Message for posting

**How long will you waver between two opinions?**

**1 Kings 18:16-46**

**Key Verse 18:21**

**“Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.””**

Wavering between two opinions is terrible. It is a kind of worst relationship when we apply it to the relationship between husbands and wives. What if your husband or wife keeps wavering between two opinions? Yourself and other man or woman.

Who would be happy in that situation as a husband and wife? Everyone would feel terrible. But that was exactly what the Lord felt as a spiritual husband for his people. So the Lord sent Elijah and challenged his people, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

So today we would like to learn how not to waver between two opinions and stay committed to the Lord.

Another question we want to think about is why the Lord needs not only the ministry of Obadiah but also the ministry of Elijah. Obadiah’s ministry was quiet and it can be applied as a general rule. But why does the Lord need Elijah’s ministry which is like fireworks? We will find the answer as well.

These two questions, how can we stay committed to the Lord without wavering and why does the Lord need not only the ministry of Obadiah but also the ministry of Elijah are closely connected. So, let us see in more detail.

My message has two parts.

**Part I. The god who answers by fire – he is God (v.16-29)**

**Part II. Let it be known today that you are God in Israel (v.30-46)**

**Part I. The god who answers by fire – he is God (v.16-29)**

**Verses 16-20**

**16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”**

**18 “I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals. 19 Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table. 20 So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.”**

When Ahab met Elijah he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?'' From Ahab’s point of view, Elijah was the troublemaker of Israel. But Elijah replied, “I have not made trouble for Israel. But you and your father’s family have. You have

abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals.”

To us it is so obvious Ahab and his father’s family have made trouble for Israel. But why did Ahab say, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

What Ahab said shows the blind spot for all peoples on earth. They see the cause of their problems from others, and they do not know they are a part of their problems. Ahab might have thought that Elijah angered Baal and that was why Baal did not send rain. So to Ahab, the solution could be to catch Elijah and kill him and then the anger of Baal would come down and he would bring down rain.

But Elijah pointed out that Ahab and his father’s family have made trouble for Israel. How have they caused trouble? By abandoning the Lord’s commands and following the Baals.

The prime example of the Lord’s commands is the ten commandments.

**Exodus 20:2-3**

**2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 “You shall have no other gods before me.”**

The Israelites knew that it was not Baal who brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. The Lord, their God who brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery commanded them, “You shall have no other gods before me.” But Ahab put Baal before the Lord, their God, abandoning the Lord’s commands.

Now Elijah asked Ahab to summon the people from all over Israel to meet him on Mount Carmel. He also asked Ahab to bring 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who ate at Jezebel's table.

So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

Why do you think Ahab listened to Elijah? It was because by now Ahab must have realized that only Elijah could stop the drought. So, he followed what Elijah had suggested. He did not have much choice. In addition, what Elijah suggested seemed good to Ahab because Elijah asked him to bring 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Being confident of the power of 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Ahab was so sure that his 850 prophets would overcame 1 prophet, Elijah.

Mount Carmel is about 1800 feet, which is about 500 meters from above sea level. It was located near the Mediterranean Sea. It was a prominent place of Baal worship. (Show map)

**Verses 21-24**

**“21 Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”**

**But the people said nothing.**

**22 Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 23 Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”**

Because Ahab sent word throughout all Israel many people came to Mount Carmel.

We don’t know how many people gathered but there must have been many. The number was large enough to catch all 450 prophets of Baal later without any problems.

Possibly Ahab might have proclaimed a national holiday and gathered people on Mount Carmel. So it must be the focus of national news in the northern kingdom of Israel. And I believe Ahab was confident for whatever would happen on Mount Carmel.

When the people from all over Israel gathered on Mount Carmel, Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him.” Elijah did not tell them that they were wrong. He only suggested the commitment either to the Lord or Baal instead of wavering between two opinions.

What was their response? They did not say anything. They were silent because they did not want to make their commitment either to the Lord or Baal. They wanted to have the best of both the Lord and Baal.

So Elijah said to the people, ““I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. 23 Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

Elijah said to verse 24. “Then you call on the name of your god”. Elijah acknowledged that the god of the people from all over Israel was Baal instead of the Lord. But he did not criticize them, saying, “Why do you follow Baal? Baal is a false God. The Lord is the true God! So repent and turn to the Lord!”. But rather he suggested a way to prove who is the true God between the Lord and the Baal. The god who answers by fire – he is God. Then all the people said, “What you say is good.” They liked the idea and the deal went through.

