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Between Two Opinions

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Series: Living Legends - Part 3

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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When two teams reach the Super Bowl, it is almost as if the men on those teams have spent their entire lives preparing for one afternoon. All of their dreams, all of the years of pain, and anguish, and preparation, and defeat have finally led up to the one great moment every young athlete dreams of, but few actually attain.

As that concert pianist walks on stage at Carnegie Hall and hears the applause of the crowd prior to his or her first great performance, it is as though he or she has spent an entire lifetime becoming equipped for this one great moment in time. All of those hours of practicing, all of those sacrifices that virtually made that person a slave to their profession now is either worth it all, or it isn't.

Those who achieve great heights in this life normally spend half a lifetime in the depths preparing for it. And only those who possess the determination, the character, and the natural skills that set the few apart from the many make the grade.

So many try to make their spiritual lives the exception. It is the norm of the hour in which we live to seek "shortcuts" to maturity, and to find "secrets" no one else knows about to bypass the disciplined road to greatness in the spiritual realm. We try to ignore the call to holiness, the demand for faithfulness, and the need for deep trials and testings to purge from us the dross, so the pure gold of the nature of God can take over our lives and make us usable. We seek "special experiences", "quick fixes" that will make us spiritual giants without having to pay the price our predecessors paid for greatness. We want the mountaintops without the valleys, the "highs" without the "lows", the diploma without the education.

We would all like to be Moses without the forty years in the wilderness. We would all like to be Abraham without the wait for Isaac. We would all like to be Joseph without the stint in the well, the misunderstanding in the palace, and the tour of duty in the

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prison. We can all envision ourselves as Elijah on Mount Carmel, as long as we don't have to sit by any drying brooks, or live in any widow's upper room. We want the hour of power without the periods of preparation. It won't work for an athlete, a musician, or a Christian.

Today we come to the part in the story of our living legend, Elijah, where we see just what it is God's been sending him to school for. It's graduation time. It's Super Bowl Sunday. It's the day of the big concert at Carnegie Hall. We'll see why God had him stand before Ahab; why God sent him far, far away to no-man's land to be fed by a raven, and why God took the most faithful prophet He had and invested his time in a little town called Zarephath, seeing that a widow and her son had dinner. And we'll see that in Elijah's life, as in yours and mine; the years we thought were wasted were nothing of the sort. The tasks that seemed so redundant were necessary. The incidents that seemed so trivial were vital. The tests that seemed so painful were crucial. It's all been part of an intricate, wonderful plan, woven by the same incredible Hand that fashioned us in our mother's womb, and scheduled each day of our lives, even before we were born.

And so we approach the big moment in the life of our hero. The title for today's study, found in I Kings 18 is: Between Two Opinions. Our outline:

- I- God's Kind of Timing (1-15)
- II- God's Kind of Odds (16-19)
 - A- The Accusation (17)
 - B- The Issue (18)
 - C- The Odds (19)
- III- God's Kind of Choice (20-21)
 - A- The Conclave at Carmel (19-20)
 - B- The Question of the Ages (21)
 - C- The Silence of Indecision (21)

When last we visited our legend, his somewhat boring stay in an upper room suddenly became a crisis in the emergency room. Just when all seemed to be peaceful and quiet, the widow's son took deathly ill and appeared to have died. The widow, frantic and distraught, blamed Elijah. She blamed Elijah for taking her son, and accused Elijah of simply trying to bring her own sins to remembrance. Our hero didn't even bother to answer the accusations. He grabbed the boy, raced to his upper room, laid

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the boy on his bed, and began to pray. That, of course, was what God had been waiting for. God heard, the boy revived, and the widow believed. And so closed another most unusual chapter in the life of this most unusual man.

The scene now shifts in God's biographical account of Elijah's life. He has packed his backpack, loaded his gear, bid his farewells in Zarephath, and taken to the road again. And as he is traveling to his next destination, God, as always, has prepared everything necessary to make it happen. Let's tune in, shall we, as the next chapter unfolds in the Living Legend of Elijah. We resume our reading at the beginning of chapter 18 of I Kings. There we read these words:

Now it came about after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the Earth."

So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria.

And Ahab called Obadiah who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly;

For it came about, when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water.)

Then Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys; perhaps we will find grass and keep the horses and mules alive, and not have to kill some of the cattle."

So they divided the land between them to survey it; Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went another way by himself. (I Kings 18:1-6 NASB)

I- GOD'S KIND OF TIMING

We need to pause, now, at this point in the story, to examine what is happening. The Holy Spirit initiates this new phase of the prophet's life with the phrase, "Now it came about after many days". This seems to indicate, then, that a good bit of time has passed, both since the beginning of the drought, and since the last event described in Elijah's biography. Time, you see, is essential to the plan of God. God cannot simply stack events, one on the other, in our lives, and accomplish His purposes. It

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is the s-t-r-e-t-c-h of time, and it is the precision of His timing, that brings about God's best in us and for us. It is the heavenly parentheses in our lives where nothing seems to be happening that ultimately give God the time He needs to sandpaper our character and develop His likeness in us.

