

HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." I Kings 18:21.

This text is taken from a story of one of the most majestic, dramatic, memorable and striking scenes of the Old Testament. The story presents a dramatic contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. This contest furnished the basis for an appeal to the friends and the enemies of God, and appeal which is suited to any people anywhere. It emphasizes the solemn fact that no one can afford to be undecided about religious matters.

One day an unexpected visitor appeared at the court of Ahab. He was as unwelcome as he was unexpected for he rebuked the king and told him that there would be no rain except at his word. Trying and terrible days followed his disappearance. The gardens all withered. The fields became parched. The fountains dried up. Summer turned into winter, and there was neither spring rain nor autumn rain. Winter turned into summer and still no rain came. Great fear began to haunt the people. They wondered if it would ever rain again. Desolation and death stalked abroad. King Ahab had a feeling that the drought was due to Elijah's prayers, and he would have laid murderous hands on him if he could have found him. He sought the prophet on whom he blamed the whole tragic situation, but his search had been in vain. Meanwhile all the prophet's words continued to come true.

After three years and a half Elijah came back. He told Obadiah to inform Ahab of his arrival. When he received this information, Ahab's eyes flashed and his cheeks glowed with rage. At length Ahab and Elijah met. When the king came into the presence of the prophet, he asked in indignation, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" The prophet answered sternly, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." Conscious guilt sealed the lips of Ahab. Not a word could he utter.

Elijah challenged Ahab to summon all Israel, as well as all the prophets of Baal and of the groves to Mount Carmel. Not knowing the purpose of this great convocation which Elijah sought but hoping that some benefit would result therefrom, Ahab gathered them all together at Mount Carmel. It must have been an interesting scene to observe all of the people and the 850 prophets gathered at Mount Carmel. Foremost and paramount in that overwhelming array confronting the prophet was the queen, Jezebel, who, by her wiles had seduced the king and the people alike. It was, indeed, Elijah against the world, the flesh and the devil.

This is one of the most wonderful pictures in human history. On the one hand there stands the great crowd of the Israelites. In the center stands the prophet. Elijah towers aloft on this occasion in the dauntlessness of his courage and the simple but majestic grandeur of his loyalty to God. We see the fearless man of God standing alone in the presence of that thronging mass, facing the fiery wrath of the leaders and the passionate fury of the mob--their savage shouts, their brutal jeers and their murderous threats--and yet unawed. Even though as his eyes traveled over that vast concourse they sought in vain an answering glance of sympathy. He stood there in all the holy calm and confidence of a humble faith in God. God alone was with him, but to the prophet that meant everything.

By faith Elijah faced that excited mass of men, maddened by those who had represented him as the author of the drought which was affecting their land. The prophet stood there undaunted by all of the fierce-eyed priests and the angry people who knew that his presence had held back the rain. There they stood with their blades and knives ready to put him to death. He very definitely challenged them saying, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, follow him."

What most impresses us as we read these words is their downright common-sense. The prophet is not affirming anything. He is not saying Jehovah is God, or that Baal is God. He is making a practical proposition, and enjoining to a common-sense line of conduct. If Jehovah is God, then follow Him; if He is not God, do not follow Him. If Baal is God, then follow him; if he is not God, then do not follow him. Whoever is God should be followed.

Elijah said to the people, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God; follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." The people apparently sought to play safe, so they worshipped both God and Baal. Elijah said in effect, there cannot be two gods who have the supreme power, so end this foolish attempt to serve two gods. The people knew that their actions were ridiculous and in their hearts they agreed with him, but so debased had they become through fear of Ahab and Jezebel that they would not speak. But Elijah said, "Why halt between two opinions? Believe something! Stand somewhere!" That is the challenge, and it comes to us across the ages.

Elijah here draws a sharp distinction between God and the gods. There is only one true God. There can be no reconciliation between the true God and rival claims and interests. In Scripture everything is clean cut, the thinking is clear, the teaching is unmistakable--righteousness and unrighteousness; light and darkness; right and wrong; truth and error; heaven and hell; God and the gods; Christ and Satan; the upward way and the downward way. There cannot be any reconciliation between these. They are eternally antagonistic. Men may halt between them, but they cannot combine them. There is an absolute necessity that we choose as between the true and the false. Choice is not optional, but obligatory. No man can serve two masters, but every man must serve one.

