

THE TROUBLE WITH US...IS ME!

Dowlan Road, August 9, 2009 AM

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Turn with me to **I Kings 18**.
 - 1. This chapter describes a meeting between two great adversaries.
 - a. The first is Ahab. Ahab was the king of Israel and arguably the most wicked king Israel ever had (**I Kings 16:30-33**). In fact we are told more about his reign than any other king of Israel in part because he epitomized the evil men who led Israel.
 - b. The second is Elijah. Elijah is the prophet of God. His job is to remind this wicked king of his sin and to announce God's judgments on the nation because of their evil. In fact, Elijah had announced the drought and famine from which the nation had suffered for three years leading up to this moment (**I Kings 17:1**).
 - 2. It's no surprise that Ahab hated Elijah. If he could have found him to kill him, he would have. In fact, Obadiah – the man Elijah uses to set up the meeting – is afraid to make the arrangements
- B. All of this helps to give us a sense of the drama when these two meet each other (**I Kings 18:16-17**).
 - 1. Ahab's opening statement is bizarre. Here is the wicked king who has disobeyed God, led his nation into idolatry and brought God's judgment upon them. Yet, he refers to Elijah as the "troubler of Israel."
 - 2. In reality, Ahab had brought trouble upon the nation. But his perception is so warped that he cannot see his own fault and actually believes that Elijah is the source of Israel's troubles. Under Ahab the nation would never turn from its evil because he could not see his fault.
- C. It's a sad story that will only get worse. And yet, there is a powerful lesson to be learned from the disposition of this wicked king – an evil attitude present that we need to avoid. Let's begin by making three observations about this wicked king and the corrupt thinking he displays on this occasion.

Three Observations

- A. Sometimes we act just like Ahab.
 - 1. This may be hard to accept because we find his attitude so bizarre. But sometimes we do the very thing that he does in this story. When we get into conflicts with others, we see only their faults and are completely blind to our own.
 - 2. For example, married couples do this all the time. How often does someone go to a friend or counselor and say, "My marriage is falling apart and it's all my fault. I'm not the husband/wife I should be. The trouble with us is me." People don't do this. They typically go in with a list of all the faults of their spouse and hope that the counselor will straighten them out. Worse yet, they are often blind to their own faults and get angry when anyone suggests that their behavior needs to change. They are closed to the possibility that the trouble with us may be ME!
 - 3. But the problem is not limited to married couples. We do this in other relationships. How many times have you seen two people get in a fuss that they never resolve because both have this attitude – the trouble with us is YOU!? Both are unwilling to see their fault. How many times have you seen someone complain about how unfriendly a congregation is, while they rush out the door and never greet a visitor?
 - 4. Sometimes we act just like Ahab!
- B. As long as we maintain this attitude, problems are never solved.
 - 1. Israel's situation would never improve under Ahab because he was unwilling to acknowledge his failure.
 - 2. But the same thing happens all the time in our relationships. Some marriages literally flounder for years because couples focus on the failures of the other and refuse to consider their own need to change. Brethren have conflicts and remain alienated for years because each focuses on what the other did wrong and will not even consider what they might do to repair things. Congregations continue to be unfriendly or neglect important work because no one is willing to say, "Maybe the trouble with us is me."
 - 3. This mindset which says – our problem is with you – becomes a barrier that prevents us from reaching true resolution.
- C. God has a better way to handle these kinds of problems in our relationships.
 - 1. But I will warn you in advance, it is radical! It requires a whole new way of looking at our problems with others.
 - a. Notice Elijah's words to Ahab (**I Kings 18:18**). Israel was suffering because of Ahab's failure. He had neglected the commands of God and led the nation into idolatry. The only way things would get better is for Ahab to take a long, hard look at himself, see his faults and take some steps to change himself. Things would not get better in Israel until this happened.
 - b. This same principle applies in our relationships. When facing a problem, I must stop focusing exclusively on the other person and their faults or failures. I must be willing to look at myself and see how I may be contributing to the problem. I must be willing to say, "Maybe the trouble with us...is me!" When I start trying to resolve problems, I must stop focusing on what the other guy needs to do. Instead, I need to focus on self and figure out what I can do to make the problem better.
 - 2. There is wisdom in this approach.
 - a. There is usually fault on both sides. There may be occasional exceptions – like this story from I Kings 18, but that is rare. When there is a conflict between two people, most of the time both people have some things to fix. And, if the problem is to be worked out, there will be things I have to do to make that happen, regardless of who is at fault.
 - b. I am the only person I can change. I cannot make the other guy do right. But I am in complete control of my actions and my behavior. No matter what anyone else does, I can make sure that I do right.
 - c. God expects me to do right. I'm obligated to be the right person and do the right things, no matter what the other guy does.
 - d. Working on self offers the best hope of repairing the relationship. People try other methods: hold grudges, ignore, gossip, nag, criticize. If you're trying one of those methods, let me ask, "How's that working for you?" Focusing on self and being the person I should be is a far more effective way to repair relationships.

