

Let God Be God.

Text: 1 Kings 18:36-45

1) People lost sight of God

Suggested Hymns:

2) Let God be God

449, 164, 304, 442, 802LSB

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Kings 18:36–45, ³⁶ *And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.*

³⁷ *Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.”* ³⁸ *Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.*

³⁹ *Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!”* ⁴⁰ *And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.*

⁴¹ *Then Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.”* ⁴² *So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees,* ⁴³ *and said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” So he went up and looked, and said, “There is nothing.” And seven times he said, “Go again.”*

⁴⁴ *Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!” So he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’”*

⁴⁵ *Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

If you were to stand on a busy street corner and take a poll of every person passing by, asking each a very simple question: “*What is God like?*” about half of the people would not be able to tell you who God is. The rest would give you a variety of answers.

To some people God is a sort of Grand Old Man who is so meek and mild that He will sanction almost anything. As one Sunday school child is reported to have said: “*God is a very old gentleman who lives in heaven.*” This is an image of a god who is soft and easy-going, who is not so strict about sin, who really will not carry out His threats against people who do wrong and only the most desperate acts of men provoke His anger.

In the minds of some other people God is a sort of Managing Director of the affairs of the world. Since God has so many things to look after in this vast universe, He cannot have much concern for puny little individuals like you and me.

It is like being the president of a large university with an enrolment of thousands of students. In such a vast student body the president cannot learn to know all of them, and he gets to know very few of them personally. So he runs his school by remote control — through staff, and by telephone and newsletters. So how can God be concerned about one individual person?

Another opinion of God is very common — that God is a haven of refuge, but hardly anything more. When they have a problem they cannot solve, such people run to God and try to push their problem off on God because they do not have the courage to shoulder it.

They are like the child who runs to his father for help, not to seek the father’s solution, but merely to get rid of the problem. People who use God only as a haven of refuge want to use God to suit their own convenience. Whenever you are in trouble, God is supposed to help you out of it the way you want it.

In the opinion of many other people God is simply a vague symbol of something hard to define. The universe and the works of creation do testify to a

being that is endowed with great power and might. So God is called by some vague term like the Supreme Architect of the Universe, but He remains impersonal and unidentifiable, more like an unfocused blur in the universe.

The theme for today is *“Let God be God.”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. People Lost Sight Of God

In the land of Israel, during the days of King Ahab, the people had lost sight of God. King Ahab had promoted the false worship of the heathen idol Baal, and together with his wicked wife Jezebel he had been successful in killing all the prophets and priests of the true God with the exception of Elijah.

At the time referred to in 1 Kings 18, Elijah seemed to be the only prophet of the Lord remaining in all Israel. In 1 Kings 16:33 we read: *“Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”*

For this reason God’s wrath was kindled against Ahab. God caused the rains to stop, and there was a severe drought for a period of about three years. As a result there were no harvests, soon there was a shortage of food, and there was a famine throughout all Israel.

The time had come for a showdown. Under God’s direction and by the command of Elijah, Ahab ordered all Israel to assemble at Mount Carmel on a certain day. This order was carried out. On the appointed day all Israel, including King Ahab himself, appeared at Carmel. Included in this vast multitude were also 450 priests of the heathen god Baal.

Then Elijah, addressing the multitude, told them, as we read in 1 Kings 18:21, *“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”*

Elijah requests that two sacrifices of bullocks be prepared, the one by the prophets of Baal, the other by Elijah. He then explains the test, *“you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.”* To this all the people gave consent.

And now, on the morning of this day, the 450 priests of Baal began to pray to Baal to reveal himself by fire. At noon they were still praying, *“O Baal, hear*

us;” but there was no answer. Then the priests began to cry more loudly, they cut themselves with knives so that the blood ran freely; but even at three o’clock in the afternoon no reply had been made by Baal.

Then Elijah asked the people to watch carefully while he built an altar of 12 stones, placed on the altar the wood and the bullock, cut in pieces, and around the altar dug a trench. Finally 12 barrels of water were poured over the bullock and the wood so that the trench was filled with water.

Then Elijah prayed: *“LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel. ... Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God.”*

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!”

2. Let God Be God

What Elijah in effect said to the people of Israel was: *“Let God be God!”* What God wants us to learn today is “Let God be God!”

The psalm writer says in Psalm 29:2, *² Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name.* Likewise we read in Psalm 96:4, *⁴ For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.*

All other human opinions about God make God too small. Human notions about God try to cut God down to man’s size, to make a god who is indefinite and inadequate, unable to deal with the complex problems of man.

Let’s let God be God! The God we know as believers is much more than some vague Supreme Being. Our God is not small. He is the great God, who is eternal, who exists even from everlasting to everlasting. Psalm 90:4, *⁴ For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night.*

Our God is not “old-fashioned” or out of tune with this nuclear age. He is a God who is changeless, *“the same yesterday and today and forever.”¹*

Let God be God! Our God is not simply a “managing director” of the universe. Rather as we read in Hebrews 1:3 He is *upholding all things by the word of His power*.

God does not manage the affairs of the world by remote control. He is concerned about every single soul. 1 Timothy 2:4 tells us that God *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. God knows you and me as individuals — knows our past, our present, our future. Even the very hairs of our heads are known by our God in number.²

Let God be God! Our God is not a weak, spineless being who may threaten, but not carry out His threat. God demands that you and I be perfect beings as He is, and He threatens with punishment if we break His commandments. His threats are not idle words, but He backs up His threats with real punishment.

God rained fire and brimstone on the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because the people in them were so wicked.³ God destroyed all mankind except for eight people in the great flood because the people were wicked. And when God says to us in Ezekiel 18:20, *²⁰The soul who sins shall die*, He means it.

