

Sermon Guide
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Sermon Series: The Drama of Redemption



Elijah Confronts the Unfaithful

1 Kings 18:20-39

Pastoral Note – It's important to read and understand the Bible in its proper context as a single story about God and His created works. It cannot be read or treated as an encyclopedia of information for which we can come to find facts, figures and information in answer to the problems in our lives.

Which God Do You Believe in

Read 1 Kings 18:20-39

This period in Israel's history most closely parallels present day modernity. Contrary to many postmodern predictions the age in which we live is characterized by religious pluralism. It is only in recent centuries, particularly in Europe, that there has been more than one generally accepted faith option in a nation: in Germany, it was Lutheranism, in Italy, Catholicism, in the US, Protestantism. Posing the question, "do you believe in God?" typically only had one of two choices as answers, either the nation's religion or atheism. However, in the last century, particularly in the major cities in the US, the question is now "which God do you believe in?"

This is a surprising development because the predicted outcome of a more modern society, spiritually, was toward less religiosity. However, the more advanced society becomes it would appear the more religious it becomes. The distinction in this religiosity is that it embraces not one religion, but many; which would suggest that men in developed nations are more religious than ever. Viewing the landscape of the United States might result in a contrary deduction because there is an opposite trend occurring. The government, news media and educational institutions are becoming less religious. Hence, the people are very religious, but the framework of the system in which they live, operate and are ruled by, is not religious at all. This unusual paradigm requires thoughtful modern people to be to evaluate competing spiritual claims and determine which is right.

Application Questions

In a religiously pluralistic society, like Israel in 1 Kings, how do we know what's right?

The Contest

1 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."

Application

Perhaps your position is that you are not religious. You have faith in nothing, neither God nor Baal, and hold to the materialist worldview which says there is nothing supernatural and all that exists is matter or

energy. Yet, the rejection of the supernatural, with absolute certainty, requires a lot of faith. As does the agnostic position which simply says "I don't know if there is a God or Baal". Elijah is suggesting that either position, rejection of God or Baal explicitly (materialism) or implicitly (agnosticism) is limping or languishing.

Perhaps your position is that all religions are effectively the same. However, it should be considered that the three (3) most influential religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all assert an exclusive claim on the truth. In truth, all religions assert an exclusive claim that their belief system is veracious. Nevertheless, focusing on just the three influential religions, the fundamental differences between them, primarily focusing on the person of Jesus, are vast. Judaism says that Jesus was only a man and great teacher. Islam says that Jesus was only a man and prophet. Christianity says that Jesus was fully God and fully man and is the savior of the world. There is no, and can be no, parity in these three distinct positions. To suggest they all have equivalent truth is to suggest they have no truth by the principle of non-contradictions.

False Gods

Who Are They?

Baal frequently appears in the Old Testament, however, it should not be understood as a specific God (e.g. Apollos, Aphrodite, etc.), but is rather a generic term for a spiritual Lord. The Israelites and other people groups in the Old Testament had a Baal for everything: rain, beauty, parties, most things people did or needed had a Baal associated with it. In this instance in 1 Kings, Israel had been lead to worship the local storm Baal from Sidon, Queen Jezebel's homeland. This was an agrarian society and rain was critical to everything. The Israelites allowed themselves to be convinced by other nations that they required favor with local and particular Baals in order to get the rain, good harvest, etc. they needed and wanted.

The belief and worship of Baals may appear primitive, however, the primitives of that time readily admitted what modern culture seems unable to; everyone is worshipping something. Like a Baal (spiritual Lord), the way to get what you want from the thing you believe has the power to give it is to serve it. Everyone is under the power and influence of something and it was this truth that Elijah wished to expose.

Application

It is no different with us; everything has the potential to be a Baal. In the case of women and men, both young and old, in this culture it is often beauty. For the former, it is a desire to be it, for the latter, it is a desire to obtain it. Moreover, there is an elevation of youth (and the beauty that comes with it) that older men and women in this current society are seeking more than ever. Beauty and youth have become Baals. Romans 1:25 "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator".

