah. But, notice the response of the people-

The People's response- nothing!

vs. 21- " But the people said nothing." Tragic! When it came time for a response- when the people were confronted with the truth, when they were "wavering between two opinions" and needed to make a decision, "the people said nothing." May no one leave this place today, and when confronted with a choice of hesitating between two opinions or *fully following* one truth, simply respond by saying *nothing*.

What was their problem? When **truth** confronts **power**, many choose **power**. If you were to travel back in time to Mt. Carmel, and you were to survey this scene, it would appear that Baal worship had every advantage! It had the support of the King and Queen; it was represented by 450 prophets of Baal; it had popularity, money, power, excitement, sensuality. What advantage did Elijah have as he stood alone on Mt. Carmel? Only one- *Yahweh was God, and Baal*

was not! Listen to me, my friends- when **truth** confronts **power**, no matter how many advantages power seems to have, **truth will always win!**

God's demonstration- power from on high!

So, Elijah said, (**vs. 22-38**) "Let's have a test to see whose god is God." They made two altars- one to Baal, and one to Yahweh. And, they would see whose god answered them and consumed the offering. The 450 prophets of Baal danced in a frenzy around their altar. They shouted and cried and even cut themselves. While they were doing, Elijah taunted them- "*Shout louder!*" he said. *'Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.'* "And, so they whipped themselves into a greater frenzy, and shouted louder, and the blood flowed...but, **vs. 29-** "...there was no response, no one answered, and no one paid attention."

So, Elijah set the stage. First, it says (**vs. 31**) he took twelve stones, representing the 12 tribes of Israel, and the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, the covenant He had established, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." Then, he said, "Let us make this demonstration more difficult- we will also pour 12 jars of water on this altar. And, then Elijah prayed:

Vs. 36-37- His prayer- "so that they may know (4 things):

- 1) that you are God
- 2) that I am your servant
- 3) that I have done what you commanded
- 4) that you are turning the hearts of the people back again

Vs. 38- Fire from heaven burned up the **sacrifice**, the **wood**, the **stones** and the **soil**, and licked up the **water** in the trench.

The People's Response- Worship!

Vs. 39- The people bowed down and declared, "Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!"

What will you say today? There are our "Mt. Carmel" moments, moments when Elijah speaks the word of the Lord- "How long will you waver (hesitate, limp) between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him; but, if some other god, then follow him." You may be tempted at a time like this to do as the people of Israel did- "The people did not answer a word." But, that is not acceptable before God.

The Lord says, "Choose- yes or no!" I want to say, "Maybe."

The Lord says, "Choose- black or white!" I want to say, "Gray."

The Lord says, "Choose- left or right!" I want to say, "Middle."

The Lord says, "Choose- hot or cold!" I want to say, "Lukewarm."

The Lord says, "Choose- right or wrong!" I want to say, "Whatever."

But, to the Lord, all these answers are unacceptable. *Not* to choose is a choice- a coward's choice. In essence, we are saying, "Lord, I *won't go*. I won't go *all the way*." Jesus says, (**Matthew 12:30**)- "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Or, in other words, "If you won't go **all** the way with me, then don't even begin to go **part** of the way with me. Follow me **fully** or don't follow me **at all**."

Your response? How long will you waver between two opinions?

It may take courage to follow the Lord all the way. It will cost you something. But, in the end, it will cost you *less* than it costs to "waver between two opinions." I have decided to follow Jesus- no turning back...no turning back. *Though none go with me*, still I will follow, no turning back...no turning back." How about you?

[Closing chorus- "I have decided to follow Jesus"]