

1st Kings 18: 16-39; “How to Confront Evil”, Message # 7 in the series – “Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 11th, 2021, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

How is it that a Christian minister, or any Christian for that matter, should confront evil? We live in a day when we very much need to be able to do that very thing, when evil is rising up on every side. And so, as Christians we need just as much to learn how to confront evil as we do setting forth the truth of the gospel to people. The two go hand in hand. People are sinners, and so they need to be told that they are sinners. But there are also people who lead other people into sin, even as Ahab led the children of Israel into sin, who need to be shown that there is only one true and living God, and He does expect them to worship only Him. Elijah was the man whom the Lord appointed to confront both Ahab and Israel with this great and all-important truth.

At this time I want us to think together about how Elijah went about to do this; how he confronted Ahab with the evil that he was doing. 1st of all – He showed Ahab that he and his fathers were responsible for all of the trouble in Israel. 2nd – He presented the case to Ahab and all the people that Baal was a false god. And 3rd – He proved to the people that only God is God by calling down fire from heaven. Let’s see if we can learn from this marvelous demonstration of the power of God, how we can confront evil in our society as well.

1st of all – Elijah straightforwardly showed Ahab that he and his fathers were responsible for all of the trouble in Israel.

Verse 16 says – “So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.” “Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, ‘Is that you, O troubler of Israel?’ “And he answered, ‘I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals.” It is truly amazing how deceptive sin was in the heart of Ahab, that he could think that Israel’s troubles had been caused by Elijah. Sin had so deceived Ahab that he only looked at the second causes of things. He was only looking at Elijah and what he was doing, and he thought this way: If Elijah had sent the drought by his own word, then he was responsible for all the present trouble in Israel.

He did not see the God who was behind Elijah; commanding Elijah to speak His word and do His works. He was thinking of the trouble, but he was ignoring his own sins which caused the trouble. This will often be the case, that great sinners against the Lord will not own that their false worship is sin. They think that worship is simply a matter of personal convictions and preferences. They will worship the Baals, the false gods of their day. False worship is often selfish and sinful in that the person thinks of what they would want for themselves in worship; what impresses them the most, in the physical creation, rather than what the only true and living God would want from them which is for them to listen to His word.

Persons who are worshipping false gods worship them because they themselves have made up what these gods are, and what they represent. In the case of Baal, it is understood by many scholars that he was the sun god, and often included in this same worship was the worship of the moon, (Astarte, or Ashtareth) and the stars. The word that is used here is plural – the Baals. People, who do not know God, or who do not want to know God, and want to suppress the truth of the word of God, do not want to be governed by One who is greater than themselves. They want to worship things that they can see; the most impressive of things that they can physically see.

Turn with me over to Deuteronomy 4: 15-20. It says here – “Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth.” “And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve

them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day.”

So, when we read this, we need to understand that since God is the only true and living God, that if we substitute anything for Him in our worship, we will be committing the sin of idolatry, and it will bring us real trouble. And that trouble will come to us from God Himself in the form of earthly judgments first, and then if there is not repentance, when that person dies, they will perish everlastingly in hell. The duty of the Christian is to confront the evil of only looking at secondary causes and not looking behind them, to the God who is the first cause of everything. This we must learn to do in our everyday conversations with people. We must show them that God is not a God afar off who takes no notice of evil, but He is the One who takes notice of all things in heaven and earth. And He takes notice of all man; to see whether they will worship Him.

How should people think about God, then? Well turn over to Isaiah 46: 9 with me. It says here – “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.’” These are the kinds of truths that we need to remind people around us of, if they are not taking cognizance of them. God has a perfect memory of the past and all that has happened. And He has perfect recognition of all things that will be done in the future, and His counsel will stand; that is, the purposes and plans which He formed long ago in the counsels of eternity. Let us remind people of this when they are only looking at secondary causes, like the weather, and those things which seem to come about by chance. There is no such thing as chance with God.

What was the nature of Ahab’s sin? It was that he and his father’s house had forsaken the commandments of the Lord and had followed the Baals. And thus they had provoked the Lord to anger. The Lord had brought His judgment of the drought upon the land, and He spoke to Ahab about it through His prophet Elijah. God would have wicked men like Ahab agree with Him instead of their fighting against His word. Turn with me over to Amos 3, verses 3-8. “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” “Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?” “Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?” “Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it.” “Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?” “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?” “If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?” “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” “A lion has roared!” “Who will not fear?” “The Lord God has spoken!” “Who can but prophesy?”

So, we see here that God expects people to agree with Him, or they cannot walk together with Him. He cannot be friends with unrepentant sinners. God expects that you as a person will walk with Him; that is, that you will agree with His word and His analysis of what you need to do, which is to repent and believe in Him. And then, by faith in Christ, you learn to do and keep God’s commandments. Let’s ask ourselves some questions: Who is the lion in verses 4 and 8? The lion is the picture of God roaring out the warnings through His prophets, in relation to Israel’s much-needed repentance.

What is the bird falling into a snare in verse 5 a picture of? It is a picture of God’s bringing his convicting judgments upon sinners in Israel to snare them in their own devices, and bring them either to repentance by these snares, or to judgments that He will bring upon them. If they would not repent, they would be taken away in judgment. What is the trumpet which is blown in a city, in verse 6? It is the trumpet of the prophet’s voice warning the people of judgments that will come if they will not repent. He will bring those calamities upon them which are in line with His interests in justice, and mercy, and judgment. So, God was about to roar through His prophet Elijah, at this wicked king Ahab.

