

1 Kings 18

The Pursuit of God

INTRO

READ THE PASSAGE

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I've had ear troubles my entire life; ear aches, infections, burst/perforated ear drums, and so forth

-one doctor looked in my ear and said it looked like a train wreck

-bc I experienced so many ear problems, I had to go to the audiologist frequently for hearing tests

Have you ever had a hearing test?

-they put headphones on your hear that swallow your ears; I think the idea is to cancel out ambient noise

-they proceed to give you different sounds long/short...beeps of differing frequencies/volume

-they give you a low frequency beep with low volume; nope, can't hear that

-then a little bit louder; maybe, I'm not sure, I could be hearing things

-then the piercing high frequency BEEP! yep I heard that...that was clear!

*I find that often God's relationship with His people is like that

-He's sending us the beeps, and it's not that I *can't* hear low-end or high-end frequency from Him; the problem is I've tuned my ears to something else OR

-I've damaged my ears with the loud harmful noise of other things & can't hear His gentle whispers

*The ear, nose, and throat Dr. warned me about the dangers of water skiing; but I *LOVED* water skiing and foolishly ignored his advice; well I fell in a turn and landed on my ear, and burst the ear drum; I had to go in and face the Dr.; he would then have to get this little tool and go into my ear, and scrape skin over the perforation to cause the hole to heal up - it was excruciating! BUT IT HEALED

-the perforation in my ear drum was quite painful and severely inhibited my ability to hear and needed a minor surgery

-in comparison, your spiritual hearing can become severely damaged due to innocent neglect OR willfully ignoring the care of your heavenly doctor and may need a surgical intervention

OUTLINE

KEY STATEMENT

KEY QUESTION

KEY APPEAL

KEY MOTIVATION

KEY RESPONSE

Last week we saw Elijah sent away, out of Israel, to Gentile Zarephath - Baal worshiping people not part of the covenant people of Israel (there was a God imposed drought over the region)

-the king of Sidon was Ethbaal, high priest to Baal; Baal was the fertility God - he was believed to provide fertility of all kinds - biological, water, food, even fire

-Baal was powerless to stop the drought OR provide rain/food/relief in Sidon; in Israel, his lack of power was the same - v2b "**the famine was severe in Samaria**"

-one of the purposes of God for the drought was to afflict, or humble, His people

Why would God do this?

King Ahab of Israel, who had married Jezebel, the daughter of the Sidonian Baal serving king, had begun a two pronged strategy of YHWH eradication and replacement with the worship of Baal

-her husband, king Ahab, had been her agreeable backer - he not only followed her into Baal worship, but also built an altar for Baal, AND a temple for Baal in Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom

-furthermore, Ahab set up worship for Asherah, the wife of Baal
-furthermore, Ahab allowed Jezebel to begin eradicating the prophets of YHWH and replacing them
-450 Baal prophets and 400 Asherah prophets – this was a state sponsored pogrom and establishment of a new religion

****this was a pointed effort to wipe out the worship of YHWH and replace it**

Is that not the very thing that Chairman Mow did in China last century and President Xi Jin Ping is doing in China currently? Eradicate religion, especially Christianity, replaced with devotion to the state
Is this not what North Korea and Russia have done?

-this is one of satan's go-to strategies

-as king, Ahab followed none of YHWH's instructions for the king of His people: his heart was to be wholly true to the LORD, walking in His statutes and keeping His commandments

*Ahab did none of it, but in fact, **the Scripture says he did more to provoke the LORD to anger than all the kings of Israel before him**

****this is instructive once again - the Kings have an extremely important leadership function over the kingdom (they have the opportunity to build up the people, set the pace spiritually, lead them and help them follow the LORD OR they can totally run the kingdom off the rails and kill it, distort it) and lead the people away from YHWH**

-faithfulness by the king was huge! but unfaithful leadership was a stench

listen to how Jeremiah describes God's feelings on the unfaithful leadership of his day

1 "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord.

2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord." Jeremiah 23:1-2

***That's it isn't it?** when God's leaders destroy and scatter God's sheep rather than taking care of them and leading them to God, He will bring the fire of His affliction!

That brings us to the KEY STATEMENT

*Ahab, and all of his house, are one of the causes of the drought bc they **v18 "have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals"**

-God told the people, when they entered the Promised Land, (from **Lev. 26**) if you will not listen to me and follow My commandments...and break my covenant...then I will send drought upon your land...and I will discipline you...sevenfold for your sins...I will break the pride of your power

This is the sad truth - The people followed Ahab, and his father, and the leaders before them

-they have turned their ears away from YHWH; they have become dull and insensitive and the drought was the result

-T/F this confrontation becomes necessary bc of God's character – He is the God who pursues

***this is what you need to see in this text – this is God powerfully, lovingly going after His people**

So Elijah tells Ahab – get all the prophets of Baal and Asherah and gather all the people, we're going to have a showdown and prove who is God

but there's really more at stake isn't there than simply demonstrating who is truly God

-the people are not all the way gone

*God plans to mercifully call His people to repentance (meaning to return to Him)

*what we need to see is that ****when God calls people to repentance it's an act of patient mercy**

Why? bc He has every right to bring swift judgment on sin

Why? bc of His holiness which demands hatred for sin; it demands justice

v19 God's merciful call of repentance will extend to people from the whole country – they will get to see Baal defeated and be urged toward repentance

-it's interesting, the confrontation we're going to see could have been completed in front of Ahab alone, but it might not have achieved the desired end – the eradication of the false prophets and the ready return of the people to the worship of YHWH alone!