While our God is the great, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, unchangeable God, who rules and governs all things by the word of His power, we learn to know more about Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to earth to be the true Redeemer of man.

God did not leave the problem of sin unsolved for us. While it is true that God’s justice demands that sin be punished — and according to this justice you and I could not escape punishment — our God also reveals to us that He has given us the answer to the problem of our sins in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

For as we learn from 2 Corinthians 5:19, *that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself*. God has made Christ to be sin for us. By His work of redemption, Christ became our Sin-Bearer by taking our place in fulfilling all of God’s demands on us. Jesus made satisfaction for our sins so that God’s justice is satisfied and we are free from the punishment of sin.

All this God made possible for all people by sparing not His own Son but delivering Him up for us all. Here we see the depth of God's mercy, His deep love for all people, His desire to redeem the souls of all people.

Here in Christ is revealed a deep dimension of God's love which knows no bounds. Our God is not only a great Ruler and King; but He is also a God who desires our salvation, our present and future happiness.

All this God has not only revealed to us as a fact, but by His Holy Spirit He has convinced us that all these blessings are ours by faith in His promises. When you became a child of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, this was not a purely intellectual process. God stirred the lowest depths of your heart and soul.

This happened when you realised that God is not a God of hate, but a God of love, not a hard taskmaster but a loving Father, that His proof of love to you is in the person of Jesus Christ.

And when Jesus placed His own stamp of approval on that love by enduring poverty, shame, persecution, abuse, pain, death, and even hell, this also is proof that Christ is the eternal Son of God; this is the work of God in you.

When God made Himself known to Israel on Mount Carmel, He did it in a very spectacular way. When God first made Himself known to you, it may not have been so spectacular, but it was with equal force and power.

There is certainly a supernatural element in our conversion too, for we know that we cannot change ourselves; only by the power of God can we be changed. Only by God's power can our eyes be opened to the seriousness of sin; only by God's power can our heart be softened so that repentance can follow.

There are a number of ways in which many people try to reduce God to their own opinions of Him. But what about you? Do you let God be God? Or do you sometimes try to make something less of God than He really is?

Do you sometimes feel that God will close His eyes to your own wrongdoings? Do you ever feel that God may not really mean it when He says in Genesis 17:1, ***"I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be [perfect]."*** Do you ever feel that obedience to God might depend on the circumstances and conditions in which you find yourself — so that your obedience to Him is tempered by your surroundings more than by God's will itself?

Have you the kind of fear of disobeying God such as the men in the fiery furnace had, such as Joseph had when Potiphar's wife wanted to mislead him? Does the redeeming love of Christ make you feel that here is a debt which you cannot ever repay, that here is love which you do not deserve, which you cannot even begin to measure?

Let God be God! Let God be God in our worship! We read in Psalm 100:4, ***⁴ Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.***

Let us realise what a privilege it is for us to come together here in His house each Sunday to thank Him for His undeserved goodness, to praise Him for the forgiveness of our sins, to ask Him to strengthen us to live a life dedicated to His service.

Let us lead our children to see and to understand that God is God, yet that He is merciful and gracious through His Son Jesus Christ. Let us give to Him not only the worship of our lips, but especially the worship of our hearts and souls. Let us know and remember that without faith it is impossible to please God.⁴

Finally, let God be God also in our daily living! When we think about the affairs of the world, the insecurity which so many people feel in the relationship of nations toward one another, let us remember the words of Psalm 46:1-2, ***¹ God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.***

In our day-to-day living let us ask God to help us carry the burdens, the frustrations, and the disappointments of life! Remember our Saviour's invitation and promise in Matthew 11:28, ***²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*** knowing that with God's help we can go on through life with a song in our heart.

Though the godless people see only ruin and desolation ahead of them and wring their hands in helpless defeat, we as God's people know that God is still God, that He will be exalted among the heathen, that He will be exalted in all the earth.⁵

Let God be God in your service to Him and to His church! This means we must give our God more than lip service. If we want to let God be God in our life, then our love and devotion to Him must express itself in the sacrifices we bring to Him.

If God is to be a great God in my life, then I must be ready and willing to sacrifice my time, my ability, and also my treasure as proof of my gratitude and love for Him.

If I let God be God in my heart, then I will offer to Him the best of my income, the firstfruits, because my God deserves no less than the best. If I will let God be God, then I know that I cannot trifle with Him, for no man can trample God's blessings underfoot and get away with it.⁶ Let God be God in the management of your time, your ability, and your money!

Let God be God also in your witnessing! In your neighbourhood, in the company of people with whom you work, in your social life remember that the Lord God has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light in order that you may show forth His praises!

If God means to us what we say He does, then we will — and this means every one of us who claims to be His disciple — feel compelled to tell people everywhere, wherever we meet them as God gives us the opportunity, what joy and blessing and hope we experience as God's redeemed people.

We will tell people what Jesus means to us in our life, how grateful we are for the forgiveness of our sins, what a wonderful Saviour we have found! One way in which the greatness of God is made known to the heathen, one way by which God is exalted among the nations is through our personal witness to His greatness. By our witness people will know that we are the children of God, that God is God.

Our God is no small God. No man can reduce Him to anything less than He is. Our God is a great God. He has done great things in the world and still upholds all things. Our God has done great things for us — He has created, redeemed, sanctified us and still preserves us.

If we will follow Him according to His will, then we will give to God the glory due to His name in word, in deed, in worship, and in personal service. We will then let God be God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Heb. 13:8

² Matthew 10:30

³ Luke 17:29, Genesis 19:24

⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁵ Psa. 46:10

⁶ Deut. 8:18-19