

Do Not WAVER!

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ July 24, 2016



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. 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 them 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." 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. "O 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. 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 was in ruins. 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. ³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, 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, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O 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!" (1 Kings 18:16-39)

I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain,

“How long will you waver between two opinions?” If God wants you here in Vail/Benson, follow him, if God wants you in Livonia, follow him there. Sometimes, I wish it was that easy to make a decision on the call I now hold to Livonia, Michigan. I wish it were as easy as Elijah, or some other prophet making it a decision between right and wrong. But like I have been reminded by a number of people, like I have reminded a number of people here at Grace, is that there is no right or wrong decision. There is no passage in Scripture that indicates whether I should stay here in Vail/Benson or leave to go to Livonia. While the answer I give to that question will have an impact upon the ministry here at Grace-Vail, it is not the same impact that took place on Mount Carmel, when God defended his honor.

It was there that Elijah, a prophet of God posed that question to the Israelites: **“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”** That question did have a right answer, and it did have a wrong answer. That right answer is still the right answer today, and that wrong answer is still the wrong answer today. The times have changed, the circumstances have changed, but the answers have not. The impact of the question is just as important today as it was in Elijah's day. And so today, the same question is posed: “How long will you waver?”

As Christians, we know the right answer. We know the right answer to choose God over Baal and any other “god” that would hold our attention. But with so many of the worldly forces encouraging us to waver, encouraging us to doubt, encouraging us to follow them, we need that constant reminder. The reminder not just to choose the right course, but also the reminder of “DO NOT WAVER!”

It was during one of the most trying times in Israel's history that the prophet Elijah ministered. It was during a time that King Ahab ruled over Israel, and his wife Jezebel reigned at his side. Jezebel the queen not only worshiped other gods, but she actively sought out the destruction of those who worshiped the Lord, the God of Israel. And in her mind, she had a good reason to do that – it had not rained in Israel for over three years.

In a country and culture that is so dependent upon agriculture and rain, this three year drought was significant. Even more significant was the cause of the drought. Three years before, Elijah the prophet had met with Ahab and said, “There will be no more rain on the land, until the people repent from their wicked ways and turn back to the Lord, the God of Israel.” It was at the word of Elijah that the rain stopped. And so for those three years of drought the persecution of the Lord's people was severe, Jezebel thinking that if she could destroy the followers of this religion, she could rid the land of this God and thus his curse of a drought.

This seems mighty superstitious to us, but it was quite common in the time of Elijah. So for three and a half years, God's name was slandered in the very country he brought his people into. For three and a half years, followers of God were persecuted and killed for the beliefs they held. But at just the right time, and just the right place, God put his foot down and defended his honor. He had Elijah confront King Ahab and prepare him for a test, a way to show who the real God was and who was not.

Elijah called for Ahab to assemble the prophets of Baal, one of the primary God's of the king and queen, and have a meeting take place on Mount Carmel. Mount Carmel would be the location that God would defend his honor. The test was simple. Elijah said, **"Get two bulls for us. Let them 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. 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."** The people readily agreed to the test, it only made sense, they would follow the God who responded with fire. The prophets of Baal would have had no problem with this either, because Baal, among other things was the god in control of the sun and would have no problem casting down fire on their sacrifice.

The prophets of Baal, clad in their white robes and pointed hats began their ceremonial rituals designed to call upon their God. A wild cry followed by a ceremonial dance around the altar. These rituals aligning with other ancient writers regarding Baal festivals. When that wasn't enough they shouted louder and danced more vigorously, they even began to cut themselves to show Baal how committed they were to him. Elijah goaded them on by saying, **"Shout louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy or traveling. Maybe he's sleeping."** Essentially he was saying, you're not doing enough, try harder – which is exactly what this man-made religion required. **"But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention."**

The prophets of Baal passed the noon hour and continued trying to elicit fire from their God into the late afternoon. Then perhaps in the middle of the afternoon, Elijah began to make preparations for his own sacrifice. First he collected twelve stones to rebuild a neglected altar of the Lord. Then he dug a trench around the altar. He placed the wood and the bull on the altar, and then he said fill some jars with water and drench the sacrifice. He repeated the drenching two more times until not only was the sacrifice and the wood soaked, but the water filled up the trench.

