

1 Kings 18:21

Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sam Hardy. I'm a member of CCH. My wife Sarah and I were part of the plant team that started CCH. You'll also see our children James, Elizabeth and Rebecca around.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we look at this passage may you give us wisdom and guide us. Please give us wisdom as we seek your will. May you illuminate to us the meaning of this passage and how it applies to each of us today. Amen.

Every day we make hundreds of decisions. What to wear, what to eat, what to watch on TV. Some decisions matter and others don't. But, once in a while, we face a decision that changes everything. It is one of those decisions that faces the Israelites in today's verse.

Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

As we look today at this verse, we too will grapple with this decision. Who will you follow? It is my contention that you should follow Jesus, my Lord and Saviour and, I pray, also yours. If you do not yet declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead¹, you will see today the critical importance of this question to you. I will urge you to examine the evidence and decide. *If the Lord is God, follow him.* If you proclaim Christ, you will be encouraged to do so not only with your words but also with your deeds. Do not waver between speaking of Christ and acting in sinful ways. Instead, persevere in running the race set before us², loving God, serving God, and keeping God's commandments³. *If the Lord is God, follow him.*

I would like to turn first to those who are not yet following Jesus. Perhaps you are here as a guest. Perhaps you have attended church for a long time but in your heart have not yet turned to Jesus. Perhaps you are a young person coming here with your parents but yet to decide for yourself. Thank you, all of you, for being here. For giving us your time this morning to look together at this most important question.

So let me put that question, from Elijah, to you directly. *How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.* You must get off the fence! You need to decide whether you will accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour or continue to reject him. And do not think that just ignoring the question is not rejecting him. Imagine you were single and walked up to a nice man or woman in a pub and asked them for a drink. They just don't reply. Perhaps they didn't hear, so you ask again. They don't reply again. I think it's clear to all of us this is a rejection! In the same way, God has put to you a question – will you accept Jesus? You must accept or reject him. There is no third way.

Don't get too hung up on the phrasing of the question in the passage as a choice between two deities. For you, you might be weighing God against another deity or against no god at all. The question for you today is whether you will follow God.

¹ Romans 10:9

² Hebrews 12:1

³ Deuteronomy 10:12-13

This is an enormously important question. The Bible teaches us that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God⁴. For justice to be done, those who do wrong must be punished. And the just punishment for our sin is death, not only death in this life but an eternal death⁵, what we call Hell. But there is an escape from this. Because God so loves the world that he gave his only Son, who willingly sacrificed his life on the cross, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life⁶. If this is true, the only way to move from eternal torment to everlasting joy is to follow Jesus. What more important question could there be?

I hope now you see the importance and urgency of this question. So how should you resolve it? How do you decide? Am I asking you to make a blind leap into the dark? No, I am not (though if you did, you would find at the end of that jump God's safe, warm, loving embrace to catch you). Instead, I ask you to do what God asked the ancient Israelites assembled at Mount Carmel to do – look at the evidence.

On Mount Carmel, God demonstrated that he is the true god, and Baal was false. Despite hours of performance from hundreds of followers, the sacrifice to Baal remained unlit. But God brought fire to a dripping wet sacrifice in response to one prayer. The evidence was clear. You too must examine the evidence in front of you.

You might say to me “This is unfair. If I saw a miracle like that, I would believe.” But would you? Many people in Jesus' time saw his miracles and walked away rather than following. Perhaps you would not believe, but would just think it an impressive magic trick – or a con job.

So instead of theorising on that, examine the evidence we have. Lakes of ink have been split on outlining this, so I'm not going to try and take you through it in 5 minutes. If you want to look into it in detail I'd suggest starting with 'The Case for Christ' by Lee Strobel, his account of the evidence which moved him from atheist to believer. It's also a compelling read! Instead of giving you a poor summary of a lot of facts, I'll share with you my story.

I have not always been a Christian. In fact, I used to be a very strong atheist. I was such a strong atheist that I was not content to just reject God myself. Instead, I would actively argue for and try to persuade people of atheism. One of my good friends from my college, who had many of these discussions with me, persuaded me to go along to a course looking at the Bible. She knew just how to get me there, saying that if I really believed what I said I should not be worried about discussing things with people who really knew what they were talking about. Over a period of months, as I looked at the evidence, I came to see that the best explanation of the evidence is that Jesus died and rose again. And if he did rise again – something we know people cannot do! – then he must be God as he claimed. And if the Lord is God, I must follow him. And so, in 2015, I became a Christian.

I was convinced by this. Perhaps something else will persuade you, but look at the evidence.

What we feel does not override the truth. And so if the evidence points to God we should follow that however we feel about it. But we are fortunate. Because coming to God is not a grudging acceptance of the facts but a joyful return to our father. The Gospel is wonderful news! It is the news that, regardless

⁴ Romans 3:23

⁵ Revelation 20:13

⁶ John 3:16

of what we have done, we can find forgiveness and be welcomed into the loving arms of our Father, to spend eternity in paradise. What wonderful news!

So if you are as yet undecided on following Jesus, I urge you – do not dither! People who stand in the middle of the road for too long get run over. You are a person made in God's image and loved by Him. His desire is for your salvation not your destruction. So do not waver between two choices. Look at the evidence and decide. And *If the Lord is God, follow him*.

