

The Great Convocation On Mount Carmel.

Text: 1 Kings 18:21-40

Suggested Hymns:

180, 373, 366, 293, 440

- 1) The Situation which Brought It About
- 2) The Vital Issues Which Called For A Decision
- 3) The Majestic Vindication Of Jehovah At This Assembly.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Kings 18:21-40, ²¹ *And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.*

²² *Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men."* ²³ *"Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it."* ²⁴ *"Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God." So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."*

²⁵ *Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it."* ²⁶ *So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.*

²⁷ *And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened."* ²⁸ *So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.* ²⁹ *And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.*

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. ³¹ And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." ³² Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood." ³⁴ Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time.

³⁵ So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water. ³⁶ And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷ "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" ⁴⁰ And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Among the hills of the Holy Land, Mount Carmel stands out with special prominence. It is on the southern extremity of the range. It is a natural amphitheatre which was so admirably suited for the great occasion of which our text tells, which lends to Mount Carmel its special significance.

Mount Carmel stands today as a constant monitor, needed as much today as in those days of yester year. For there was held an assembly at which issues were decided, that to the end of time, will arise in the lives of people and will call for a decision.

May the same decision be made today, that was made on the memorable day of the story of our text! To this end let us consider *The Great Convocation on Mount Carmel*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Situation which Brought It About

Evil days had come upon Israel. We know how wonderfully God had led this people, how He had raised the former nomadic tribes to the dignity and splendour of a world power under the great kings David and Solomon.

We know especially the merciful purpose of God to have this people to bear, to guard, and to proclaim the promises of the world's Saviour. Then came the revolt of the ten tribes under the weak and wicked Rehoboam and the setting up of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

But Israel had revolted also from Jehovah. From the time that Jeroboam had set up two golden calves at Bethel and at Dan,¹ Israel had gone from bad to worse, and the character of one king after another is summed up in the ever-recurring sad refrain, "*He did evil in the sight of the Lord.*"

But in King Ahab, son of Omri, wickedness reached its height. Of him the sacred chronicler says in 1 Kings 16:33, ³³ *And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.*

Ahab, was faithless to Jehovah, and only had a mind for earthly glory and power. And for the purpose of satisfying his all-consuming ambition he sought advantageous alliances with neighbouring heathen nations. Particularly, to establish an alliance with the wealthy and powerful Sidonians, he had married the wicked princess Jezebel and had introduced the iniquitous Baal-worship of the Sidonians.

Baal, together with the female counterpart Ashtoreth, was the idol to whom productiveness, good crops, and material wealth, etc., were ascribed and all the carnal pleasures that wealth enables one to indulge in. With diabolical fanaticism

Jezebel set about introducing the pagan religion in Israel, importing priests of Baal by the hundreds, setting up his altars everywhere, and mercilessly persecuting all those who opposed.

Unmistakably Jehovah had registered His disapproval. By a long drought the land had been reduced to famine and starvation.

It was at this time that Elijah the Tishbite was sent by God once again to reprove Ahab and to demand of him a gathering of all Israel, together with the priests of Baal, on Mount Carmel that there he might have an opportunity to call the wayward people to repentance. And before the dauntless courage of Elijah, Ahab wilts and obeys.

Take special note, that this situation presents itself over and over again! How many people who have experienced the wonderful mercy of God, who by Baptism were made children of God and heirs of heaven, who vowed and renewed allegiance to their Saviour at their confirmation, have sooner or later cast off that allegiance and worshiped the Baal of this world!

How many people have yielded to the lure of material wealth and made the dollar their God or would not let fidelity to Christian principles stand in the way of sinful pleasures, or the achievement of some carnal ambition!

What inroads the Baal of lodgery and false religions has made upon the ranks of God's people! This situation calls for a searching self-examination. Does God occupy our hearts or Baal? Oh, let us, too, humbly join that throng on Mount Carmel's heights and listen attentively to the important presentation of the most vital issues, issues as vital today as they were then!

2. The Vital Issues Which Called For A Decision

“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” From this ringing appeal of the prophet we see that the great masses of Israel had not intended entirely and openly to cast off their allegiance to Jehovah. They still professed to be God's people. But they had sought to compromise between God and Baal.

In their spiritual blindness and corruption they had attempted the impossible, namely, to harmonise the service of the true God with the service of Baal. Elijah points out the impossibility of this and the abomination of their attempts. Fairly

and squarely he places this issue before the people: Is Jehovah God, or is Baal? They must make a choice.

And according to their choice undivided allegiance must be given either to God or to Baal. Nor had Elijah left the people in doubt as to what depended upon this issue and their decision. Attempts to evade the issue, or the choice of Baal, had brought misery upon the land and would finally bring eternal woe.