So, when you read a phrase like "after many days", assume that the "many days" are just as important in the scheme of things as the last and next events recorded. Many days means many prayers. Many days means much contemplation. Much waiting. Much need for patience. Much need for faith. And those are the things God is after. No doubt Elijah, like so many of us, must have awakened morning after morning and whispered to God, "Today, Lord? We've been here a long time, Lord, and you've fed that woman, fed her son, saved her son's life; she's believed. Don't you think, Lord, it's time to leave?" And day after day, the same reply. Silence. God wasn't ignoring His man. He was perfecting His man. So He said nothing. Until now. But now, after many days, God spoke at last to Elijah and said, "Now Elijah, it's moving time again, This is the day you've been waiting for; this is the day you've been groomed for. Pack up, Elijah, your life has run full cycle. This all began with Ahab. Let's go back to him, now, and have another chat."

You see, it has been more than three years since Elijah first spoke to the king and gave him his somewhat arid weather forecast. Three years. That's over a thousand days. That's over twenty-five thousand hours. Thousands of people have suffered. Many, no doubt, have died...just as that widow was about to do before God intervened. Virtually every body of water in the area was now but a hollow canyon of parched soil, cracked and dry. And by now, Ahab had reached the stage of desperation. No doubt at the outset he thought he would use his creativity to make the best of a bad situation. Now there was no hope left unless this God of Elijah's intervened. So every man in the CIA, the FBI, and the Sheriff's Department had been dispatched to look for this man, Elijah, but to no avail. It was as though he had evaporated, just like those clouds that would have brought forth rain.

Now it is time. God is sending Elijah to Ahab, and round two of the confrontation between this evil king and this godly prophet is about to unfold. Meanwhile, back at the palace, King Ahab is embarking on a last ditch effort to find a drop or two of H₂O. He calls on the one godly man in his cabinet, a man named Obadiah,

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and the two of them split up, each by himself, and go their own way, looking for at least enough water to feed a cow or two.

It was as Obadiah was making his fruitless search for moisture that he came, by divine appointment, upon the one man in the world everyone was looking for, the only one who could change the weather charts on the six o'clock news. Now Obadiah worked for Ahab, but Obadiah was a believer, a courageous believer, at that. For when that wicked queen, Jezebel, decided to do away with all the prophets of God, it was "Obie" who took 100 of them and hid them in two caves, 50 in each. So, needless to say, he was glad to see Elijah. Here's the scenario as it unfolds.

Now as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him, and he recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is this you, Elijah, my master?"

And he said to him, "It is I. Go, say to your master, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" (I Kings 18:7,8 NASB)

At this point, Elijah got an argument. Obadiah feared that as soon as he told his boss that the rainmaker had reappeared, Elijah would do the vapor trick again and vanish, leaving no one but Obie to bear the brunt of Ahab's anger. But in verse 15, Elijah finally convinces Obie that he really would appear to Ahab. It reads like this:

And Elijah said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today."

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

And it came about, when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said to him, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?"

And he said, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have followed the Baals.

Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

(I Kings 18:15-19 NASB)

II- GOD'S KIND OF ODDS

So we have introduced now a couple of new characters in the story. The first is Obadiah, the king's servant who is a believer, who hesitantly is going to announce to the king that Elijah

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has been found. This is not the prophet Obadiah that we read about later in Scripture. In fact, there are 12 Obadiah's in the Old Testament. This one, however, deserves a special place in Hebrew hearts because he held a very key position in the enemy's household, all the while secretly protecting the servants of the real King, Jehovah God. Obadiah's name means "servant of Yahweh", and he was one, indeed.

The other new face on the scene belongs to a woman named Jezebel. We'll be hearing a great deal more about her as Elijah's life progresses (or digresses as the case may be). In a classic case of unequal yoking, King Ahab has married this woman, the daughter of the priest-king of Tyre and Sidon, in order to ratify a treaty between the two nations. She has been granted the privilege of continuing to worship her native god, Baal. To that end, she has created a staff of no less than 450 of Baal's prophets, plus 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah. She is constantly threatened by the presence of God, and thus her incredible movement to eliminate all the prophets of God, as though by doing that, she could eliminate God Himself. At any rate, those are the new players on the scene, as High Noon approaches, and Elijah approaches Ahab for the first time in over three years.