Normally, when you're about to light something on fire, if you're going to put anything on it, you're going to put lighter fluid on it, to help the flame get kindled. Water has the exact opposite effect, it makes it that much harder to light. And just think how precious this water was. It had not rained on the land in over three years, and now Elijah is asking for gallons and gallons of this precious liquid not to be drunk, but used to douse a sacrifice.

Scholars have suspected this dumping of water to be symbolic of the washing that was to go on in the temple, a washing away of sin. And while that may be true, it also would make the miracle that God was about to do even more miraculous. Elijah called the people to turn their attention away from the frantic prophets of Baal to him. He bowed his head, raised his arms, **"O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel...answer me, so that these people will know that you, O Lord, are God."** Then, no sooner had he spoken those words, did fire descend from heaven, consuming not only the sacrifice, but it burned up the wood, the stones, the soil around the altar, and even vaporized the water in the trench. We are told, **"When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord – he is God! The Lord – he is God!'"**

Let's be honest with ourselves. How often do we just wish God would act like that today? Like Elijah, we see a world that outright rejects God and his perfect laws for living. We see a world of broken families, a world of prejudice, a world of selfishness, a world that tries to cover itself with a veneer of "everything's fine," when underneath it really isn't. If only God would call the people of

Tucson together on Mt Lemmon for a demonstration of his power. Then, people would respond like the Israelites, and turn back to the Lord. Let's face it, isn't that what we wish would just happen?

We wish it would happen because we see God's name being dishonored all around us. And if we're really honest with ourselves we see God's name being dishonored by ourselves as well. Because God's name is dishonored, not only when people actively tear down God, but when Christians like you and me don't speak up. When Christians only hope for the time when God is going to give them a sign from heaven, or when Christians are just content to complain about the world out there, instead of spreading what they hear in church with out there.

It's not just the people out there that are a problem to the world, but it's the people in here as well. Because what we share with the people out there, is a sinful nature. A sinful nature that wants to say, "If only God would do that great miracle today it would be much easier to be a Christian." But you know what? God never said being a Christian was easy. And you know what else? God still performed that great miracle thousands of years ago. That same God is just as powerful now as he was back then. And so it is our own hearts that must be turned back to God. It is our own hearts that must repent of our own weakness, our own timidity, our own selfishness when we too have acted not like Elijah, but like the sheepy people of Israel.

On Mount Carmel did the Lord ask anything of his people? He did not ask them to perform some ceremonial ritual to earn back his favor. But he showed himself to be God, and turned the peoples' hearts back to him. This same God has done the same for you. He turned your heart back to him. Whether through the simple waters of baptism, or when someone shared with you God's Word. He is your God, and you are his people.

What peace this gives us. To trust in the Lord even when those around us dismiss or dishonor him. To trust in the Lord when people say, "what has God done to deserve my love?" To trust in the Lord when the world blames all of its problems on him or his followers. To trust the Lord that he will defend his name and defend his honor. Right now, he does that through his followers – you and me, as we stand up for what is right, as we point out what is wrong, and most of all point to Jesus as the solution to the world's problems. We also know that a time is coming, perhaps very soon, when God will come down to show that he is God, the only God, and those who dismissed him will be left with nothing, but those who trusted in him will be given heaven itself.

So DO NOT WAVER in your Christian faith. God has given you no reason to waver, only the world has. But God has given us every reason to trust in him – for he not only sent fire down from heaven on Mount Carmel to defend his honor, he sent his Son to die on the cross for our sins, to defend us from death. The Lord has proven he is God, so follow him, and DO NOT WAVER! Amen.