

Title: THE CHALLENGE AND THE CHALLENGE, 1 KINGS 18:17-18.
(Chatham, NJ; 02/24/08, AM) [E – Four Pages outline]

Theme: In spite of persistent evil and idolatry, God accomplishes his plan for salvation.

Purpose: To encourage us to maintain our faithfulness to the Gospel, to believe that God is still at work in the affairs of the world, and to keep doing the work that he has called us to.

Page One: The Conflict.

- A. Elijah/Ahab = God and the world in conflict, 1 Kings 18:17-18.
 - 1. Ahab had lead Israel into more sin than his ancestors, 1 Kings 16:29-33.
 - 2. Elijah had prayed for the famine that was the present concern, 17:1.
 - 3. After three years when he and the king meet, the king blames him for the country's troubles.
 - 4. Elijah turns it back on him: he blames Ahab for causing Israel to plunge deeper and deeper into idolatry.
 - 5. The matter is settled on Mt. Carmel as to who is right. Notice especially 18:21. (Narrate the rest of the episode.)

- B. These were terrible times for Israel.
 - 1. Elijah prophesied during a period of apostasy.
 - 2. Like his most famous descendent, John the Baptist, his work sought to turn people back to God.
 - 3. His life was often in danger because of his stance. After Mt. Carmel Jezebel seeks to kill him.
 - 4. This poses a challenge for the faithful. How does one remain faithful during a time of immorality and godlessness without falling prey to its temptations?

Page Two: Where is the conflict for us?

- A. Is it Christians who are the troublemakers?
 - 1. Listening to some of the recent critics of Christianity they seem to think so.
 - 2. But we turn the tables on them and say it is because of immorality that the wrath of God comes, Ephesians 5:6.
 - 3. Paul even takes us a step further by suggesting that we expose their deeds, 11.
 - 4. We are not surprised that people lie about us, Mt. 5:11.

- B. Yet this conflict still raises the question of how we are to deal with it.
 - 1. Note the reaction of a couple whom Scott Bates was counseling when he suggested they stop living together until marriage.
 - 2. I had two similar experiences several years ago: one, the person ran out of the building livid that I would suggest such a thing; the second was a man who wanted to be baptized but when I told him that he would either have to marry the girl he was living with or stop living with her. He left and never came back.
 - 3. Note also the discussion on WPLJ about a report that rocker Lenny Kravitz has supposedly been celibate for the past three years. The DJs scoffed.
 - 4. But such is the culture we live in.
 - 5. Do we give up? Do we stand firm? Do we, like Elijah, think that we are the only ones left? Do we press on faithfully?

Page Three: The Good News in the story.

- A. Elijah needed some encouragement.
 1. When he runs from Jezebel, God comes to him on Mt. Sinai.
 2. Elijah feels alone and abandoned, 1 Kings 19:9-10 & 14.
 3. God gives him some jobs to do; he also reminds him that he shouldn't feel so self-righteous (18).
 4. Let's not forget that one of the servants of Ahab, Obadiah, has been hiding and feeding the prophets of the Lord while Elijah has been in exile in Sidon, 18:7ff.
 5. Essentially God tells Elijah to get back to work though he does so with a still, small voice (gently but firmly?).
 6. He won't allow Elijah to wallow in self-pity, nor will he allow him to feel that he is carrying the entire Kingdom on his back—he isn't the only faithful one left though he thinks he is.
 7. God refocuses Elijah's energy. Implied here is the fact that God is bigger than Elijah and that He is still at work.
 8. This is one of the reasons Elijah is instructed to anoint a successor to himself.

- B. Perhaps the church needs to be refocused.
 1. People will always wander off into myths and immorality. This is why Paul tells Timothy to preach the word in season and out, 2 Timothy 4:2.
 2. We keep preaching because there is power in the message despite its critics.
 3. Note the article that suggests that the ACLU has actually prompted some people to look more closely at the Intelligent Design challenge to Darwinian evolution. (*Salvo*, Winter '08, pp. 75-76, "Has ID Been Banned?")
 4. In John 11:45-52 the Apostle John has demonstrated that even when evil is intended that God makes it possible that good can result.

Page Four: The Bridge.

- Joseph, the son of Jacob, had been sold into slavery, but when he looked back on it he could see that God had done a good thing to save his family.
- The church should adopt the same attitude. We can be sure that God will do what it takes to care for and save us.
- This is a time to avoid the trap of self-pity. We can decide to be discouraged or we can decide to do whatever God calls us to do.
- This is a time to dust ourselves off and see what we can do to move forward—with God's help of course.
- This is a time to stand firm with the message that we possess. God is still at work.
- The Gospel is still a message of hope and victory.
- Though we go through periods when his ways are challenged and rejected, God's plan still marches on.
- Let us join him in the march and do whatever we can to be faithful to his plan.
- As Elijah's faith was challenged despite his victory over the Baals so too is our faith challenged by living in a world plunging headlong into immorality.
- Let us rise to the challenge of being faithful in the middle of such challenging times.
- God is in charge and his only Son is seated at his right hand.