

Lead, Don't Limp

1 Kings 18:21



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FOCAL Read Responsively 1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, **How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.**

In a little comic strip called *Prickly City* a little girl asks her companion, "Why does God let bad things happen?" Her companion answers, "Why do people insist on doing bad things?" In the last panel we see the little girl hanging her head and saying, "I need a world with fewer whys".

When bad things happen we - like that little girl - tend to ask first of all "Why did God allow that to happen?" Rarely do we ask the second question, "Why do people insist on doing bad things?" You see, its easier to blame God than it is to blame ourselves. It's always easier to blame someone else.

I was at the dollar store the other day (I love shopping there - it makes me feel like a millionaire) and as I came out I heard a woman cry out. She had bought some balloons for her baby's birthday party. As she came out she put the balloons in her car, and then settled her baby in the child seat. A gust of wind came through the car and the balloons took off. Why did God allow that to happen? Didn't He know that these balloons were for her baby? But wait - let's look at this from another direction. I know for a fact when they sell you balloons the employees offer to sell you a covered weight - kind of like a rock - to tie the balloons to. The woman had the *choice* to invest an extra dollar for this weight. Or she could do like I often do when I buy balloons for people

in the hospital. I buy them a coffee cup and have the balloons tied to the handle of the cup. When the balloon is tied to a weight it can't get away.

It's your choice.

I know that many of you planted gardens this year. The reason I know is that many of you blessed my wife and I with nice fresh produce. Has anyone here today planted any *ferrous sulfate*, or *thiamine mononitrate*, or *disodium phosphate*? How about *oleoresin paprika* or *enzyme modified cheese* or *disodium guanylate*? These are additives found in many of the well known prepackaged foods that we eat.

It's your choice.

I stopped eating *Vienna Sausage* when I realized that this stuff don't come from Vienna, and its certainly not sausage. The ingredients are *mechanically separated chicken, water, beef, and pork*. That's right off the label. In other words, these are pieces and parts that are ground up and put in the shape of a sausage. I'm not fooled: I'd rather eat escargot (that's "snails" in French).

It's your choice.

When someone has an accident because they're sending *text messages* on their cell phone, whose fault is that? Do we blame God, the cell phone manufacturer, or the person doing the texting? When someone gets killed with a gun do we blame God, the gun manufacturer, the government for allowing the gun to be manufactured, or the person who chose to pull the trigger? When a child

ingests poison and dies who is at fault? Is it God, the parent for leaving the poison where the child could get at it, the government for not regulating the poison, or the manufacturer for making the poison in the first place?

It's a matter of choice. The Bible says that **God made man in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26-27)**. We were made with the ability to choose. When we choose badly, bad things happen. We can choose to drive too fast on wet roads and end up in the ditch. That's not God's fault. We can be sexually promiscuous and end up with an incurable and deadly disease. That's not God's fault. When you jump off a cliff because everybody else is jumping off a cliff you can't blame God for the fall. He is God, and His law of gravity is in place and cannot be broken. You don't break the law of gravity, but you do break yourselves when you choose to ignore His laws.

Some people think, "Well, I'll just go along with the crowd, and everything will work out just fine". Sadly that's not the cast. Someone once said "**The only thing necessary for evil to win is for good men to do nothing**". When you do nothing, evil grows. When you refuse to ride the fence between good and evil then evil - like weeds in a garden - will flourish. The parent who refuses to make their child go to Bible school because they "want him to make his own decisions" will live to regret their inactivity. You may not train your child, but if you don't the other side will. This is why the Bible says "**train UP a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it**". If you don't do your job I'll guarantee you that Satan will. If you don't

influence your children to follow the Lord the drug dealer or the pornographer will. If you don't speak up when someone around you takes God's Name in vain then your workplace will be filled with swearing. If you don't turn and walk away from filthiness (**Ephesians 5:4**) you'll find yourselves covered with it.

It's your choice.

