

WARNING!!

Fence Sitting can be Hazardous to your Health

1 Kings 18:21

April 30, 2016

Today

As we noted last week, Israel had been given the sacred responsibility of demonstrating the character and love of God to the rest of the world. They would do that through their fidelity to Him and through them the gospel message would be given to the whole world.

- **Deuteronomy 14:2** - For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Before entering the Promised Land, the purposes of God were presented to the Children of Israel and the **terms of their prosperity** and the **consequences of unfaithfulness** were set before them – BEFORE they stepped foot in Canaan.

- **Deuteronomy 11:26-28**. - "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known".

By refusing to keep His covenant, they would cut themselves off from their source of life and God's blessing could not come upon them.

Ancient Israel did not fulfill God's purpose to bring all nations into a saving relationship with Him and chapters 17 and 18 of 1 Kings describes the significant religious struggle that developed.

As the 3 + years of drought came to an end Elijah challenged King Ahab to a test to see who was the greatest god – Baal, the storm god or Jehovah –the true God.

- **1 Kings 18:21** - And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word.

Elijah wanted to know how long God's people were going to skip over the issue of worship. Apparently, they saw no need to choose between gods and simply decided to ignore the problem. In the countries surrounding Israel the worship of many gods was not unusual. There was a god for practically everything and the Children of God had become so entangled with the nations around them that they no longer saw the need to worship God exclusively. As a matter of fact, they had become so much like the nations surrounding them that it was nearly impossible to tell who was who and, in many instances, they outpaced those nations in their wickedness.

- **King James Bible Commentary** - "Baalism would accommodate other gods, but Jehovah demanded total and uncompromising loyalty and worship".

As creator and Sovereign of the Universe, God has the right to demand exclusive worship. To an infinite God there is no such thing as a fence sitter. Humanity either serves Him or serves Satan, there is no middle ground.

To finite man, however, there is a fence and he is firmly impaled upon it. "Human desire is to manage our own lives; we are hesitant to release control because we might face unexpected demands or unpleasantness". To serve God completely is to give up control and management of our lives, so man keeps one foot on either side of the fence and convinces himself that he is in control.

Indecision is dangerous:

- It is devastatingly destructive and can be deadly:
 - We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run over.
 - To the unbeliever indecision can cost eternity.
 - To the believer indecision can be costly - Through indecision opportunity is often lost - opportunity for growth, fellowship, service, and reward.
- It is repugnant to God:
 - **1 Revelation 3:15-17** - "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."
 - **James 4:4** - "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

- It is highly contagious:
 - Indecision feeds upon itself and it is habit-forming. Not only that, it is contagious; it transmits itself to others. (H. A. Hopf)
 - Your influence is negative or positive, never neutral.
 - **Romans 14:7** - "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself."

This is how we find the Children of Israel in 1 Kings 18. They wanted the blessings of God and they wanted to worship as they pleased, live life as they pleased in the service of God or otherwise. As a nation, the Children of Israel had convinced themselves that they were the chosen of God regardless of their actions. They were fence sitters.

By contrast, Elijah stood in direct opposition to the leadership of Ahab and Jezebel. On top of Mt. Carmel, He confronts Israel and he calls them to move off center and to decide whom they will serve. Through Elijah, the nation of Israel was brought face to face with the unconditional loyalty that is required of God.

This passage has two clear applications:

- The contest on Mt. Carmel was not for unbelievers, but for the chosen people of God.
- God will not allow fence-sitting among His professed believers.

As with the Israelites of old, Christians today have been set apart by God.

- **1 Peter 2:9** - "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Not only are His people to be holy, but they are to be an example to the rest of the world of the blessings that come to those who do not have divided loyalties. Christians should stick out. They should be obviously different.

But in 2016, many Christians are stuck on the fence and have divided loyalties. "They worship Me with their mouths, but their hearts are far from me". To be fully loyal to Christ is risky and might require something that most are unwilling to give up – full surrender of the will.

Some of you may be thinking how legalistic and uninformed and simply "not with it" I sound.

Being set apart and holy are directives from God. They are not my words nor are they my interpretation of the passage. The words are very clear. It is not legalistic for God to expect obedience and loyalty from His followers. If you are a member of Lions Club or Boy Scouts, there are certain requirements and codes of conduct for membership. How come that's okay? How come we think nothing of keeping human creeds and requirements, but its legalistic if those requirements come from God??

Now here is something amazing about the grace of God. He knows that we cannot be successful on our own – we are all sinners and while our fences may be different – we are equally powerless to do anything about them and sometimes we don't even want to do anything about them. Our fences feel kind of good sometimes, so God provided Holy Spirit power to transform us from fence sitters to devoted followers.

Suddenly we can be authentic and transparent people. We can share our triumphs and failures without fear of gossip or finger pointing. We can encourage and support each other. There is accountability. We love and are loved.

That is the Gospel – the power of transformation. We have the privilege and responsibility to get off our fences and tell the world WHO He is and what He HAS PROMISED TO DO in their lives.

Don't be a fence sitter!!