The Crossroads

It was an unforgettable meeting that became the prelude to an epic showdown.

- The old, fierce, prophet of God squared off with the evil, wicked, ruler of Israel.
  - Ahab had long desired the day when he would be able to lay his hands upon Elijah.
    - He had sent out the decree to every nation and kindred and people
      - that if they were hiding Elijah or assisting him in any way they would face his wrath.
  - His searchers and man-hunters had scoured the kingdom,
    - beating the bushes and searching high and low for the wily old prophet.
    - But they couldn’t lay their hands on God’s anointed man.
  - There were times when they thought they had him cornered,
    - there were times when they were sure that they had caught him,
      - but the spirit of God would whisk him away to safety.
  - Their best efforts would come up empty handed as they pursued a prophet who seemed to vanish like a vapor into the air.
    - He was there and then he was gone.
      - Elusive.
      - Untouchable.
      - Protected by God’s own hand.

- That’s what made this meeting so special.
  - Elijah had requested it and promised that he would meet with Ahab.

- All the might of the kingdom could not corral and produce this one frail prophet
  - but now, in a move that must have added insult to injury,
    - Elijah sends the king an invitation to a meeting.

When they met that day, in 1 King 18, they represented two extremes.

- On the one hand there was Ahab, the depraved ruler of a backslidden nation.
  - He was the worst of a long string of evil kings.
    - Way back in the very beginning, when God established the nation of Israel and brought them into the Promised Land,
      - He warned them of the dangers of conforming to the wickedness of that land.
    - Before they ever crossed into that land,
      - God carefully instructed them not to serve the many idol gods of Canaan
        - but to remain true to the one faithful God of their father Abraham.
  - Later, as they conquered and divided the land,
• Joshua would warn, before his death, that if they united with the ungodly people of Canaan and adapted to their false religions, they would perish.
  • Ultimately, the people of God faltered.
  o Much of the Promised Land was never conquered.
    • By the time of the judges the people began to mix and mingle with the original inhabitants of the land
      • and to serve the foreign gods that had been long worshipped at the altars of Canaan.
  o What began as a small sin of omission in failing to completely subdue the land of Canaan
    • became the downfall of the children of Abraham as they turned to the pursuit of idol gods and the worship of false deities.

Throughout the history of Israel, the problem is amplified.
• After Saul, David and Solomon depart their thrones,
  o a succession of mostly evil kings leads the nation further and further away from God
    • until, finally, Ahab and his ruthless spouse, Jezebel, ascended to the throne.
• Of all the evil, wicked rulers that sought to pervert the ways of God and mire the nation in pagan worship,
  o none could begin to compare to this terrible duo.
• Ahab, aided by his cruel spouse, was an exceptionally malicious ruler.
  o As a matter of fact, the scriptures give him the distinction of being the worst of a long line of bad kings.
    • 1 Kings 16:30 says that Ahab, “did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.”
    • Verse 33 amplifies that charge stating that “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.”

Even as Ahab and Jezebel were removing the last vestiges of godliness from the nation that was chosen by God as his holy people,
• God raised up a man to stand against the onslaught of wickedness and perversion.
  o That man was Elijah, the Tishbite.
• Elijah was God’s response to the tide of evil that was ushered in by Ahab.
  o Over the course of the next several years, Elijah would be a divinely placed thorn in the side of Ahab.
• Time and time again he would perform miracles and speak divine oracles directed at the king, his queen and the backslidden nation.
  o He was God’s instrument, divinely anointed and divinely protected.
Ahab would have liked nothing more than to destroy that pesky prophet just like he had crushed so many others before him.

- You’ve got to understand that Elijah wasn’t the only prophet of God in that day and time, but the rest were hiding in caves for fear of their lives.
  - Ahab, in his cruelty, had cowed down the rest of God’s prophets.
- But Elijah was a man appointed by God for this specific purpose
  - and, though he despaired for his life, at times, he would never back down from the evil king.

Elijah, under the anointing of God’s anointing, launched a fearless campaign to stamp out the idolatry that had established itself in the nation of Israel.