The Bible says **Elijah came unto ALL the people ... and the people answered him not a word**. This is the problem. When people will not stand up for the Lord our God then evil will cover the land. Because the people would not stand with the Lord the land had been in three and half years of drought. Because the people would not stand with the Lord the **evil Queen Jezebel destroyed the prophets of God (1 Kings 18:4)**. Because the people would not choose to follow God there were 450 prophets of Baal, but only 101 prophets of God - and only one prophet willing to stand up for God while the other 100 hid.

It's your choice. It's our choice. You can *limp* back and forth between two opinions - the world and God - or you can *lead* by *following* the God of glory in all that you do. We need to make a choice. My prayer is that you make the *right* choice.

1. There Are Only Two Religions

The world will have you believe that *all ways* are equal paths to God. The world says "the good Muslim will go to Heaven" just as quickly as it says "the good Person

will go to Heaven". When famous people die they inevitably show up in some pundit's cartoon with Heaven as the background. The world believes that everyone *except the people we don't like* get into Heaven. To the world **Christianity is old fashioned and outdated**, and the world doesn't mind Christianity as long as you take Christ out of it. CHRISTmas with Santa Claus and no Jesus is fine. EASTER with a bunny and no Jesus is fine. A public prayer with some generic reference to God but no Jesus is fine.

Elijah understood this. There can never be peace between the world religions and Christianity. Elijah said,

FOCAL 1 Kings 18:21 ... How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. ...

Let's be honest about this thing. The world says that Christianity is intolerant, but the world's religions - if they'd be honest - are intolerant as well. Elijah said "**if the Lord be God, follow Him**". Don't ride the wall. Get off the fence. True faith requires following.

The proof of faith is in the following, not in the saying. "**If the Lord be God, FOLLOW Him. If Baal, THEN FOLLOW him**".

ILLUSTRATE The only thing you get by being double minded is confused. I heard a young comedian say one time that when he was young his momma was a Baptist, and his daddy was a Buddhist. He said, "when I grew up,

I was only CONFUSED". Make a decision - and then go that way. There are only two religions in the world. There is the relationship based religion of Christianity, and there's everything else. There's the true faith of Christ, and the false faiths of *not Christ*.

You say "well, I'll build two altars in my house, one for Jehovah God and the other for Baal - that way all bases will be covered". No it won't. God - the True God - won't give you that option. Any preacher worth his salt - any Elijah - will say "how long will you stumble between TWO OPINIONS".

There is the opinion of the world, and the opinion of God. The two cannot be reconciled.

Let's look at the religion of the world and compare it to the religion of the True God. Elijah makes this easy. Once Elijah challenges the people to *make a choice* he goes a little bit further.

ILLUSTRATE Oh, I love Elijah's preaching! I've listened to preachers that had *light* but no heat, and others that had *heat* but no light. I've heard scholarly but spiritually frozen people spout off Biblical truth in dull monotones, afraid to show any love toward the Lord. I've also heard spiritually ignorant and Biblically unsound "rabbit chasers" who - like many Independents - spit out a Bible verse then preach anything but that verse. Here now is a true Prophet of God! He has LIGHT and HEAT, KNOWLEDGE of God and PASSION for the Lord. Oh that God would make me like Elijah! Oh that

God would bring up other Elijah's in this present age!
Elijah says:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:22-24 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. {23} Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: {24} And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

The first proof of TRUE religion is *answered prayer*.

Elijah proposed that two altars be set up. The 450 Prophets of Baal would set up an altar, sacrifice an animal and lay it on that altar. Elijah would do the same with God's altar. Neither side would put fire to their offering, but Elijah said "call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God". Elijah put God to the test in prayer.

God delights in talking to His children, whereas the false gods of this world have no such voice. God is self-existent. He was not not created, but has - from the beginning - been the Creator of all. The Bible says that all other religions represent gods that "**neither see, nor**

hear, nor eat, nor smell" (Deuteronomy 4:28). These "created gods" cannot do anything for you. The Bible says that unbelievers turn away from God, becoming

Romans 1:21-25 ... vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. {22} Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, {23} And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. {24} Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: {25} Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

God has left a clear witness that He is not only in creation but also in other Christians.

