
Jesus, He is God! (1 Kings 18:16-45)

5/14/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Two men went out into the woods late one winter. Ned wanted to show Phil his favorite hunting spot. Along the way, the two men had to cross two frozen rivers.

When they came to the first river, Ned walked confidently over the ice. Phil timidly followed. Suddenly, Phil heard the ice crack. He stopped and started backing slowly toward the shore. Ned laughed and said, "Calm down, Phil! That's just the ice settling. It'll hold us. No problem." Phil watched Ned cross the ice and then followed carefully. Both men made it across and continued their walk.

When they came to the second river, Ned again confidently walked over the ice. Phil had gained a little more confidence this time and followed more closely. Suddenly, there was another crack, even louder than before! Phil turned right around and got back to shore. Ned laughed again. "Calm down, Phil! I told you, that's just the ice settling. It'll hold us. No problem." Immediately at Ned's next step, his foot went right through the ice and the rest of him with it!

Let me ask you, what did Ned do wrong? It was the same man. He had the same trust, or we could say, the same faith that the ice would hold him! Why did he fall through? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? The strength of his faith didn't matter too much. What did matter was the object of his faith. He trusted the ice to hold him, but it could not do what he trusted it to do, so he fell through.

Today, as we take a closer look at 1 Kings 18, we see that religious faith is not too different from trusting that the ice on a frozen river is going to hold you up. The most vital factor is not how strongly you believe, but what it is that you believe. If you trust something untrustworthy, you're better off having doubts like Phil did. Today, our God turns our hearts back and proves to us that Jesus is the Truth, the Way, and the Life. In our sermon, we will look at two essential truths. 1) Faith needs a trustworthy object and 2) Christ is trustworthy. Today, we shout along with the Israelites, "Jesus, He is God!"

1) Faith needs a trustworthy object. We saw that was very much the case with Ned and Phil crossing the frozen rivers, right? Faith needs to have a base in reality. It's true, but it's not a very popular truth, is it? If there is a truth, that means a lot of people are wrong. How many of us like to hear that we are wrong about something? Finding the truth means recognizing that we are wrong! I remember someone telling me that all of us spend 99% of our lives believing that we are right, because as soon as we find out we are wrong, we change and believe the truth. No one likes to believe a lie, but at the same time it hurts to find out that we have been believing a lie. Sometimes, it's just more comfortable to keep believing what we always have.

Here's what I mean. How many people actively seek out honest feedback on how they are doing at their jobs, or as parents, or even as just human beings? If you've ever had to tell someone that what they are doing is wrong, you know how hard it is to be honest with that person. You

probably hesitated to speak to the person because you knew that they would not want to hear the truth. You knew that the truth would hurt.

A philosopher once said, “You can really come up with some wonderful theories until you have to deal with all those pesky facts.” In 1 Kings 18, we first see King Ahab call Elijah a troubler. Ahab saw Elijah as troublesome because Elijah pointed out those pesky facts to people. Elijah told people about their sin. Elijah told people that they were walking away from God and that they would be punished for it. No one liked to hear that. They wanted to believe they were good people who were walking with God. They wanted that wonderful theory. They did not want to hear those pesky facts. So, to Ahab and the people of Israel, Elijah was a troublemaker!

But who was the real troublemaker? Wasn't it Ahab? Sure, Ahab made people feel good by his idolatrous ways, but he was leading people to hell through that! Ahab was showing people how to enjoy a long and fulfilling life on earth, but at the same time he was leading people straight to eternity in hell. In the end, didn't Ahab's wonderful theory bring far more trouble to Israel than Elijah's pesky facts?

It's still true today, isn't it? The world doesn't like the idea of Jesus being the *only* Way, the *only* Truth, and the *only* Life. So they don't like us teaching that. The world wants there to be many ways to heaven. But that wonderful theory ignores the pesky fact that it leads people to hell.

Don't get me wrong though. We point to Jesus as the Truth, not ourselves. We are not always right. In fact, that's essentially what we just confessed at the beginning of our service. By acknowledging that we have disobeyed God, we are saying that, when we follow our own way, we are always wrong. If we were always right, we would have no need to listen to God's Word to find out the truth. If we think ourselves to always be right, we show that we love living in our own wonderful theories just as much as the sinful world around us.

Back to 1 Kings 18, we see Elijah condemn the Israelites for “wavering between two opinions.” The Israelites wanted to worship both God *AND* Baal. In their minds, they weren't abandoning God, they were just incorporating the great ideas from the world around them too. They didn't want to be stuck in the past. They wanted to be cutting edge like the rest of the world, so they worshipped both God and Baal. But in the end, they truly had abandoned God, even though their wonderful theory said they were still following him.