Summary: God has a better way. Our challenge is to put this principle to work in the relationships where we struggle.

Three Applications

- A. When I struggle in my marriage...
1. I need to be willing to first say, "Maybe the trouble with us is me."
 - a. I need to start by looking for my own failures that have helped create the crisis. Really listening to your spouse will help.
 - b. I need to be searching for things I can say and do to begin making the situation better.
 2. Keep in mind that this isn't some counseling technique; it's what God commands us to do.
 - a. Consider Peter's instruction to wives (**1 Peter 3:1-2**). It is likely that Peter is speaking to a woman whose husband is not a Christian. Notice what he says about how she wins her husband. It is not with constant complaining about what a lousy spiritual leader he is. It is not with nagging about all the things he ought to be doing. It is not by gossiping to other women about how miserable she is in her marriage. She is to focus on herself – her character, her behavior. She is to become all that God wants her to be in this relationship. In this way she can win him without a word. If this principle applies when the husband is not a Christian, how much more would it apply when he is, but is disobeying God's instructions about marriage!
 - b. Consider also what Peter says to husbands (**1 Peter 3:7**). What if you're married to a woman who is disobedient to God's word; one who is negative and critical all the time; one that doesn't do any of the things God says wives should do? What should you do? The answer is not to complain to your friends or neglect your duties. I have to work hard at being the husband God calls me to be. I have to strive to understand her, perhaps identifying unmet needs in her life that help create problems in our marriage. I have to show her honor, whether she honors me or not.
 3. Some may wonder, what if I do my part and my spouse does not respond. First, I still have to do my thing because it is what God commands. Sinful actions on the part of someone else don't justify my sin. Second, remember that continuing to do that right thing is the best hope for my marriage. Letting my spouse's evil drag me down only makes things worse and hastens the process that will destroy the relationship.
 4. Some complain that this is too difficult. But Peter gives us all the incentive we need (**1 Peter 3:7**). I have to do this to be right with God. If I really want to solve the troubles that afflict my marriage, then I need to be open to the possibility that the trouble with us...is me.
- B. When I struggle with enemies...
1. I need to be willing to first say, "Maybe the trouble with us is me." When I have a conflict with someone, I need to honestly consider my words and actions that may have caused or contributed to our problem. One way to do this is to really listen to the other guy and not just defend yourself. I should consider what steps I need to take to make the situation better.
 2. This isn't just a technique; God tells us to do it (**Romans 12:17-21**).
 - a. Notice again that the focus is on me and my conduct. I need to be sure that I do not retaliate. I need to do everything I can to make peace. I should even find opportunities to do nice things for my enemy.
 - b. You will notice that he did not say to go gossip to everyone about your problem and avoid the person until they seek your forgiveness.
 - c. What Paul is describing is a person who is making sure that the trouble with us is not because of me. So many problems go unresolved because people are unwilling to do this.
- C. When I struggle with the congregation's failure to be friendly or evangelize...
1. I need to be willing to say first, "Maybe the trouble with us is me."
 - a. Perhaps the reason we aren't converting people is because I'm not doing much to reach out to me friends.
 - b. Perhaps the reason the congregation doesn't seem friendly is because I rush out the door and never greet anyone.
 - c. Perhaps the reason our family doesn't seem closer is because I never open my home to my brothers and sisters.
 - d. Perhaps the reason not much happens with the kids is because I don't initiate anything.
 2. When I see an area where we need to do better, I have two choices.
 - a. I can be part of the problem by choosing to complain about others.
 - b. Or, I can make myself part of the solution by working to make things better (Capps illustration).
 - c. Some churches never grow stronger and overcome areas of weakness and failure because no one is willing to say, maybe the trouble with us is me.

Conclusion: When it comes to my relationship with God

- A. The trouble with us is certainly me. God loves us and wants very much to have peace with us. He wants this so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins. He gave us this book to tell us what we must do to be saved.
- B. If there is no peace between you and God today, the trouble is with you. You need to make peace with God. You need to love Him. You need to believe in His Son, Jesus. You need to decide to live for Him. You need to be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.