

The Valley of Decision

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of making a decision to serve God fully and avoid the consequences of indecision.

Duration: 32:01

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:24, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:26-31

Topics: "Decision"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of choosing to serve either God or the world. He warns against being indecisive and divided in devotion. The speaker references the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, where he challenged the people to choose between serving Jehovah or Baal. Elijah demonstrated his faith in God by rebuilding the altar and pouring water on the sacrifice, despite the drought. The sermon concludes with the reminder that serving God should be the master passion of one's life.

Transcript

We do have the privilege of serving you. And Lord, we ask that today as we look at your word, that your Holy Spirit will speak to our hearts, Lord, concerning our relationship with you. Father, we ask that there will be just a powerful work now by your Holy Spirit, through the word, penetrating into our hearts.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated.

We continue our journey through the Bible, and this week it brings us into 1 Kings, chapters 16 through 18. And tonight, as we go through the Bible, we'll be studying these chapters 16 through 18. We encourage you, read them over, then join with us as we go through the word.

This morning, we'd like you to look at verse 24 in chapter 18 of 1 Kings. The prophet Elijah is making a challenge to the prophets of Baal. And he said that they would build altars, place the sacrifices upon them, but then they would call upon their respective gods to kindle the fire of the altar to consume the sacrifice.

And so in the challenge he said, call upon the name of your gods, and I will call upon the name of Jehovah, and the God that answers by fire, let him be acknowledged as the true God. And the people answered and said, it is well spoken. The prophet Joel talks about multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision.

And this is where these people were on this particular day. Actually, as we look at this scene, there were three groups represented. There was Elijah, the true prophet of Jehovah, standing alone, opposed to him and opposed to the worship of Jehovah were the 450 prophets of Baal.

These people were in direct opposition to Jehovah God. They would lead people into the worship of Baal. And they were in open opposition to the worship of Jehovah.

The third company is the company that is sort of in indecision. They are wanting to serve both Jehovah and Baal. They are standing there in this place of not really choosing whether or not they would live fully for Jehovah or live fully for Baal in this valley of decision.

Those same three crowds exist today. There are those who are standing for the Lord. They are always, it seems, a minority crowd.

But they are true unto the living God. There are always those who are in open opposition against those who would serve the Lord. And we see them today as they are openly opposing the worship of Jesus Christ, the false prophets.

And their opposition against our Lord. The ACLU, the People for the American Way, the Hollywood movie industry, and the media that seeks to turn people from a faith in Jesus Christ and to lure them into the worship of the flesh. And then you have that halting multitude who are trying to really serve both.

Now Elijah is calling the people to be decisive. To get off of the fence. The time has come when you must decide are you going to serve Jehovah or are you going to serve Baal? Jesus said no man can serve two masters.

He will love the one and hate the other or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot sit on the fence.

It is one or the other. But in spite of what Jesus has said, multitudes today are trying to do just that. They're trying to serve Jesus and mammon.

They have enough love for the Lord, they hope, to escape the judgment of hell. And yet they are bowing to the gods of this world and they are living after the flesh. They're like those in the Old Testament that are described as they feared Jehovah and they worshipped their own gods.

That's exactly where a lot of people are today. They have a fear of the Lord but they are worshipping their own gods. They want to do their own thing.

They want to worship their own gods but when real trouble rises then they hope that God will be there to bail them out. If you are in that category one foot on the rowboat, one foot on the dock. Half of your trust in Jesus, half in your Wall Street stock.

You're sort of trying to balance things out. Living, well you attend church but yet in reality your life is devoted to other things, other passions, other interests. You had better hope that when the hour of real crisis arises in your life maybe your child is deathly ill or maybe you are facing death.

You better hope that when you cry out to God He doesn't say to you like He said to the children of Israel at one point to cry unto the gods that you have served. He said I will deliver you no more. Go and cry to the gods that you have chosen.

Let them deliver you in the time of your distress. What an awesome time that is when God rejects your call. When He says I've been calling on you for years you haven't really responded.

You haven't really served me. Call on the gods that you have chosen. Years ago when I was in Tucson we had a lady attend our church whose husband was in the Air Force and because she had attended I made a call on the house.

I wanted to meet him and invite him to come. When I came to the door as he opened the door and I introduced myself he began to curse me and was very unfriendly. He said I just brought my little daughter home.

She has polio and I knew that the child that I had met had been crippled by polio and he said you can't tell me of any God of love that would allow my children to be both of them to have polio. And he was just angry, angry at God. I said to him tell me have you been serving the Lord? And he lit out with a lot of oaths emphatically declaring that no he had not, he hated God.