What Elijah suggested reminded me of the suggestion of one mature servant of God when there is conflict between two people. He said, “When you have a conflict with others, do not pray that the Lord may change others. If you pray in that way and others pray that the Lord may change you, then the Lord would not know which prayer he has to answer. The better way is to pray like this. First, you ask the Lord to forgive your sin, which is inability to understand others completely. No one can understand others completely. But it is our sin that blocks us from understanding others completely. So you need to pray for it first. Second, you ask the Lord to open his way and his door where both of you would be prosperous together. Then most of the time, the Lord will surely answer your prayers.” I found what the great servant of the Lord said to be true.

**Verses 25-29**

**25 Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” 26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.**

**27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” 28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 29 Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.**

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**Part II. Let it be known today that  you are God in Israel (v.30-46)**

**Verses 30-34**

**30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” 32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. 33 He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”**

**34 “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.**

**“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.**

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down.

Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. Symbolically what he was doing with the people at that time was repairing the Lord’s altar which had been torn down.

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Elijah built an altar in the name of the Lord by using the twelve stones which represented the twelve tribes descended from Jacob. So it reveals that the essence of the Lord’s altar was his own people rather than material.

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“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

**Verses 36-39**

**36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”**

**38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.**

**39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”**

36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

Elijah did not do what he did that day in his own way. But rather he followed Moses' law. He offered his prayer at the time of evening sacrifice. Usually the time of morning sacrifice is around 9am and the time of evening sacrifice is around 3pm.

Elijah called the name of the Lord as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Elijah reminded the people that the Lord is the God of their ancestors. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel is the God whom Abraham, Isaac and Israel personally experienced. And he is God who worked in their lives and in the history of the Israel people.

Elijah prayed so that they might know that he was the God in Israel and that Elijah was his servant and he did all these things according to God's commands.

 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

Elijah prayed for the Lord to answer his prayer so that the people would know that the Lord is God and that the Lord was turning their hearts back again.

38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”

They were completely persuaded and convinced. Out of fear they cried out, “the Lord – he is God! The Lord – he is God!”

**Verses 40-43**

**40 Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.**

**41 And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” 42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.**

**43 “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked.**

**“There is nothing there,” he said.**

**Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”**

41 And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” 42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

43 “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

“There is nothing there,” he said.

Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”

The Lord’s mercy was extended to the evilest king Ahab. Elijah asked Ahab to go and eat. Elijah must have said by faith, “For I hear the sound of a heavy rain.” Elijah heard the sound through his faith. When Ahab went off to eat and drink, Elijah himself climbed to the top of Carmel and began to pray.

**Verses 44-46**

**44 The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.”**

**So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’”**

**45 Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. 46 The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.**

Elijah was filled with the power of God and ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel which is about 15 miles.

Now let us think about how we can overcome wavering between two opinions and stay committed to the Lord, and the reason why the Lord needed Elijah’s ministry in addition to that of Obadiah.

First, let us think about how we can stay committed to the Lord instead of wavering between two opinions, the Lord and Baal.

Now I have a question for you. Do you think the Baals are as powerless as shown in today’s passage? Elijah taunted the Baal, **“Shout louder! Surely he is a god. Perhaps he is deep in thought or busy or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened”**. **Despite their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice there was no response. No one answered. No one paid attention.** So today’s passage shows Baal is completely powerless. Is the Baal completely powerless? What do you think? The answer is ‘absolutely not’. If Baal is so powerless, why does the Lord take the matter of Baal so seriously?

What is Baal or what are the Baals?

**Verse 18 ““I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Baals.**

So the Baals are things Ahab followed when he abandoned the Lord’s commands. What are the Lord’s commands? The ten commandments are the prime example of the Lord’s command. Do not put any gods before me. Do not make idols. Do not misuse my name. Keep the Sabbath. Honor your father and mother. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony. Do not covet your neighbor’s wife, men servants or female servants, and everything.

These are the Baals. What do you think? Is the desire to steal or commit adultery or murder so powerless? You tell me. They are not powerless at all! Why then was the Baals so powerless in today’s passage?