Christians have experienced a real blessing in a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who worship the other gods, however, worship *empty and imagined things*. These worshipers of Baal began to cry out to their god. The Bible says:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:26 they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered.

There was no voice, nor any that answered. You can believe all you want, and be as sincere as you want, but if you're wrong, you're wrong. Sincerity is not the proof of a faith. The proof of a faith is in the God behind it. Popularity is not the proof of a faith. The proof of a faith is in the God behind it. Pleasure is not the proof of a faith. The proof of a faith is in the God that is behind it.

It is not devotion, emotion, or popularity, or preaching that proves a faith. Unless the God of the Scripture is behind the faith it is all folly.

There were **450 prophets of Baal** and only **one Elijah**. Baal worship was more popular - and it was state supported - than Elijah's faith. The Baal worshipers cried out "**Oh Baal, hear us**", but no one answered. There was nobody there to answer them. The Bible says:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:26-28 ... And they leaped upon the altar which was made.... it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened. {28} And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. {29} And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

Please note that false religion is always accompanied by

man made works. A man made god requires man made works. Man made religion says "**if you'll work hard, god will accept you. If you'll be good, god will accept you**". The worshipers of Baal **jumped on the altar, they cried aloud, they screamed and hollered, they cut themselves with knives until *blood gushed out***. Dear friends, these people *worked* at their religion until they were exhausted and spent.

You can follow a false god, but you're like the village idiot who spent the day following his own shadow!

2. True Religion Saves By Faith

Oh, how I love this text. Elijah mocked the false worshipers of Baal, but now the tenor of his voice changes. Now the Under Shepherd speaks for the Great Shepherd. Whereas the worshipers of Baal expended themselves dancing before a shadow god, now Elijah prepares to bless the people by reintroducing them to

James 1:17 ... the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

The God of the Scripture is not a shadow god. He is not imaginary, though His power is beyond all that we **can even ask of think**.

Our God is immense in power, immense in Being, immense in love, and He loves to love whosoever will.

The god of this world *loves us the way we are, lost and undone*. The God of Scripture **loved us enough to offer us salvation**. The god of this world keeps us busy trying to make ourselves better. The True God of Heaven *gave Himself* to make payment for our sins. The True God of Heaven *keeps on giving Himself* to those who call Him Lord.

After the din of the Baal worshipers screaming, and cutting, and generally making a spectacle of themselves, we see God's Under Shepherd say to the people:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:30 ... Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him.

As the people watched Elijah did as any believer in Christ should do. **He followed God**. The Baal worshipers were following a shadow, but Elijah followed God. **Elijah restored God's altar**. The Bible says:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:30 ... he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.

Elijah obeyed God's Word, and reminded God's people of His Word. We read:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:31-33 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: {32} 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 measures of seed. {33} And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood

True worship comes from the heart of God's people. When Elijah built the altar he used **twelve stones**, this symbolizing a unified Israel worshiping the One True God of Scripture.

Just as God blesses the nation that honors Him, He blesses the PEOPLE who honor Him.

Israel divided in worship suffered under God's divine punishment. EVERY tribe was represented in the altar that Elijah made. Dear friends, when God's people come to God to worship they can change the world. Israel had been under a terrible drought for 3 1/2 years. Elijah brought the people back to unity in worshiping God. Notice what happened next:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:33-35 [Elijah] said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. {34} And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. {35} And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

Do you remember that Israel had been under *drought* for 3 1/2 years? Take that truth and compare it with what Elijah did. Elijah took water - hoarded water, valuable water - and poured it on the offering. He took that which

was precious to man and poured it out to God. He took that which is costly to Israel - water - and poured it on the altar.

Water and fire don't mix! We can see so many truths in the water poured on the sacrifice. True faith does not need man's hand to be effective. In fact, anything I do to be saved is *counterproductive* to salvation.