Did you notice that Elijah had to repair the altar of God which was in ruins? If they were still following God, why did God's altar lay destroyed? God's altar was in ruins because the Israelites were no longer following the true God, no matter what they thought. What they thought of as mixing was actually a total denial of the true God.

That's still true for us today. If we mix Christianity with anything, we totally abandon Christ. So many people today try to follow “Christianity *AND*...” People try to mix Christianity

AND their political views. People try to mix Christianity AND one specific law like Christianity AND helping the poor or Christianity AND genuineness or Christianity AND church attendance. People try to mix Christianity AND worldly success. But that is not Christianity. In all those things, the “AND” becomes far more important than the Christianity.

“Christianity AND...” cannot save us, because our real problem is not the other side of the political spectrum. Our real problem is not a lack of charity, is not hypocrisy, is not the people who aren’t coming to church. And our problem is not earthly suffering. Our real problem is our own sin which separates us from God and earns us eternity in hell. And nothing can fix that problem except the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Only Jesus can fix the true problem. That is why anything mixed with Christianity is not trustworthy. Only Christ can deliver on what we truly need.

Back in 1 Kings 18, did you notice how sincerely the prophets of Baal believed in their god? Could these prophets of Baal have been more sincere or focused? They prayed to Baal from morning till evening. Most of us get upset if a church service goes longer than an hour. The prophets of Baal danced around the altar and shouted loudly to their god. Most of us aren’t even comfortable talking about spiritual things at all. The prophets of Baal even cut themselves till their blood flowed. Most of us see coming to one church service a week as a little much and don’t even talk to me about giving money for an offering or more time at Bible study or to serve my fellow believers!

The sincerity of the prophets of Baal, frankly, puts us to shame, doesn’t it? However, the sincerity of their beliefs got them nowhere, because faith only works if the object of that faith can deliver. Which brings us to our second point today:

2) Jesus is trustworthy. God proved the truth in Elijah’s day by answering with fire and he proves the truth in our day by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

Think about that. Human history is something every person shares. Human history is true for all of us. World War 1 happened, no matter who you are or where you live. A Roman Empire rose and fell, no matter who you are or where you live. Those things are history. They actually happened.

And history tells us, that a certain man named Jesus appeared in a land called Israel. This Jesus went around teachings and doing things that rocked the very foundation of what most people believed. Jesus claimed to be God. Jesus claimed that *he* was *the* Truth and that no one could come to God the Father except through him.

When Jesus was asked to give proof that his claims were legitimate, Jesus said, “Kill me and in three days I will come back to life.” Do you see what Jesus just did there? He just gave the entire world license to completely ignore anything he ever did or said, provided Jesus stays in that tomb. We could even go as far as to say that the world could ignore Jesus if he happens to come to

life either on the 2nd or 4th day or any day other than the 3rd day! Can you imagine anyone putting that kind of test forward as proof of what they are teaching? That would be madness! But Jesus did it. And he proved it!

Think about it! Christianity started with the claim that all other religions are false, and that was just as unpopular back then as it is today. Then the leader of Christianity, Jesus, gets himself publicly and shamefully put to death in the most humiliating of ways: by dying on a cross. How does a religion with such a humble beginning become one of the most influential religions in human history?

Think about it! The people who were tasked with spreading Christianity, Jesus' disciples: what kind of people were they? Read through the gospels and how would you describe them? They are cowards. When Jesus is arrested, they all abandon Jesus. Of those who actually follow Jesus, one of them, Peter denies that he even knew Jesus 3 times so that he doesn't get into trouble! After Jesus died, they hid themselves in a locked room, still terrified that they would be arrested too.

But then read through Acts. How does that book describe those same disciples? Suddenly, they are heroes! They even rejoice at being able to suffer for telling people about Jesus. These weren't superhuman people. They were just like you and me. They felt pain. They feared suffering. It was serious to them to realize that telling people about Jesus put them in danger of jail, torture, and even death. It was serious to them to realize that their loved ones and anyone who believed what they said about Jesus coming back to life would also be in danger of jail, torture, and death. They had every reason to doubt what they had seen. They had every reason to keep quiet about Jesus. But they didn't!

Why did they keep talking? Why did no one prove the disciples' message false by simply going to Jesus' tomb and showing people the dead body? Why is there even a Christian religion at all? Because Jesus actually came to life.

Dear friends, today we saw that faith needs a trustworthy object and Jesus is trustworthy. Jesus' resurrection truly happened. His resurrection is proof positive that our faith has a solid foundation. Our sins are truly forgiven because Jesus lives. One day we will be raised to life again because Jesus lives. Soon, we will be in heaven with our God because Jesus lives. Today we, like the Israelites proclaim the Truth: Jesus, He is God! We proclaim the Way: Jesus, He is God! We proclaim the Life: Jesus, He is God! Amen.