It was because the Lord did not allow the Baal to exercise its power. It was because the Lord wanted to demonstrate the truth that his power is infinitely greater than the power of Baal. His power was so great that compared to his power, the power of Baal was completely powerless. The power of our sinful desire has power, and that is why we have trouble. And the power of our sin causes us to waver between two opinions – between the Lord and our sinful desires.

But through today’s passage, the Lord demonstrated his power is infinitely greater than all the powers of idols and all the powers of our sinful nature and death.

That is why the Lord commanded Elijah to perform such a miracle, the demonstration of his power on Mount Carmel.

As we learn from the last Sunday message that the ministry of Obadiah is the general way of the Lord’s work. But why did the Lord ask Elijah to have such a show down in today’s passage? Elijah clearly said in today’s passage, “I have done all these things at your command.” It was not Elijah’s idea.

Throughout human history, the lord allowed several spectacular miracles. Why did he do it? He did it because they are also part of his ministry, and he had a clear message to deliver. What is it? His power is infinitely greater than all the powers of sin and death and darkness.

The cross of Jesus is another public spectacular demonstration of the Lord’s power. On the cross, the devil brought out all of its armory, all possible weapons. The greatest weapon it had was the power of death. So Satan threw out all of his weapons against Jesus on the cross -  the power of death, the power of pain and suffering, the power of condemnation from people, and the temptation for Jesus to come down from the cross. But nothing worked out. Jesus went through all the powers of the devil personally without fear. Rather on the cross, Jesus demonstrated his love through his forgiveness of the people. He said, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” That power of love, that is what the devil does not have. The devil has the power of hatred, the power of condemning and judging people and the power of death, but the devil does not have the power of love. On the cross, the power of Jesus rather than the devil was demonstrated publicly.

That is why the apostle Paul proclaimed on the cross that Satan and its powers were publicly ridiculed and all their powers were disarmed. They became a public spectacle.

**Colossians 2:13-15**

**13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made youalive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**

On the cross, Jesus Christ disarmed the powers and authorities of the devil and he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

This is the very reason why the Lord performed miracles several times in human history although miracles were not the general way of his working. Once in a while, he needed to demonstrate publicly the truth that without any doubt his power is infinitely greater than all the powers of our sin and death and the dark forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

To know and believe the power of the Lord is the way for us not to waver between two opinions and stay committed to the Lord.

Now there is one more thing that we need to learn when we want to stay committed to the Lord instead of wavering. What is it?

Let us assume, your power against your enemy is infinitely low. But you want to win. What would you do? There is still a way to win. What is it? Yes, DECEPTION! If you are successful in deceiving your enemy to believe that your power is greater than his you still can win the battle.

And that is exactly what our enemies, the dark forces in heavenly realms, are doing against us.

But the greatest deception is when you do not know you are deceived. When you do not know you are deceived you cannot get out of your deception!

But thanks be to God! There is a way for us to know whether we are deceived or not. What can help us to know whether we are deceived or not? The commands of God!

For example, the Lord commands us, “Do not judge”. But we judge others. When we judge others we may not have any sense of problems. We say, “I judge others and others judge me. I judge them because they are making such terrible mistakes!” and we keep doing it. And we don’t have any sense of problems. Only the command of God reveals what we are doing is against his command. We judge others so naturally that we even do not know we are deceived.

I will tell you my story about how I overcame my anger problem. I have had an anger problem. I did not show my anger at our church because I believed everyone in our church are people that I need to serve. But I showed my anger at home. So I hurt my wife and my oldest daughter so much. Years have passed and I struggled with this anger issue. I wanted to know where this anger comes from. Then the Lord revealed to me, the anger comes from my disobedience of the Lord’s command. “Do not judge.” I judged people because I thought I have right to judge. But the command of the Lord shows I do not have the right to judge others. It belongs to the Lord. The realization and my fighting not to judge others became a huge breakthrough for my anger problem. Amazingly and wonderfully as I do not judge others, discerning heart is arising in my heart through the Holy Spirit.

So the commands of God are the very source to know whether we are deceived without knowing we are deceived.

Jesus Christ our Lord paid all the price of our sin. Through his resurrection he is dwelling within us with all his authority and power. Therefore, by believing in his power and authority which is infinitely greater than all the powers of our sin and death, we can stay committed to the Lord instead of wavering. That is the reason why the Lord needed the ministry of Elijah which is public humiliation against all the dark forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

**One word:**

**How long will you waver between two opinions?**