****in God's pursuit of the people, His plan was to root out false worship:** He was going to expose the idols of the people as unable to provide anything – He was going to expose their powerlessness

****this is a gracious and loving Father humbling His people and showing them that they are serving inferior things**

***God is committed to exalting Himself in your life**

If God is the greatest, mightiest, loveliest, most satisfying thing in the universe, it would be cruel of Him NOT to demonstrate that to us; it would be cruel of Him NOT to expose these lesser gods we give our affections to as petty imitations

-and here's a very important point: the people haven't fully embraced Baal yet, they haven't fully departed from YHWH

THAT'S REVEALED TO US THROUGH ELIJAH'S KEY QUESTION

v21 "how long will you go limping between two opinions"

-limping means waffling/wavering, bouncing back and forth between two commitments

Imagine running through life with one snow shoe and one track shoe, OR remember when you were a kid and your dad had a pair of boots and you would put those big things on (you couldn't hardly lift your feet)

***the Israelites are living in spiritual schizophrenia – they are wavering between Baal and YHWH, not fully committed or convinced one way or the other**

I wonder what about the church, are we like Israel? How do we vacillate? Do we want just enough of Jesus to not go to hell, but don't want to be too radical about Jesus that we turn people away?

Do we want God to be the center of our lives whose presence radiates out and touches everything OR do we put God over in the corner like a little statue of Buddha that we can go and bow down to and burn a little incense when we need something?

Do we serve a sanitized Jesus who doesn't ask us to give up anything, who doesn't ask us to lay things down and love people who are hard to love? Who just wants our comfort?

Friends, do not live in confusion! don't waffle between opinions! make up your mind! if Jesus is LORD, then lay down your life and serve Him only! love Him with EVERYTHING you are!!

Do not deal with God like the stock market:

"I've got this much to invest, this stock right now is doing well, it's a safe investment"

"but I better hold onto this money for a rainy day; if this whole thing with God doesn't work out, then I'll still have this"

If Jesus is Lord, then sell out and serve Him only! don't waffle! you can't serve two masters

-these people were not wholly committed to anything and God mercifully brings this confrontation about, for the people to make a choice

***so the confrontation was this: let's prove who is God – either YHWH or Baal**

-the prophets of Baal go first - both will take a bull, cut it up, lay it on wood, and pray to their god to answer with fire

*****THIS IS HUGE, Baal had home field advantage, more players, probably more fans, and most importantly, BAAL WAS THE GOD OF FIRE – this was like playing t-ball for them!**

(BUT on the other hand, *IF BAAL CAN'T DO THIS, THEN WHAT CAN HE DO?)**

v26 these prophets pray and cry out to Baal from morning until noontime

***there was no answer and Elijah maybe had watched a few too many sporting events in America**

v27 he begins mocking the prophets; cry louder so he can hear you

-maybe he's busy meditating or he's out in the bathroom; maybe he's asleep and needs to be awakened

vv28-29 the Baal prophets get more desperate – they gash themselves until blood pours out
-they “**raved**” on; this was a religious ritual – likely with lots of loud shouting and wailing; likely working themselves up into a trance, a psychosomatic state
-this is extremely common throughout the world – known as Animism or tribal religion
-on Mt. Carmel, from morning until early evening, “**no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention**”

And then comes Elijah's KEY APPEAL

-it's his turn and watch all that he does

v30 E. wants the people to come close to an altar of the Lord that had been torn down so they can see what he does and clearly hear his words

What's the significance of an altar?

*it's the place where people worshiped YHWH; God had established the altar as the place where He would atone for His people's sins and forgive them; atonement meant people could approach Him and be in right r'ship with Him

v30 says Elijah “**repaired**” the altar, lit. he healed the altar

How did he heal the altar?

-he takes 12 stones – one each for the 12 tribes of Israel

What was the significance?

E. is emphasizing you are YHWH's people

-YHWH called their fathers out of worshiping the moon and stars; they followed Him and believed Him; He blessed Jacob and renamed him! blessed him with 12 sons, who exploded to become a

huge nation; YHWH later delivered them out of Egyptian bondage and gave them this very land

-it's Elijah's reminder, He was with your fathers time and time again, giving you grace over and over

-He saved you and He is your heritage!

-furthermore, God saved ONE people, from 12 tribes; not 10

-even though the 12 tribes been split for 60yrs, E. demonstrates that they are still ONE covenant people before the LORD

-they are not Baal's people! they are YHWH's people!