In our day too many people talk about salvation and grace as if it is *cheap*. **Salvation is not cheap. True religion is not cheap. Christianity is costly. It cost God His only Begotten Son. It cost Jesus Christ our Lord His life. And if you're born again by faith in Christ, it will cost you everything!**

As Elijah poured out twelve barrels of water - one for each tribe of Israel - he was literally pouring out life. People were dying for lack of water in Israel. People were dying because they were worshiping the false gods of Baal. What did Elijah do? He laid down his life. He poured water on the altar. But Elijah wasn't risking anything, for he knew that God was real. You see, Elijah had a living relationship with God. Notice his prayer:

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:36-37 ... Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. {37} Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast

turned their heart back again.

Elijah quietly acknowledged the Lord as his God. He called Him **LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel**. Elijah acknowledged the covenant promise of God. Elijah said to God **"I am Thy servant"**. Oh Beloved, how often we come to the infinite and immovable God of the universe as if He were *our lackey*. He is not! He is God. He alone saves. Further Elijah said, **"I have done ALL THESE THINGS at THY WORD"**.

A servant serves, and a good servant does what his master bids. Elijah never actually called fire down from Heaven. He just said, **"I've done all You said, Lord, please hear my prayer"**. The Bible says that

1 Kings 18:38 **Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.**

3. One Man Can Make A Difference

FOCAL 1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

One man submitted to God can make a difference. In order to make a difference though, you must not be part of the problem. You need to **follow God** if you are His.

Jesus said:

Matthew 12:30 **He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.**

You're either with Jesus or you're against Him. You're either standing with Elijah and the people of God, or you're standing with Baal and those Baal has deceived. **Elijah told the people:**

CONTEXT 1 Kings 18:38-41 ... **Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. {41} And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.**

One person makes a difference. Elijah stood up for God and made a difference. He changed his world by following the Lord His God. We cannot follow the world and change the world. We must follow the God of the Scripture. **We must follow God**. The Bible says:

Deuteronomy 11:13-17 ... **if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, {14} That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain,... {16} Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; {17} And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that**

there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

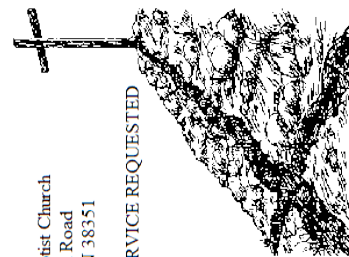
When God's people returned to God the rain returned to the land. In America today God's people are not - in many cases - standing up for God. Our nation is in jeopardy. We need to come back to the God of the Bible so we can be blessed.

People say that Christianity is old fashioned. I agree. It is old fashioned, but its not out of fashion. The sun is old fashioned but we need it. Water and fire are old fashioned, but we need it. The ways of God may be old fashioned, but that just means its tried and true. Dear friends, **the just shall live by faith**. An old fashioned Bible has an old fashioned text that says:

John 3:16-18 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. {17} For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. {18} He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Oh that we would return to old fashioned obedience to His ever eternal Word.

May God touch your hearts with His Word!



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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1. There Are Only Two Religions

1 Kings 18:21; 1 Kings 18:22-24; Romans 1:21-25; 1 Kings 18:26; 1 Kings 18:26-28

- The proof of faith is in the _____.
- "If the Lord be God, FOLLOW Him. If Baal, THEN FOLLOW him".**
- There is the opinion of the _____, and the opinion of _____. The two cannot be reconciled.
- The first proof of TRUE religion is _____.
- God has left a clear witness that He is not only in _____ but also in other _____.
- It is not _____, _____, or _____, or _____ that proves a faith. Unless the God of the Scripture is behind the faith it is all folly.

2. True Religion Saves By Faith

James 1:17; 1 Kings 18:30; 1 Kings 18:31-33; 1 Kings

18:33-35; 1 Kings 18:36-37; 1 Kings 18:38

- Our God is immense in _____, immense in _____, immense in _____, and He loves to love whosoever will.

3. One Man Can Make A Difference

1 Kings 18:21; Matthew 12:30; 1 Kings 18:38-41; Deuteronomy 11:13-17; John 3:16-18