- In a bold, brave, demonstration of unwavering loyalty and faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Elijah defied the evil king.
  - In an unprecedented move, he commanded the heavens to hold back the rain
    - and a severe draught and famine descended on the land.
- That drought set the stage for the showdown as it brought the conflict between the maniacal king and the holy God into focus.
  - Israel was approaching a significant crossroads,
    - and God, through the instrument of Elijah was stirring his people from spiritual apathy,
      - causing them to become aware of the ongoing conflict and the brewing storm.
- Finally, God directed Elijah to confront the reprobate king, face to face.
  - So, with the assistance of a reluctant servant of God named Obadiah, he arranged the meeting that would lead to the showdown.

It was a rendezvous between the most evil king in the history of Israel and the most famous and dramatic of all of the prophets of God.

- It was a meeting that would shape the course of a nation.
  - An indignant prophet confronted an angry king as the two squared off with eyes blazing and tempers aroused.
- Like David and Goliath of old, who hurled insults at one another before the battle, Elijah and Ahab engaged in an exchange of heated rhetoric.
  - Ahab, in 1 Kings 18:17 accused Elijah of being the one who “troubleth Israel.”
    - It is clear that Ahab, feeling the effects of the drought induced famine across his kingdom,
      - is blaming the judgments of God upon the one who pronounced the judgments.
- You see, up until this time Ahab has been able to defeat and subdue all of his enemies.
  - He has the mighty armies, he has the financial support, he is king of a great nation and no adversary can defeat him.
But Elijah, and God, have struck him where he is defenseless.

- How do you wage war with a drought?
  - What good are armies in the face of a famine?
    - Indeed, Elijah has troubled Ahab, he has robbed his armies of their strength and shown that his false deities are unable to help him.

But, the charge that Ahab brought against Elijah was much deeper than a personal vendetta.

- When he accused the prophet of being the one who “troubled Israel” he used language that hearkened back to the valley of Achor
  - where Achan and his whole family were stoned to death after the defeat at Ai.
- The Hebrew word that is used by Ahab is a relatively rare verb that is used twice in Judges
  - to describe the atrocity that Achan has brought upon Israel by his sin.
- What Ahab is saying is that the three years of drought and famine that have befallen Israel are Elijah’s fault,
  - as if he is morally responsible for what is happening.
    - Ahab, has been so perverted and twisted by evil that he now sees righteousness as sin and sin as righteousness.
- Elijah, anointed of God in righteous indignation, proclaimed the judgment of God,
  - which results in the drought, and famine that has stricken the land
  - but he has done so because of the vile wickedness of Ahab
  - and the idolatry and worship of false gods that has permeated the nation of Israel.
- The trouble, as it were, is the result of Ahab’s sin and his sinful leadership of Israel.
  - But he has so lost his sense of right and wrong, until he has convinced himself that wrong is right and right is wrong.
- In his mind all of the troubles of Israel are the fault of this one stubborn, unyielding, old prophet who refuses to go with the flow!

Sin and unrighteousness has a pervasive effect on the very thought process.

- The ultimate end of rebellion against God is that one eventually begins to see wrong as right and right as wrong.
  - Consider where we are as a culture right now.
    - In our culture certain kinds of sin are exalted and the tolerance of things that are an abomination to God are seen as good and righteous.
  - But to speak out against such things, to declare sin to be sin, is seen as evil and unrighteous.
As a nation we are on the verge of limiting the freedom of speech to such a point that it would become a crime to preach against certain sins from behind the pulpit.
  o Right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right.

Sin has the same effect on us individually.
  o When you begin to become calloused to sin,
    ▪ when you begin to develop a level of tolerance for certain kinds of wrong,
      • it begins to affect your thinking.
  o Sin has the same effect on us individually.
    ▪ When you begin to become calloused to sin,
      ▪ when you begin to develop a level of tolerance for certain kinds of wrong,
        • it begins to affect your thinking.

Slowly but surely a process of moral erosion occurs where you begin to see those things that are wrong as if they were right
  o and those things that are right as if they were wrong.
  ▪ Unrighteousness is a dangerous thing.

