

# 1 Kings 18:16-45

Easter 5, Supplement Series A, May 14, 2017

Theme: The LORD, he is God!

I. Powerless pretenders panic

II. The prophet proclaims God's promises

INJ Jesus says that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life. He insists that no one comes to the Father except through him. We immediately agree. Of course Jesus is the only way to heaven! Parents/Mothers teach their children this simple Christian truth. They are honored when their grandchildren continue to be fed in the Christian faith.

Yet it seems that our children and grandchildren drift farther away from the truth. We do a lot of drifting ourselves! I think that in our heads we understand that trusting Jesus is the one important thing for our time on this earth. The rooms prepared in heaven await us! Perhaps we forget that God gives and maintains faith through the gospel we hear and learn.

A disconnect happens. We know Jesus is the Only Way, but we take for granted the hearing and learning of his word. So many things that are not Jesus crowd our lives! Our head still acknowledges Jesus, but our ears don't listen to him, and our hearts and hands don't follow him. Sometimes it isn't obvious which one we are – followers of Jesus or unbelievers! Yet those are the only two options: Either we are with the LORD, or we are against him. Our lesson leads us to confess: "The LORD, he is God!" While powerless pretenders panic, the prophet proclaims God's promises.

At the time of Elijah, the nation of Israel was a religious mess. King Ahab was not interested in the true religion. His queen was Jezebel, who is described in the Bible as wicked and devious. She made it her policy to hunt down and kill all the prophets of the LORD while she promoted the idolatry of the idols Baal and Asherah. She was effective in her agenda. Elijah was the only prophet of the LORD still alive.

While idolatry had the upper hand socially and politically, the LORD did not abandon his people. Elijah was his messenger to encourage the faithful few. Elijah also spoke persistently and loudly against Ahab and Jezebel and the idolatry of the people. The LORD sent a famine. It would not rain until he said so. And for three and a half years, it had not rained a drop. In a land that depended on the moisture from intermittent showers, the famine was economically disastrous. For a people who had turned to Baal, the god in charge of rain and fire, it was pointedly targeted law.

When the LORD arranged a meeting between his prophet and the King, the enmity between them showed. Ahab accused Elijah of being the Troubler of Israel – of bringing disaster on the people. If only he would let it rain, then Ahab would have no problems. "Why are you so stubborn?" he accused. Yet Elijah was not the problem. The trouble was that the king wouldn't acknowledge the LORD. The disaster was open idolatry.

Elijah proposed a showdown to settle the matter. Ahab and Jezebel would gather their idol prophets – 400 who served Asherah and 450 who represented Baal. They would prepare a sacrifice on Mount Carmel and ask their gods to send fire on it. Elijah would prepare a sacrifice to the LORD. Whichever offering was consumed by fire would testify to the true God.

It was to be a public showdown. The people of the nation gathered to watch what would happen. Elijah tried to engage them and move them from their idolatry. "How long will you limp around on two crutches? If the LORD is God, follow him. If Baal is God, follow him." We are used to hearing the phrase, "How long will you waver between two opinions?" The picture in "limping around on two crutches" is that you don't trust either one of your legs. You cannot move because you don't think either one will support you. Elijah called for a decision. Either the LORD is God, or he is not, and Baal is God. Which will you confess?

There are many reasons we are reluctant to commit to the LORD with our whole heart. We may be afraid of what will happen politically. What will our friends will say about us? If we commit to the LORD it means we have to turn away from our sin. We then must use our minds and our time and our money for the LORD rather than for just me. We limp around on two crutches sometimes, unable to make a decision. But indecision is idolatry! If the LORD is God, follow him. Everything else is an idol. "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

This was a low point in the history of God's promised Savior. The people wouldn't even answer Elijah's call to repentance. Maybe they were afraid of Jezebel. They were so deluded that they really thought Baal might send fire from heaven! The Baal cult had popularity and the appearance of glory, while the LORD's representative looked lonely and lost. Which church would you go to? Let's have the showdown and see what happens!

The events painted in the account are vivid. Can you imagine the 850 prophets of the idols dancing and shouting and performing rituals all morning and afternoon? Were there spotters checking to see if there was a spark or a smolder in the sacrifice? It must have been a carnival atmosphere around their worship space. It was all show and no substance.