The Accusation

Ahab takes the offensive this time. "Is that you, you troublemaker?" the vicious monarch begins. In other words, "Look, there's the guy who stole all our water so the babies can't bathe, and the horses can't drink, and the peasants can't live." That was Ahab's line. Elijah was hardly intimidated.

The Issue

Elijah answered without batting an eye. "I'm not the troublemaker, King Kong; you are. And the problem's not the water supply. The absence of water is the *symptom*. The cause is the fact that you and your father and this nation have forsaken the commandments of the Lord God, and thanks to your pagan wife, you've led the whole country in Satan worship. The issue is spiritual. The issue is a matter between you and God." (It usually is.) God wanted to get the king's attention and the nation's attention, so, just as He did with that widow, He had to take from them for a season something they thought they had to have, so He could give them something they really had to have...a relationship with Himself. Elijah quickly walked through Ahab's

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smokescreen, where God had been made the villain for allowing unpleasant circumstances, and tore to the heart of the matter, which was Ahab's allowing pagan worship.

The Odds

It's time, then, for Elijah to demonstrate to this wretched monarch and his destructive wife just who God is. In order to do that, God has to once again, create "GKOO". "GKOO" stands for "God's Kind of Odds". God's kind of odds involves giving the world such an advantage that the only way God's people could possibly succeed is through the hand of an omnipotent God, who would then receive the Glory. For given any room at all, we have a way of stealing God's Glory, and giving Him credit for "helping", rather than recognizing our utter, complete dependence on Him. That's why, when the circumstances in your life get utterly impossible, and there is absolutely, positively, from a human perspective, no way out...Beloved, then it's time to jump up and down and shout for joy. You've just encountered "GKOO"; God's kind of odds. And when God gets you there, and you've no place else to turn...hang on to your hats. The Eternal God of the Ages, the Great I AM, the Alpha and the Omega is about to move into your life and declare Himself to Be God.

In the case of Elijah, God's kind of odds were 850 to one. He invited all of Jezebel's "Court of Satanic Priests" to come and stand before the people, and try their powers against one lonely prophet of God. They couldn't say, "If only Benny had been there." If Benny belonged to Baal, Benny was invited to come. It was reminiscent of other days in God's scheme of things, when Jehovah adjusted the odds until they were so preposterously impossible, no one could argue with the outcome. As with Abraham and Isaac. As with Gideon. Now the odds had been adjusted in Baal's favor so overwhelmingly, that no one could find an out if things came out God's way.

III- GOD'S KIND OF CHOICE

Try to visualize this scene, if you can. Here were 850 pagan prophets and prophetesses at Mount Carmel upon the personal invitation of the one lonely prophet of God who had brought about this horrendous change in the weather. Here was the culprit responsible for the absence of rain, standing before all the enemies of his God. Listen now, to his bashful challenge:

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So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel, and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

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. (I Kings 18:20,21 NASB)

Conclave at Carmel

The die is cast. Now you may be like me. I hate confrontation. I would rather postpone the inevitable than face up to times of traumatic conflict. It's a bad characteristic, and it's not true of God. Throughout the Scriptures, whenever there is a conflict between God's best and compromise, *at the proper time* (and that's important), God always forces a confrontation. The conclave at Carmel stands out as one of the most incredible examples of that truth in Scripture. Never has God more boldly challenged Satan face to face before all the people than He does in this scene. There will be no room left for doubt or compromise. There will be no hiding from the real truth. God's man stands before Satan's host and challenges them to a head to head showdown. It is high noon, indeed.

The Question of the Ages

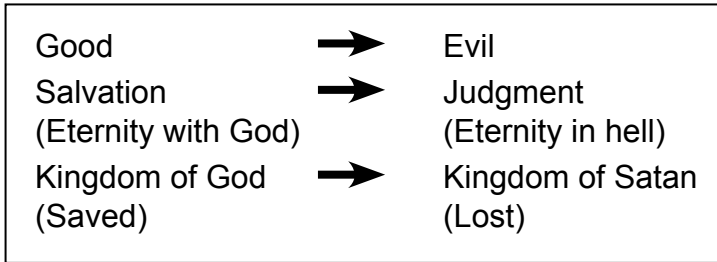
Elijah, taking advantage immediately of his captive audience, proceeds to ask the question of the ages. The question of the ages is this: "How long can you vacillate between two worlds? If the Lord is God, then follow Him. Obediently follow Him. Consistently follow Him. Faithfully follow Him. If He is not, then Satan is...so follow him." Someone is in charge of the spirit world that dominates this universe, and it has to be either Satan or God. There is no third choice of neutrality where spiritual things are concerned. Either God is God, and He demands our total allegiance; or Satan is god. And there is no use pretending to be a believer, if we do not believe in the one who claims to own us. That, in utter simplicity, is the question that man must be asked in any generation. "Is God who He claims to be?" If so, we have no choice but to follow Him, to give our life to Him, to give our life *for* Him, if need be.