When you consistently immerse yourself in unrighteousness it has much deeper impact on your soul than you ever realize.
  o That’s why James is so adamant in James 4:4 when he declares that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God...”
    ▪ He goes a step further and says that whoever “will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

Elijah quickly answers Ahab’s charge, establishing the truth.
  • He says, in 1 Kings 18:18, “I have not troubled Israel,” but you have.
    o When you abandoned the commandments of God and turned to the alters of Baal, he said, you brought trouble to Israel.
      ▪ This is all your fault, you and your father’s house.
  • Then he issues the challenge.
    o This is why God brought him on the scene.
      ▪ This challenge is exactly why God has dried up the heavens for three long years.
  • Elijah tells Ahab, in verse 19,
    o “Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table.”
  • Get your boys together and meet me on the mountain because the time has come for Israel to choose between right and wrong,
    o between sin and righteousness.
      ▪ For way too long Israel had been riding the fence of indecision and compromise.
      ▪ They were God’s chosen people, they had a rich heritage, they were the children of Abraham, whom God called out of Ur of the Chaldees.
        • They were a nation of promise, a people of heavenly potential.
        • But they had become mired in sin and compromise.
It had become easy and even fashionable to compromise with the strange gods of Canaan.

- It was profitable to them socially to just get along with the other inhabitants of their promised land,
  - the inhabitants that their forefathers failed to remove from the land way back at the beginning.
- Joshua warned the nation of Israel way back at the beginning of the dangers of allowing these false Gods to coexist with them.
  - But they thought they knew better.
    - They thought he was being intolerant and unnecessarily strict.
    - So they compromised.
- That first generation of compromisers could never anticipate how far their error would carry their descendants away from the presence of God.
  - By the time that Ahab rose to power, Israel had arrived at a historic crossroads.
    - It was time for them to make a choice.
      - Would they serve God?
      - Or would they serve Baal?
    - Their future was hanging in the balance.
- God anointed Elijah to oppose Ahab for this very purpose –
  - It was time to cause the people of God to make a choice between righteousness and sin.
    - It had gone too far.
- They could no longer act as if they were worshipping the God of Abraham while they were busy chasing after the gods of the Canaanites.
- A person can only halt for so long between two opinions,
  - eventually he must choose one and forsake the other.
- God recognized the place where Israel was as a nation and called them to make a choice.

As they gathered on the mountain, Elijah made a heartfelt appeal to all of Israel.

- Hearkening back to language that was very familiar to them he echoed the sentiments of both Moses and Joshua as he asked, in 1 Kings 18:21,
  - “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.”
    - In other words, this business about standing with one foot in Baal’s kingdom and one foot in God’s kingdom is getting old.
      - Make up your mind!
      - Choose you this day!
      - Who will you serve?
    - If God is God then serve God and forsake the idol gods of Canaan!
- It was a call for an immediate decision.
  - It was a challenge to make a choice.
    - Will you live for God or not?
- Some of you have balanced for way too long on the precipice of a decision.
It is time to make up your mind!

- Will you live for God or will you follow after the ways of the world.
- Will you press on into the newness of life that God has prepared for you
  * or will you go back and pick up the things that you abandoned at an altar of repentance and return to your former life?

A choice MUST be made.

- You can’t live forever in between sin and righteousness.

Isaiah declared in his 55th chapter and 6th verse: Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

- Isaiah understood what Elijah understood.
  * It’s a truth that needs to grip our hearts tonight.
    * God will not always strive with mankind.

- He is patient and he is merciful, but there are limits to both his patience and his mercy.
  - None of us is promised another opportunity to experience his mercy, beyond the calling that we feel right here and right now.

- That’s why Paul declared in II Corinthians 6:2 that today, right now, is the day of salvation!
  - There is urgency to the choice!
    * We need to recognize that we stand at a crossroads and a decision must be made.

The end of verse 21 is revelatory:

- “And the people answered him not a word.”
  - Elijah’s stirring call was answered with silence.

- They tarried between two choices.
  - They halted between two opinions and they were not willing to give voice to a choice.