Elijah started to mock them for their unbelief. I get a little bit of

pleasure out of this, because I have a tendency to speak sarcastically, too. Perhaps Baal is sleeping. It is barely noon! You wouldn't expect him to be an early riser after the late night parties he manages! Maybe he is busy or thinking hard about something. Surely he will answer you! The idol prophets cut themselves till the blood flowed and their earnest cries still accomplished nothing. Because Baal is nothing. No power. No ability. No existence. Nothing but foolishness. And just condemnation from the only True God. The powerless pretenders panicked because Baal is not God.

But condemnation was not the point the LORD wanted to make just then. Elijah rebuilt the altar to the LORD, using twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. He honored the LORD God who promised to send a Savior from sin from their descendants. He showed the people what it looked like to focus on God's word. They saw worship that is not about what I do or what we do, but worship that is focused on what God does. That altar was doused with water so that it could not accidentally catch fire. And the LORD sent fire from heaven to consume the bull and the wood and the water and even the stones themselves. "The LORD, he is God!"

Powerless pretenders panic when they realize they have put their confidence in a nothing. If you were in the crowd that day on Mt. Carmel, would you have come to Elijah? Honestly, we stand silent so often, wavering between two positions. Limping on two crutches. Both cannot be true, that the LORD is God and that life, work, family, everything takes all my attention. If all that is my focus, then the LORD is not really my God, but I am. Is the panic rising in your heart because of your secret idolatry?

The LORD is God, and he suddenly has my attention. He doesn't promise to send fire from heaven into our gathering, but he sends his messengers, his prophets to proclaim his promises. The words of God are powerful and they grab our heart and move our hands and fill our lives to overflowing. "The LORD, he is God!" This is our confident confession.

The idols that captivate our attention are nothings. They cannot send fire from heaven. They cannot make our wallets thicker. They cannot improve our health or prolong our life. They cannot give us happiness or contentment. They cannot make our future brighter. Idols are nothing and do nothing. The LORD our God promises to do them! And he has done it. Our confidence in the LORD comes down to one spectacular event that blows away every powerless pretender.

Jesus said it when he proclaimed "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." The power of God's promises is evident as the Second Person of the Trinity is born in human flesh. By a virgin, no less. God's awesome power is hidden under humility and obedience, under dirt and

dust, under suffering and lowliness. Yet there is your Substitute, and the sacrifice for your sins. There is the precious blood of Christ shed to pay for your guilt. God works through the message of his crucifixion to penetrate your heart and turn it from a stone cold and dead heart into a living and energized heart that trusts him. "The LORD, he is God!"

No more spectacular event has happened in history than that the dead Jesus raised himself from the grave. The power of sin is broken. Death has no hold on him, and it has lost its grip on me, too! Your forgiveness is no less certain than if fire fell from heaven like it did on Mt. Carmel. God has acted. He is intervened. The prophet Elijah proclaimed God's promises, and the people finally listened. The promises of God are before you today. "The LORD, he is God!"

There is still more to see in this account. After the fire fell so dramatically – not from fire idol Baal, but from the LORD – Elijah promised that the rain would return. Not from the waters of Baal, but from the LORD. After 42 months without rain, where would this thunderstorm come from? There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Elijah sat down to wait for it.

There we can also see ourselves. We know the power of God, and we have heard his promises. But where is the fulfillment now? Where is the rain? Seven times Elijah looked. Nothing. How frustrating! Meanwhile wicked Ahab stood defiantly against the LORD. How long must we wait? We aren't patient. We want dramatic, like the fire from heaven. But that isn't how the LORD works. Sometimes our hearts are weak, and we falter.

The LORD does what he says. Whether we believe him or not; whether the enemies stand defiant or cower; whether we are weak or strong, still the LORD keeps his word. The rain came in torrents on the land. The precious shower of the gospel soaks us through. "The LORD, he is God!" He has forgiven my sin completely! I am his dear child and an heir of heaven. How precious to hear his powerful promises.

Those promises are proclaimed right here week after week. Nothing is more important than knowing Jesus forgives sins. That he is the Way and the Truth and the Life. Don't limp around on two crutches, wavering between two opinions. Have complete confidence that the LORD is your never failing power, your ever present peace. Let the Word of God declare that you are his child, and that he is your God. Powerless pretenders may panic, but the prophet proclaims God's promises.

As we honor mothers, consider that nothing is more of a blessing than trusting Jesus. The truth of his resurrection is powerful. The power of his Word is profound. Pass it on to your children, and to theirs. Let us hear and proclaim the message together: The LORD, he is God! SDG Amen.