****THIS IS A VERY CLEAR MESSAGE, A VERY CLEAR APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE – REMEMBER! REMEMBER!**

-E. cut-up the bull and placed it on the altar, then he built a trench around the altar and filled it with water

-just so they would know this was no hocus pocus ***he poured three helpings (four jars) of water on it;

Elijah then prays making 4 requests

1) make it clear that You are God in Israel (as opposed to the pretend god Baal)

2) make it clear that I am Your servant (as opposed to these prophets of Baal)

3) make it clear that I have followed Your word (I'm not rogue but acting by Your will)

4) make it clear that you are turning Your people's hearts back to You (this is not merely a power encounter, but the Lord's judgment on Baal and an invitation to Israel to come back to their Father)

v38 God answered and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water!

*this is God's approval and answer in the affirmative

KEY MOTIVATION

What is God's motivation?

-certainly God is defeating Baal once again proving that He is supreme over all peoples

*but there's more than that; there's something more personal

*God has brought these people to Mt. Carmel, to this repaired altar to bring about judgment and grace – this is what an altar is for

-God is bringing about judgment on Baal, the idols/sin BUT ALSO offering forgiveness/grace

-someone has called this place on Mt. Carmel the Old Rugged Altar

***the place where God judged the false worship and idols of the people and granted the people grace
(**why is there grace?** bc He had every right to lick all the people up with His fire and judge them fairly at the same time as the sacrifice!)

God is once again pursuing His people to liberate them!

***this is why God brought the drought to discipline and humble them and prepare them for this encounter when He exposed Baal as a fraud, where he exposed the wavering of their own hearts and where He graciously called His people back to Himself**

now, as this encounter took place, as their wavering is exposed, it created a crisis of belief for the people – it creates a different tension - they must make a choice!!

*this is what God's discipline does, it creates a place where they must make a choice

-will they submit to the Lord's discipline? What will the people do?

v39 the people responded by falling on their faces and said twice YHWH is God!

-it may happen in your life that God is creating this same tension and crisis

-when you turn away from the Lord, He will lay siege to your idols

-for some He can gently woo you back like the low level beeps in the headphones

-for others of you God has been collapsing the false gods you've submitted yourself to and it's like the loud high frequency beeps

-the question for either person, low level beeps or loud and piercing, **will you submit yourself to the Lord's discipline and lay down your idols? Will you quit giving love to the things that will not satisfy and return to the Lord?**

**friends the good news is that God breaks down and exposes these Baals in our lives so that we can be liberated! He wants you to be free!

KEY RESPONSE

-the Israelites had to act on their confession – it's one thing to say, that YHWH is God, it's another to act

v40 they seized all the Baal prophets and killed them

*in the immediate aftermath of the great showdown and miracle by YHWH, the people had a willingness to do what was right – the crisis of belief was followed by putting faith in action

*this was in accord with **Deut. 13** – whoever leads Israel into false worship is to be executed

-the prophets of Baal were put to death bc they were guilty of leading God's people to rebel against Him; they led the people to sin against God and promoted idolatry

-spiritually speaking, you and I must put to death the idolatry of our own hearts; that's what Jesus means when He says you must lose your life if you want to save it – you must willingly jettison the idols of your life if you want Christ

then more grace comes, vv41-46 the rains return

CONCLUSION

As we conclude,

-there is a popular narrative among some churches and Christians that there is the God of the OT and the God of the NT and that they can't possibly be the same

-the God of the OT is cold and harsh - full of wrath and judgment and likes to pour it out on people

-and the God of the NT is warm and loving, compassionate, winsome and full of grace

*friends don't miss these last two chapters in 1 Kings – God has gone to a Gentile worshiper of Baal and saved her and her son...calling her into His family

-and this week we see the entire Northern kingdom being drawn away into Baal worship and God mercifully sends His prophet to call them back into right r'ship with Him

****THIS IS A MASSIVE MOVEMENT OF HIS MERCY/GRACE AND LOVE AND COMMITMENT TO THEM**

*this is a husband calling to His unfaithful wife saying I still love you! come back! leave your lovers!

-they can't fulfill you and love you like I do

*maybe you feel like this whole story has been describing you – you've been wandering away from the Lord...you've been waffling between God and worldly things...maybe only a few weeks or maybe it's been a few yrs or many years and you face a crisis of belief

-the Lord has graciously brought you here to call you to repentance

-you've been in a crisis of belief as He has slowly and faithfully torn down the idols in your life you've been giving love to – you've not been satisfied, you've known they were insufficient for you, you've become miserable and now you're in a crisis of belief

Jesus tells a fantastic story about a crisis of belief

-there was a man was working in a field and he discovered great treasure that had been hidden

*he knows that nothing he owns compares with that treasure!

-so he goes and sells everything

***this story is a great challenge – are you going to go all in with Jesus?**

Are you going to stop wavering back and forth, but instead give your whole heart, your mind, your soul, your strength to Jesus?