This challenge of the prophet called for a decision as to the truth itself. "If the Lord be God" was the first point on which the people were to satisfy themselves. So long as there was any uncertainty there would necessarily be indecision, vacillation and feebleness everywhere. He claimed to be the God. Besides Him there could be no other. He was not one who could divide His glory or allow His honor to be given to another. He was God, and the gods of the nation were but idols. It was for the nation to recognize His claim. Neutrality, compromise or hesitation were not allowable. It was for them to say whether Jehovah was their God, and whether or not they would follow Him.

Most of the people who were before Elijah thought that Jehovah was God, and that Baal was god too, and that for this reason the worship of both was quite consistent. The great mass of them did not reject the God of their fathers entirely, nor did they bow before Baal wholly, but they thought that both Gods might be worshiped and each of them have a share in their hearts. Because God rejects in its entirety all worship or service which does not exalt Him as supreme in the heart, Elijah in a spirit of the most scathing rebuke condemned their unmanly and unwavering conduct.

People today sin in a similar manner to what they did in the time of Elijah. They are trying to serve two masters. They are trying to serve Christ and Satan. They are compromising the service of God with the allurements of the world. They mix the ointment of the Lord with the sinful perfumes of the world. They want just enough Christianity to insure their arrival in heaven, but they do not want enough to keep them from any worldly pleasures in this life.

Note how the prophet rebukes the dilatoriness of the people: "Why halt ye between two opinions?" He calls their attention to the absurdity of such an attitude. "Halt" literally means to hop or to limp. He was talking to people who were trying to walk on one leg, and making a poor out of it. They went, first of all, on one support and said, "We will worship the Lord;" then they went on another support, and said, "We will worship Baal." So he looked at the people of the Lord who for the first time in their history had begun

to worship a false god, Baal, and he said, "How long are ye going to hop on first one leg and then on the other?" Whole-heartedness one way or the other is what others can respect.

What does it mean to halt between two opinions? It means to sway first one way and then the other, to stand first on one foot and then on the other, to look first this way and then that way, to hop like a bird from this bough to that, and back and forth. The prophet says, "How absurd! Don't you have any convictions? Don't you have any intelligence? Don't you have any judgment? Can't you make up your mind? Can't you stand somewhere and be something?" A literal translation of the text would be, "How long go ye limping between the two sides?"

Having drawn this great distinction between God and the gods, and having rebuked the dilatoriness of the people with reference to it, the prophet called for immediate decision in the light of the facts.

Indecision with reference to one's relationship to God is unreasonable. Because He created us and has sustained us, it is unreasonable to ignore Him. Indecision in this realm is sinful and dangerous. It is an insult to God. It is unmanly. It is attended with a sense of shame. It never brings peace of conscience. It never produces enjoyment. It is perilous. It is injurious to others. It is displeasing and dishonoring to God.

With all the earnestness of my soul, I appeal to you nonChristians to cease your limping between the two sides and to accept Christ as your personal Saviour now. I appeal to your intelligence. I appeal to your conscience. I appeal to your common-sense. I appeal to your better judgment. I appeal to your longing for a higher and better life. I appeal to your unsatisfied souls.

Your acceptance of Christ now is a matter of supreme importance. The Lord has the first claim on you by virtue of creation, preservation and redemption. There is no middle ground. You are on one side or the other. If you are on Satan's side, it is right, best and safe for you to accept Christ as your Saviour and line up on the Lord's side. If you have any interest in your personal welfare, you will not delay this all-important matter.

You cannot afford to procrastinate. You have life now, but you certainly have no promise of it for tomorrow. While you are hopping, hesitating, halting or limping along the way destiny may overtake you and settle the matter for you. So, do not wait any longer. You have already waited for years. How many more sermons do you want to hear preached before you trust Christ? How many more opportunities do you want before you decide to accept Christ and be saved? You alone are responsible to God for what you do with His Son, the only Saviour, and this is the time for you to say what that will be. Take Christ as your personal Saviour now.