2nd – I want you to see that Elijah straightforwardly presented the case to Ahab, and to all the people, that Baal was a false god.

In verses 19-21 Elijah says to Ahab: “Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and four hundred prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel’s table.” “So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel.” “And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions?’ “If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.” “But the people answered him not a word.” You can see the blindness and hardness of heart that the people had fallen into, through idolatry. Everything of spiritual significance had to be proved to them in a dramatic way or they would not believe in the true and living God.

The fact that they said not a word to Elijah when he said these words to them, was because they had adopted a wait and see attitude. They wanted proof. This would not have been a bad thing in itself, except that they really would not believe, simply because the Scriptures said so. They would only believe if Elijah gave them some compelling evidence that the God of the Bible was the only true and living God. And since they were Jews, and had been given so much; what with the covenant promises, and the temple worship, and all of the blessings of the Old Testament Scriptures, they should have been able to believe because faith is what, according to Hebrews 12: 1? “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

In other words if they would believe in God and His word in the Scriptures, and through His prophets, they would be saved. And, they would have it verified to their own experience by the Lord giving them the assurance that He was the only true and living God. Then they would feel confident in serving and worshiping Him only. But since Ahab and Jezebel had led the people into the worship of many false gods, the people, many of them, did not believe. They thought that the rituals of the false prophets were very profound, even though nothing was actually accomplished by them. They were simply doing religious works which neither helped or saved anyone. In practicing this false religion they would be charged by God with violations of the 1st and 2nd commandments of the 10 commandments, given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The ritual religion of Baal would save no one from their sins, and it would not teach them anything about the true God, or the meaning of their lives. But even though their religion was worthless, they were actually, it says here, “faltering or halting between two opinions. That was how blind they were. They were at a stand, and they didn’t know which to believe; whether God was God, or whether Baal was god. The way that Elijah would show them the truth of the matter was by having the false prophets bring two bulls. They would give Elijah one. Then the 450 prophets of Baal would prepare their bull by sacrificing it and laying on the wood, on the altar, and put no fire under it.

After they were done with this, Elijah would prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood of another altar, but put no fire under it. The prophets of Baal would go first and call upon the name of their gods. And then after them, Elijah would call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who would answer by fire, it would be evident then, that He was the true God. Elijah let these false prophets go first and they cried out to Baal from morning even till noon, saying, “O Baal, hear us”. But of course, there was no voice and no one answered. And so Elijah mocked them and he said in verse 27 – “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

So it says – “They cried aloud, and cut themselves as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.” Then they prophesied from noon to the time of the evening sacrifice, but there was no voice; no one answered, and no one paid attention. We should see from this that the truth is the truth, and we should learn from it. There is no God but our God. We can apply this to ourselves by thinking of how we will react when people around us try to assert that their god is just as true a god as our God is. Let us ask them a simple question. Does your god answer when you call to him, or is he silent? It is not as though we hear an audible voice of God in

prayer, but ask them to tell you of the specific answers to prayer that their god has given to them. Ask them how they know that their sins have been forgiven. Ask them to give a testimony of how they have come to have eternal life. They will be hard pressed. Some people may think that it was not right, for Elijah to mock these false prophets when they didn't get an answer from their god.

But we must understand that this was the right thing to do, since they had so boldly and shamelessly put forward what was patently false. It was good for them to be seen as the fools that they were. Elijah is a good fulfillment of Proverbs 26: 4 and 5 – “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.” “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Elijah was not answering these fools according to their folly in that he was quiet for a long time, letting the prophets of Baal give it their best shot; that they would pray and cry aloud and show forth the fact that their god did not exist. Then he eventually did answer them according to their folly by mocking them when their god never answered them, so that they would not be wise in their own eyes. There was nothing wrong with this. It shamed them into realizing that he was right.

3rd – Elijah straightforwardly proved to the people that only God is God, by calling down fire from heaven.

We see how wonderfully Elijah dealt with the people after the failure of these false prophets. He said to all the people in verse 30 – “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. He then took 12 stones according to the 12 tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, ‘Israel shall be your name’. Then with these stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around it and put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and told the people to fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. And then he had them do it a second time. And then he had them do it again a third time. So there was water all around the altar and he also filled the trench with water.

He then called upon the name of the Lord – “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.” “Hear me that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.” What an experiential prayer of faith! “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.” And “when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The Lord, He is God!’” “The Lord, He is God!”

Now, that was very a straightforward way of showing Ahab and all the people that the Lord was God, and that Baal was false. We might ask ourselves the question: Why is it that any time a person or group of people wants to know that God is real, that God would simply prove it to them like He did here? The answer is because God is not pleased with unbelief; neither is He pleased when people demand a sign that He is real, and true and faithful to Himself and His purposes. He is only pleased with faith in who He is, and who He has declared Himself to be in the Scriptures. That is His usual way of revealing Himself to the serious inquirer. God will reveal Himself to those who will humbly come to Him for light and life in Jesus name.

1st Corinthians 8: 2-6 – “And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” “But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.” “Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.” “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.” Let us learn, from what we have studied here at this time, the importance of confronting evil and holding fast to the truth which has been revealed to us in the Bible, and experientially, knowing it in our minds and hearts, well enough to want to talk to others about it. Perhaps with God's Spirit helping us, we will make a difference.