And I said then why would you expect God to do favors for you? If you have set yourself in opposition and hatred against Him you're not serving Him. Why would you expect Him to hear you when you call upon Him? It's interesting how that people want to live their own lives. They want to go their own ways and as this man in open opposition to God and yet when tragedy comes you expect God to just come running to your beckon and call.

We are not guaranteed that God will come to us in that hour of need. It may be that it would be just like what the people experienced in Judges when God said you have forsaken me you have served other gods therefore I'll not deliver you go cry to the gods that you've chosen let them deliver you in the time of your distress. People play dangerous games with God.

And in so doing they are gambling with their eternal destiny. Somehow people think that God will always be there for them. But they seem to forget that God warned my spirit will not always strive with man.

The prophet Jeremiah said then the Lord said to me pray not for the good of these people for when they fast I will not hear their cry. When they offer their burnt offerings and their prayers I will not accept them but I will consume them by the sword and by the famine and by the pestilence. Jeremiah, don't pray for them anymore.

I'm not gonna listen. God said to Hosea Ephraim is joined to her idols let her alone. What a tragic day when God says of a person let them alone.

Don't pray anymore for their good. I won't answer. And that is possible.

We should not take God for granted. We should not expect Him to just be there any time that we wish to call. It may be that we've gone over the line and God will refuse to hear our call.

For you see God is under no obligation to save you or no obligation to help you. The book of Hebrews tells us for if we go on sinning willfully after we've received the knowledge of the truth there remains no further sacrifice for our sins. But only a certain fearful looking for the judgment and fiery indignation of God which will devour His adversaries.

For those that despised Moses' law were put to death without mercy if two or three people would witness against them. Of how much worse do you suppose the punishment shall be for those who have trodden underfoot the Son of God and have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing and have done despite to the Spirit of grace. For we know Him who has said vengeance is mine I will repay saith the Lord.

And again the Lord will judge His people. The writer concludes it's a fearful thing to fall in the hands of a living God. A living God that you have rejected.

A living God that you have failed to serve. A living God that you know is there and hope that He will always be there for your need but a God that you have not really served with your heart or with your life. That's exactly where some of you are today.

You're going on in your life of sin having come to the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ. You are tramping underfoot the Son of God. You are counting the blood of His covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing and you are doing despite to the Spirit of grace.

You're in a fearful place. The cry of Elijah to the crowd was How long will you halt between the two opinions? Here they are in this valley of indecision actually. They don't know if to serve Jehovah or if to serve Baal and they're really seeking to serve both.

They're divided in their devotion. Elijah is saying to them How long are you going to be in this place of indecision? You must choose one or the other. You can't have it both ways.

The Bible tells us love not the world neither the things that are in the world for he who has the love of the world in his heart has not the love of the Father. Very plain. If you have the love of the world in your heart you don't have the love of the Father.

James said you adulterers and adulteresses speaking in a spiritual sense you haven't been true or faithful to your relationship to Jesus Christ. He said don't you know that friendship with the world to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. Your God is the master passion of your life.

You can have many passions but you have only one master passion. And it would be well for you to take a look at your heart today to seek to discover what is the master passion of your heart. It's easy to say well I love the Lord more than anything else.

Words are cheap. As John said let's not love in word, in tongue but let's love in deed and in truth. Like the fellow who called up his girlfriend and was expressing to her and seeking to express to her just how much he loved her.

If she were over in Europe he would attempt to swim the Atlantic Ocean to be by her side. He couldn't stand being apart from her. If she were on the moon he would try and get in a rocket and fly to the moon to be near her because he can't stand being apart.

And incidentally I'm coming over tonight if it doesn't rain. You know, you can express great words of fondness, devotion but is it just words or is it truly there? The master passion of my life. If Jehovah, Jesus Christ is not the master passion of your life then there is something that masters you.

If Jehovah is God, Elijah said then serve Him. If Baal is God then serve Him. It can't be both ways, it is one or the other.

Paul in writing to the Roman church said know you not that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey His servants you become whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness. What is controlling my life? What master passion guides me and the decisions that I make? If I follow the commandments of God and of Jesus Christ then I am a servant of God. If I follow the suggestions of Satan to obey the passions of my own heart and lust then I have become a servant of Satan.

And I am either serving one or the other I can't serve them both. How long, Elijah said will you halt between the two opinions? How long will you try to sit there on the fence? In reality either God is ruling over my life today or Satan is ruling over my life today. It is one or the other.

Jesus said he that is not for me is against me. He does not give a person a place of neutrality. And if you've tried to be in that place of neutrality Jesus doesn't accept that.

He won't allow that position. Either you're for me if you're not for me then he said you are against me. Pilate ordered a basin to be brought that he might wash his hands.