For those of us who believe, this verse also confronts us. Let us remind ourselves of Elijah's question. *How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him*. What does it mean for a Christian to waver between God and not-God? Are we not firmly God's people? For believers, to waver means this – to move between words that confess Christ and actions that deny him. Does our life align with our belief? The Israelites in this passage were also God's people, but they did not follow Him. We are God's people, but do we follow Him? Do we embrace God as our Lord as well as our Saviour? Perhaps these days Baal is not a tempting alternative. But consider what it meant at the time. Worship of Baal offered the Israelites approval from the powerful, tradition, and a direct connection to their felt needs (for favourable weather and fertility (in the agricultural and human senses)⁷. Might we perhaps be led away from God towards something offering these things? Do we bow before the ungodly workplace policy where compliance brings approval from leadership? Or perhaps it is Mammon (the sin of greed) that tempts us more today? Our 'not-god' may have changed, but we still risk wavering.

Whatever the alternative, we are challenged in this verse. Stop wavering back and forth between God and not-god. God is very clear with us that he takes half-heartedness seriously. In Revelation 3, the church in Laodicea is warned "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."⁸ We do not want to be spat out of God's mouth because of our wavering. Get off the fence and wholeheartedly commit to God!

And we understand in human terms too that words and actions should align. Think of a marriage. I'm married to Sarah. I love her very much, and we are covenantally bound until one of us dies. But if I say these things while drinking away the mortgage money, ignoring her or mistreating her, would you really believe that I do love her? Our actions should follow our words. And so, in our actions, *If the Lord is God, follow him*.

Therefore, the principle of this verse is clear – commit fully to God. Do not flit between prioritising God and living in other ways, but put God first. What does that mean practically for us?

Some practical applications are just as clear as the principle. Are you coming regularly on a Sunday to spend time with God, worshipping him as part of the body of believers? Are you regularly attending a life group? Are you serving regularly? Or do you miss these things for non-shift work that you could do at another time, or to play sport, or to socialise? We should organise our life around our relationship with God, not our relationship with God around our life. We can be inspired here by the famous

⁷ Davis, Dale Ralph, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly* (Christian Focus Publications Ltd 2025), p. 232

⁸ Revelation 3:15-16

example of runner Eric Liddell, who refused to compete at the Olympics in his best event (and various other races for which he was selected) because it would have required him to race on a Sunday⁹.

Other practical applications of the principle of full commitment to God are matters of wisdom where faithful Christians can reach different conclusions. There is a range of permissible approaches to how you manage your finances, order your household, or educate your children (although of course some approaches are not permissible). So, the question I ask you here is not what you decide, but how you decide it. Do you seek God's will then start to make choices, or do secular principles drive your decisions (even if you subsequently rationalise them from the Bible)? I believe that, in calling us not to waver between God and not-god, this verse is calling us to first seek God's will, not the way of the world, and order our life according to our Lord. Only God knows whether you, in your heart, are putting him first in these decisions. But challenge yourself on that point – are you putting God first? And know that our hearts can deceive even ourselves, so actively grapple with these questions with other faithful believers as we seek to sharpen each other¹⁰.

Further, it should go without saying that we must turn from sin. Where we find sin in ourselves we must put it to death¹¹, or we will die¹².

We might fear that, in prioritising God, we undermine ourselves. We might fear that we will miss out on what is good because we are prioritising God over what we (in our fallen state) want to do. If that was the case, it would still be right and what is due to God, ruler of all. But it is not the case! God wants what is good for us¹³. He is loving, merciful and compassionate. Jesus is the servant king, not a grasping king. Yes, sometimes we may have to give up what is fun and pleasurable. But this is like the athlete who sacrifices their temporary desire for chicken nuggets and sitting on the couch and is rewarded with a gold medal victory¹⁴. In following God we will ultimately find what is good.

All this said, our salvation is not through how we follow God. We all sin¹⁵ and rely on Jesus for our salvation¹⁶. But this reassurance should not dissuade us from seeking to follow God. It is not a licence to waver. Everyone who has truly turned to Jesus will seek to follow in God's ways. And so, while comforted and encouraged by God's grace and mercy, we should also take seriously God's commands to conform our actions to our faith¹⁷. Faith without deeds is dead¹⁸. *If the Lord is God, follow him.*

So what have we seen today. Whatever our relationship with God, we have been urged to stop wavering between God and not-god, and to commit to God. If you are not yet a believer, this means not delaying or dithering but coming swiftly to a decision on Jesus. If you would like to talk that through with an elder or with me as you look at the evidence, we would be delighted to help you. If you are a Christian, then

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/jan/04/50-stunning-olympic-moments-eric-liddell>

¹⁰ Proverbs 27:17

¹¹ Colossians 3:5

¹² Romans 8:13

¹³ Matthew 7:9-11

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:25

¹⁵ 1 John 1:8

¹⁶ John 2:1

¹⁷ James 2:14-26

¹⁸ James 2:26

stop wavering between a mouth which proclaims God and actions which deny Him. Bring those actions into line with our faith. For all of us, *If the Lord is God, follow him*.

As you reflect on living this out, I will leave you with a question to consider. I encourage you to discuss this with someone as you enjoy the tea and biscuits afterwards.

If you are not a Christian, this is your question. Why have I not turned to Jesus?

And if you are a Christian, consider this. What is the most important area of life where I am wavering between following God and following secular principles?

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for the clarity of your word, that unmistakably calls us to follow you. Thank you for the evidence that points to you, that you ask for well-founded trust not a blind leap. Please give wisdom to all who investigate this and seek you, and all who assist them. And please, through the aid of the Spirit in each believer, help all of us to conform our lives more closely to your will. Lord, you are God; help us follow you. Amen.