But if we claim to be Christians, but cannot honestly take our place on the witness stand of eternity and testify to a skeptical world that God is, then we are the worst of hypocrites. We are trying to claim the best of both worlds. And we are fools, indeed.

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Elijah's question is a haunting one. What the prophet was saying was, "There is no middle ground in spiritual matters." It has a two-fold significance. First, contrary to what the world's philosophers and the world's theologians may say, there are no "probably saved Christians". There are no "sort of redeemed saints". There are no "neither fish nor fowl" spirit beings. This diagram illustrates this, one of the simplest, yet perhaps most profound truths in all of Scripture:

No "gray" area between:



In other words, every man or woman who has ever lived, will live, or is living, has had, does have, or will have only two choices regarding eternity. They either receive the person of Jesus Christ and are restored to fellowship with God, or they reject Christ, either by refusal or neglect, and spend eternity in hell, in torment, eternally separated from the Person of God. There simply are no people anywhere who are in-between. There is no one anywhere who is "too good for hell". "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6). Man has always rejected that truth. It is too narrow for the natural mind. But it is Divine Truth, and it is immutable; it cannot change.

If you have never received Christ into your life, but consider that a holy God is simply too good to send anyone to hell, Beloved, I would remind you that a Holy God cannot lie. And He has promised, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (I John 5:12). That's clear enough. Elijah is speaking to you today. He is saying, "How long can you vacillate between two opinions. If God is who He claims to be, then follow Him. If not, then admit to yourself and to the world, that you are a follower of Baal, or Satan." For there is no one anywhere, who is not following either one or the other.

But Elijah was addressing a second group as well. To those

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Jewish believers gathered at Mount Carmel that day (and to us), I believe Elijah had an even more profound message. It was this: “How can you call yourself a child of God and waver back and forth in your commitment to your God? If God is God, then follow Him. No turning back. No compromises. No half-hearted hypocrisy. If God is who He claims to be, then why in the world would you be anything less than totally sold out to His Word; totally yielded to His Will; and totally committed to His ministry? If God be God, then serve Him. Live for Him. Love for Him. If need be, die for Him. (Even as He died for you.)”

We live in a world of half-hearted, lukewarm Christians. Most of us help make up that world. It is actually popular in our day to profess to following Christ, so the deep decision making processes that surface when one’s faith is under fire to stand firm are not found in our midst. We don’t have to decide to either stand for Christ or die. Declaring our faith does not earmark us for prison, or for persecution, or for death. But that does not mean that God requires any less of us. It does not mean that God expects any less of us. Having freedom to declare our faith, indeed God has a right to expect more of us.

Some of us know that our commitment to Christ has gradually cooled to the point of compromise. It is to us, as individuals, and to the Body of Christ as a whole, that Elijah speaks this day. He says clearly: “How long will you vacillate between two lifestyles. If God is God, then live for Him. If not, then declare yourself to belong to Satan. That is your choice.”

The Silence of Indecision

The people refused to answer Elijah. They thought that silence meant neutrality. It didn’t. It still doesn’t. Silence means you remain as you were. If you are standing by the roadside lost, and a friend stops in his car and asks you if you want a ride, you have two choices; either get in or stay out. By refusing to get in the car, you don’t remain neutral. You stay in your lost condition, while the one person who could have saved you drives away, grieved at your indecision.

How long will you vacillate between two opinions? Not long, I hope. If you are an unbeliever, the silence of indecision is, in the ears of God, a resounding “No”—no to salvation; no to eternal life; no to a life of love and peace and hope. It is also a “Yes”. It is a yes to hell and suffering and grief and pain.

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As believers, we cannot straddle the fence. To do so is an affront to God. The living legend of Elijah is speaking to us today, calling us to renew our first love, calling us to return to the wonder and excitement and commitment that so characterized our walk with Christ when we first met the Savior. How long can we waver between two opinions?

Not one second longer.

For Further Application

1- Make a list of the three people in Scripture you admire most. Now list the training steps God took them through to prepare them for their ultimate ministry. What similarities do you find?

2- List three major confrontations in Scripture where God's people stood face to face with the enemy and triumphed. How did God adjust the odds in each case to better glorify His Name?

3- Why do you think time is so essential in God's plan? How has God used those parentheses in your life? Have you thanked Him for it?

4- Using a Bible Dictionary or other study help, do a study of the life of Jezebel. Why have we come to associate the name with evil? Why did she so hate Elijah?

5- How can you explain to an unbeliever, in practical terms, that there are no "neither saved nor lost" people? Do you have Scriptures memorized to validate that principle? Ask God to sensitize you to the reality that everyone you meet is either born again, or lost and on their way to hell.

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