And he said I wash my hands of this man I am guiltless as far as his blood is concerned I want you to see to this. But you can't do that. You can't wash your hands of Jesus Christ.

He either is Lord of your life or he's not the Lord of your life. Now Elijah proposed let's build two altars. You 450 priests of Baal build your altar under Baal.

We'll take two bullocks and we'll cut them in pieces we'll place them on the altar but we'll not kindle any fire under the altar. And then we will pray. You pray to Baal I'll pray to Jehovah.

And the God that answers by fire let him be acknowledged as the true God. And the people said that's fair enough. And so the prophets of Baal 450 built their altar.

As Elijah gave to them the choice of the bullocks they cut and butchered the bullock and laid the pieces upon the altar. And again Elijah allowed them to go first he wanted to give them every opportunity and every advantage in this contest. And so they started praying and they were doing their dances and leaping on the altar and all kinds of religious contortive activity.

And about noon Elijah sort of figured he'd have a little fun and he said fellas I've got your problem solved for you. Baal is a God so he probably is asleep. And you need to cry louder to wake him up.

Perhaps he is on vacation and he's just sort of disposed in other places. Cry a little louder. Wake him up.

And so they began to scream more loudly. They began to take knives and cut themselves and the blood was gushing out as they through their religious frenzy endeavored to get some kind of a response from Baal. Now at that point Baal was the worship of the sun and thus the fire God.

So I mean if your God is the fire God surely he can kindle the fire on the altar. And about the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah said OK fellas you've had your opportunity. Nothing has happened.

And it said he rebuilt the altar of Jehovah. And then he said dig a trench around it after he laid the bullock in order. And they dug a trench around the altar and he said now pour water on the sacrifice.

And so they poured water on the sacrifice. Interesting There was a drought you know. It hadn't rained for three years.

People say well where did they get the water? Well just below the place on Mount Carmel where this contest took place there is a spring and there seems always to be water in that spring. And so they got the water they poured it on the sacrifice and he said pour more water on it. And so they poured more water and he said pour more water and they poured water again until the trench was even filled with water.

And then Elijah prayed and he said Lord let them realize that I've done all of this because of your word. And I think that's an important verse and we'll look at that tonight. The difference between faith and presumption.

I've done this Lord according to your word. And we read that the fire came consumed the sacrifice consumed the altar itself, the stones and licked up the water that was in the trench and the people upon this manifestation of Jehovah's presence fell on their face and they began to cry Jehovah is God, Jehovah is God. And thus there was the acknowledgement and off of the fence.

What do you suppose it would take to convince you of the reality of Jesus Christ and of the things that he has said? Joshua called on the people in his day to choose which of the gods they would serve. As you walk out of the doors of the sanctuary today you will have made a decision to follow Jesus or not to follow Jesus. To serve him or not to serve him.

That decision will have been made. You say, oh no, I'm not going to make my decision. Well, no decision is a no decision.

To decide not to serve him is to decide not to serve him. Jesus said, if you're not for me you're against me. And today you are making your decision.

Now as Elijah said, how long will you try to halt between the two decisions? If Jesus is the son of God then serve him. If your flesh is your God then serve your flesh. But you make that decision and you will have made that decision before you leave today.

As you walk out of the church today you are either walking out a servant of Jesus Christ or a servant of Satan. You are what you are by your own deliberate choice. Let's pray.

Father, we see the multitudes today in the valley of decision. That crowd who seeks to stand on the fence. They haven't really stepped into one side or the other in their own minds.

But in reality, Lord, not serving you is to serve the flesh. Lord, there are so many today that are in that same position. They are here because they are interested.

But yet, Lord, it hasn't been that full commitment, that full determination to live for Jesus Christ fully, completely. I pray today, Lord, that there will be a powerful work of your Holy Spirit in their hearts. Causing them, Lord, to realize that we have indeed made our choice and not to follow you fully.

Not to serve you completely. It's to serve our own flesh. To serve Satan.

God, help us today in Jesus' name. Amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front.

And if you've decided to follow Jesus, to serve Him, if He indeed is the Son of God, then serve Him. And if you've decided that you'd like to serve Him and follow Him, as soon as we're dismissed, I would encourage you to come on forward and talk to one of the pastors. The Lord doesn't allow a position of neutrality.

If you're not for Him, you are against Him. You can't be neutral. So you must determine, do I want to be for Him or do I want to be against Him? And I'm certain that in our hearts, none of us really want to be against Him.

But if He is, then, all that He claims to be, then serve Him. Don't sit on the fence. Serve Him.

May the Lord guide and direct your path. May you be strengthened by His Spirit. And may you walk in the ways of the Lord in fellowship with Him.

The Lord bless thee. And keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee.

And be gracious unto thee. And be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee.

And give thee peace.

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