

## 17<sup>th</sup> S after Pentecost (9/15/24) SM, SJ

1 Kings 18:21–39 - 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.

<sup>22</sup>Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.” <sup>25</sup>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.” <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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.” <sup>28</sup>So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>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.” <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>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.” <sup>34</sup>“Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. <sup>35</sup>The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. <sup>36</sup>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. <sup>37</sup>Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” <sup>38</sup>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. <sup>39</sup>When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”

In the name of the one holy, true God, dear fellow redeemed:

In sports, when it’s near the end of the season and two powerful or maybe even undefeated teams meet, it might referred to as a “showdown.” There are also rivalries in sports that no matter how good their team is that year, one game looms as the most important of the whole year – games like Army-Navy or Michigan-Ohio State, or perhaps Minnesota-Wisconsin, which is played for Paul Bunyan’s axe.

Sometimes movies have big show downs: Godzilla vs. King Kong, Luke Skywalker vs. Darth Vader, Robin Hood vs. the sheriff of Nottingham. Today we have a showdown too, as we look at:

The Showdown on Mt. Carmel

1. We are not alone
2. God always wins in the end

### 1. We are not alone

Our text takes place during the life of one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Elijah. Yet it also takes place during the rule of the most wicked king in the Bible, Ahab, and his even more wicked wife, Jezebel. Ahab ruled from about 874 to 853 BC.

Ahab and his wife were idol worshipers, particularly the Canaanite gods of Baal and Asherah. Not only had they been encouraging their worship of these idols among the Israelites, but they had been destroying the altars of the true God and killing his prophets.

However, there is a question about Elijah being the only prophet left. Earlier in this very same chapter, Elijah met a man named Obadiah, who had hid 100 prophets of God inside of two caves, to keep Jezebel from killing them as she had so many other prophets of God. A number of suggestions have been made to explain this, but I think the best I’ve heard is this, that the Hebrew doesn’t say he was the ONLY prophet but that Elijah was a prophet ALONE. As Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mt. Carmel, those 100 other prophets are not by his side. He stands **alone** against the prophets of Baal.

Shortly after our text, Jezebel sends a message to Elijah that she intends to kill him, and this results in Elijah hiding in a cave, and he utters this prayer: **“I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”**

You can feel the despair and the depression flowing out of Elijah. The one true God has made Israel his chosen nation, and yet their nation is ruled by a truly evil king and queen and the people have forsaken the worship of their God to worship idols. However, even that is not enough, they have been trying to stomp out all worship of God, destroying his altars and killing the prophets.

How often have we all felt despair and depression, or even like Elijah, have we felt like we are all alone? Maybe we feel like God hasn't done anything for us, or like he hasn't done enough for us?

## **2. We are not alone/God always wins in the end**

Sometimes it feels like we too are standing alone against the evil world around us. Yet today we are reminded that we are never alone and that God always wins.

It's time we get to the showdown itself, one of the most memorable events in the Bible. God's prophet, Elijah, challenges the 450 prophets of Baal present to a contest that will prove once and for all whose God is greater. Both sides – both Elijah and the prophets of Baal – will offer a sacrifice to their God, and whoever's God burns up their sacrifice will win the big showdown between the gods of Israel and Canaan.

The 450 prophets of Baal take their sacrifice, place it on their altar and then start praying to Baal. Baal doesn't answer right away, so they try even harder. They dance. They cut themselves and think that offering their blood will make Baal more likely to hear them. They start in the morning and tried all day long, but Baal did not answer. Elijah mocked them though, saying things like **Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.** No matter what these 450 prophets tried, Baal did not respond – and we know why – he did not exist.

How different everything was when Elijah finally took his turn. First, he was content to do things the same thing. He took his animal, laid it on the wood, but he insisted that the wood be drenched **THREE TIMES** with four large jars of water! Elijah called to the Lord in prayer, and without delay, **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.**

In this showdown between Baal and the God of Israel, Baal had done nothing and God not only burned up the sacrifice, but the wood, the stones, the dirt and all the water.

Elijah had thought he was alone, and humanly speaking, he might have been. No one was there, and no human being could help him. But God was there and he heard and he answered Elijah powerfully. The people realized that this proved that the Lord God Almighty was real and powerful, and Baal – not so much. They fell to the ground, **“The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!**

Yes, there are times like Elijah we feel alone. We're afraid. We're depressed. Yet we're not alone. The all-powerful God of Israel is with us. We remember his promise to never leave us or forsake us. We see his answer to prayer in his answer to Elijah and we see his power in the burning up of the sacrifice, stones, dirt and water.

God is more powerful than those who oppose us. God is wiser than those who think they know everything. Even though we cannot see him, he has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Even in fear and doubt, he reassures us, and in the holy and precious blood of his Son, he purifies us and sanctifies us.

We look at this showdown between God and Baal and we are reminded of another showdown; we could call it the last showdown. Jesus will return. He will raise the dead. All those who failed to acknowledge him, who rejected him, all those who refused to confess him as God's Son and Savior, will be like Baal. They will be shown to have chosen the wrong god, the wrong Savior. Yet for you and me, it will be like Elijah, as God wins and everyone knows that the Lord is God, the only God. Amen.