What Are They Like?

False Gods require service. In this story of the prophets of Baal and Elijah, the prophets performed for six (6) hours in a veritable frenzy. They could not go to their God assured of a relationship. They had to work to impress it. With Baal worship, the relationship between God and man is reversed.

Application

When we fall into works-based righteousness to impress God in order to obtain something from Him, we are falling in to Baal worship. When we engage in works-based righteousness we aren't relying, trusting and leaning upon God in grace, but rather we are trusting in our own efforts to get what we want. We know we are serving an idol, if, when we don't get what we want we begin to perform in a frenzy, redouble our efforts and turning on ourselves in hatred.

Application Questions

How have you been working to impress God?

When He doesn't answer in the way you think He should do you ask "What kind of God is this"?

Do you feel far from God and believe you have to "work your way back"?

The True God Shows Himself

1 Kings 18:37 "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

God shut off the rain in Israel to show that He was lord of the heavens and not rain Baal. The contest of fire Elijah called between himself and the prophets was to confirm who was at work here. Moreover, we also see what God was ultimately after which was to turn His people back to Him.

The Drought

Through the drought, the Israelites hearts had already been humbled. Food was limited and livestock was dying. They were already yearning to know who the true God was and to be reconciled to him. Israel was suffering the consequences for their idolatry. God was angry with them for being unfaithful for He is a jealous God. But He was not simply punishing his people because they deserved but because He wanted them back. The irony of the drama in redemption is that He loves the Israelites through letting them suffer. He created His people for himself and every time they looked to some other source of power or tried to control their circumstances instead of relying on Him, they were taking one step farther away from Him. This was Him coming back for his children.

Application

This is how God deals with us. Success and comfort just seem to confirm our idols. James 4:6 "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.". Humility and clarity are rarely found without suffering; some of that suffering comes from serving our idols the way we do. For three (3) years and six (6) hours, God, is letting the people see how painful and pointless it is to serve false gods.

For those of us in the middle of immense loss and pain this is both good and bad news. The good news is that God is in control and may be using it to expose our idols and reveal where we don't trust Him. The bad news is that He may not respond to our prayers for the suffering to stop because He loves us enough to let our lives fall apart for the purpose of refining and sanctifying us. It is for love that we don't experience perfection on this side of eternity. Nothing is ever perfect because he wants us to see His perfections. He protects us from Baals by not always allowing things to turn out the way we plan.

The Fire

Sin had separated God from His people and He wanted to be reconciled, but He could not simply ignore their rebellion. God is holy and He cannot compromise his justice. Fire from heaven is a sign of God's wrath against sin. It is never a good thing when referenced in stories in the Bible. In Luke 9, the Samaritans reject Jesus and the disciples ask if they should call down fire upon the wicked Samaritans like Elijah. But Jesus turns and rebukes them. When Elijah assembled the twelve (12) stones and slaughtered the bull, it was for the purpose of a sacrifice of sins for the twelve (12) tribes of Israel. The people should have been the recipients of that fire from heaven, God's wrath, but instead it was the innocent bull. Likewise, on the cross, it was Jesus that was the innocent lamb that took the wrath that all men should have received. Jesus took the wrath of God, satisfying the justice of God, to bring us back to himself. 1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit"

Application

Whether Christian (from remaining sin) or not today, we have Baals. We were made to enjoy the one true God and rule over created things, but instead, we have enjoyed created things and they now have rule over us. Every false god requires something of you; a demand to cut yourself for it in order to get what you need. Only the gospel says that Jesus on the cross was cut for us and it was His blood that ran. We must come to see that Jesus gives freely what Baal won't give even when we perform. He gives by his shed blood, what Baal promises only if we will shed ours. Every other religion will ask you to dance and perform until your blood runs. No other religion suggests that God Himself performed and bled and for you. When you see that God has done this for you, you'll be able to tell who the false god's are and who the true and living God is.

Sermon Link : <http://redemptionhill.com/elijah-confronts-the-unfaithful>

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