This issue is always with us and demands a choice from every heart: God or Baal. The story of the great convocation is especially meaningful to those who still profess allegiance to the Triune God, maintaining the outward appearance of Christianity by membership in the visible Church, etc., but who secretly in their hearts worship Baal, the idol of Mammon, and of sinful pleasures, etc.

St. Paul shows the utter futility of all attempts to harmonise the worship of God and Baal. We are warned in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, ¹⁴ *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?* ¹⁵ *And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* ¹⁶ *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*

Likewise we read in 1 John 2:15, ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* No, you cannot harmonise the true God and Baal. You must face the issue squarely: Is Baal God or Jehovah God? Can the things symbolised by Baal give you true happiness? Can they comfort you in the days of trial? Can they help you in the hour of death? Can they give any assurance of a blessed hereafter? If so, then follow after them, wholly and openly. Then openly embrace the philosophy: *“Let us eat and drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die.”*

On the other hand, consider the question: Is the Lord God? Is God as He has revealed Himself in all creation, above all is the Triune God, who has revealed Himself in the Bible as our Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter; is He the God to whom we are accountable? Is He God who in Christ Jesus revealed unfathomable love for a world of sinners and provided their one salvation?

Then, as you value your soul, follow Him! Then eagerly, cheerfully yield yourself to Him with your whole heart and with an undivided love and loyalty.

God grant that this latter may be the choice of every one before whom the issue is so placed! To this end let us note, finally, the majestic vindication of Jehovah at the great convocation on Mount Carmel.

3. The Majestic Vindication Of Jehovah At This Assembly.

Firstly we note that Baal is an impotent Idol. Picture the vast assembly on beautiful Mount Carmel. There was the king, proud and haughty, surrounded by his courtiers. There, in proud array, in gorgeous vestments, the 450 priests and prophets of Baal. Then, in almost endless numbers, the people of all Israel, filling the vast natural amphitheatre.

Finally, there came, alone, Elijah, fearless and undaunted, the courage of faith and the conviction of truth in his heart. Without delay, determination in his bearing, Elijah proposes the test between God and Baal.

“Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. ²⁴ “Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.”

His proposal is accepted, and the test is on. The priests of Baal are given every advantage. The very nature of the test was in their favour, for fire was the element over which Baal was supposed to have special power. They are given first place and permitted to arrange everything to their liking.

But what a dismal failure accompanied Baal and his priests! ²⁶ *So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, “O Baal, hear us!” But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.*

In holy, stinging irony Elijah tells them, *“Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”* And spurred on by this taunt, they spend their last frantic efforts in pleading with their idol for a vindicating response. *But there*

was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. Finally, exhausted, panting, and bleeding, they must concede the dismal failure of Baal.

Thus Baal has always been a colossal failure, and the people are duped who follow after him. Never have the things symbolised by him satisfied a human heart. On the contrary, Baal has always exacted a fearful toll from all his followers. Disappointment, misery of every description, follow in his wake.

And oh, for that final disillusionment which awaits those who persist in following him to the end! It seems that the very days through which we are passing are but a re-enactment of Baal's failure on Mount Carmel, these days in which Baal-worshippers have seen their fortunes swept away in a night, have seen opulence succeeded by poverty, and wild pleasures by misery and despair.

Many worshiping fame are relegated now to contempt and oblivion. And have not the many vain frantic efforts to remedy things, the confusion in high and low places, often vividly reminded us of the frantic yelping of those priests of Baal to their idol? There was no voice nor answer, neither then nor now. For Baal is not God. And God forbid that he be our choice!

Secondly Jehovah is the True God. But now came Elijah's turn. He is divinely sure of his God. Therefore, having prepared his sacrifice, he has it flooded with water, etc. Then he turns to his God in this prayer, ***“LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.”***³⁷ ***“Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.”*** Note that Elijah did not even mention the word “fire” in his prayer.

And then in a twinkling of the eye, in glorious vindication of Jehovah, ***“the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.”***

Little wonder that after this majestic and conclusive vindication the people fell on their faces in humble, penitent worship and then sent up the mighty shout: ***“The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!”***

Thus, over and over, with overwhelming power and majesty, by the sheer power of His divine love, our God has proved Himself the one true God.

All history attests the blessing that the Gospel, the proclamation of His love in Christ, has always wrought. Uncounted human hearts have experienced His saving power. And think of the crowning evidence, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

As in majesty on Carmel's heights Jehovah accepted Elijah's sacrifice, so in love He proved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that He had accepted the great sacrifice of His Son, brought as the atonement for the sins of the world.

Contemplation of Christ's resurrection as the fullest vindication of our faith in the God of the Bible, the God of the Gospel, cannot but bring to our lips the exultant shout, "***The Lord, He is the God!***" Upon Jesus our hope of salvation is immovably founded.

May God grant that we may always unhesitatingly make the choice of Israel on the day of its great convocation on beautiful Mount Carmel, so that finally, we shall be in heaven with our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Kings 12