- There were likely two things happening at this point.
  - On the one hand they may have been searching their hearts
    * as the penetrating gaze and convicting words of the prophet cut through the charade that they had thought that they were so good at maintaining.
  - On the other hand they were likely weighing the odds,
    * trying to decide which side was about to win the coming showdown.
  - On one side there were 850 prophets of Baal,
    * on the other side there was only the man of God.
      * Things didn’t look so good for Elijah.
  - No doubt there was an element of fear that froze their voices in their throats.
    * To stand with Elijah now might very well result in a massacre at the hands of the prophets of Baal.
I believe that the silence marked a sort of “wait and see” attitude on the part of Israel.
  • The conviction of God had stirred them to the point that they weren’t sure they wanted to side with Ahab and the prophets of Baal,
    ▪ but the overwhelming odds frightened them to the point that they weren’t sure they wanted to side with Elijah either.
    • So they would sit back and wait for God to prove himself.

God isn’t afraid of a test.
• He was more than willing to prove himself.
  o Elijah gave every advantage to the false prophets.
    ▪ They would choose between the two bulls first,
    • they would build their altar first,
    • they would have the most time and the most opportunity.
  o But, even with those odds, Elijah wasn’t worried.
    ▪ There can be only one God and Elijah knew who He was.
    • He knew, from the start, that the contest was rigged.
  o Baal was powerless, he would never be able to meet the challenge.
• When noon came and the prophets of Baal still hadn’t called down fire from heaven, Elijah began to mock them.
  o He suggested that Baal was asleep, or maybe he was on vacation.
    ▪ This only served to further provoke the prophets of Baal.
    • They danced all the harder, they cut themselves with knives, they prophesied with loud voices.
    • All the way to the time of the evening sacrifice, but nothing happened.
• Finally, Elijah commanded the attention of the crowd and admonished them to draw near and pay attention.
  o He carefully built again an altar that had been there before.
    ▪ Gathering together 12 smooth stones, he built it just like the law demanded.
    • He prepared the sacrifice, the bull and the wood were placed on the altar.
• Three times he demanded that the whole thing be thoroughly soaked with water.
  o With everything in place, Elijah stepped back and prayed a simple prayer (18:36-37):
    ▪ Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.
    ▪ Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.
The results were instantaneous and spectacular.
- Fire fell from heaven and devoured the entire altar:
  - the sacrifice, the wood, the stones of the altar,
    - and it even licked up the water that had pooled in a trench around the altar.
- That demonstration of the power of God was all that was needed to break the spell of silence and indecision that had gripped Israel.
  - In the midst of that amazing display of the raw power of God, they made their decision.
    - All of a sudden, the odds didn’t matter anymore.
    - All of a sudden the pull of the world wasn’t so strong any more.
    - All of a sudden they found their voice and lifted it to heaven declaring (18:39):
      - *The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.*
- It was a start, a step in the right direction, as God pulled his people away from the very brink of destruction.

Tonight, I come to this pulpit with a simple but needed admonition.
- It is just as easy today as it was back then for believers to live their lives at the crossroads of indecision.
  - But there exists a great and real danger that the longer you spend hovering between two decisions
    - the further your sense of righteousness and morality is impacted.
  - Tarry too long in such a place and you will begin to see wrong as right and right as wrong.
    - It high time that we made a choice:
      - That we determined to live for God above all else.
      - It is high time that broke free from the world’s influence,
        - that we began to discard those subtle changes to our sense of righteousness and morality.
  - I lift my voice and join it with Elijah of old as I ask, How long?
    - How long will you stand between two choices?
      - How long will you keep one foot in the kingdom of God and one foot in the world?
    - Choose you this day, whom will you serve?
      - Light and dark have no fellowship with one another.
      - Righteousness and unrighteousness have nothing in common.
    - It is high time that we stirred ourselves.
      - It high time that we made a choice.

CLOSE

There will be an apostolic church in Lake City.
• There will be a distinctively apostolic, righteous, moral and godly people that know how to pray and know how to touch heaven.
  o There will be a place where the power of God meets with the people of God.
    ▪ Where every chain of bondage can be broken,
      • where deliverance can be found,
      • where a mighty God makes a way where there seems to be no way.
  o And we will be that people!
• Let us determine.
  o Let us choose this day.
    ▪ Let us make a spiritual proclamation that will stir the heavens and shake the foundations of hell!
  o We will serve God.
    ▪ We will seek righteousness and godliness.
      • Let us seek Him.
        o Let us pursue His face.
    ▪ Let us turn our hearts to Him!