

2 Kings 1 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening folks. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron. I'm a minister for this service. This sermon will be a little bit shorter than normal so we can give space for the interview coming up later.

So we're looking at 2 Kings 1. 2 Kings 1 we have this man called Ahaziah who is now the king. He is the son of Ahab and Jezebel and even though he was the king, we don't actually hear much at all about his life.

Except for this one thing. This incident. This one thing. The word of God came to Ahaziah and he rejected it.

He tried to suppress it. He tried to overturn it. And the reason that this is the only event mentioned about Ahaziah's life is because it's the most pivotal. The defining moments of our lives are the ones where God speaks to us.

We decide what we're going to do about it. Now that's getting ahead of ourselves a little bit. So we'll start from the start, shall we? So this King Ahaziah, he falls from the second story of his house presumably.

[1 : 1 3] He's really badly hurt. He's bedridden. And he is wondering, am I going to survive this? So what does he do? He gathers some messengers and he says, Go inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness.

So instead of asking the god of the people he is supposed to be the ruler of, the one true god, he sends some messengers over the border to ask some local god if he will get better.

Now why would Ahaziah do that? Let me read a couple of verses to you from the previous chapter.

This is how the chapter immediately before this one ends with these verses. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, began to reign over Israel. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother.

He served Beel and worshipped him and provoked the Lord, the god of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done. So inquiring of some fake pagan god across the border, this was not a spur-of-the-moment decision for Ahaziah.

[2 : 3 2] It was a consequence of how he was raised. It was a consequence of the atmosphere of the home that he lived in.

His spiritual response to the problem he had was passed down to him by his father and his mother. Now we are all individuals, but the way God has ordered the world, the atmosphere that we grow up in, the spiritual atmosphere of our homes, is really important.

Now there are lots of implications to this. And I think you can probably work them out for yourself. So, that is part of the answer as to why Ahaziah did what he did.

So let's get back to the story. The messengers were sent off to inquire of Beelzebub. But they don't get very far because God speaks to Elijah and says, Stop these messengers and tell them this, which Elijah does.

And what does Elijah say to them? He says, verse 3, It is because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Beelzebub, the God of Ekron? Is it because there is no God of Israel?

[3 : 43] Now therefore, thus says the Lord, You shall not come down from your bed, you will surely die. Ahaziah is not going to be happy, obviously, with the last part of that statement there. But let's for a moment look at the first part.

Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Beelzebub? The passage repeats that line three times. It's almost, it's comical, right? God is saying, God is saying to them, I am real and you know it.

I can see you. I am right here. Beelzebub? Really? Beelzebub?

What are you doing? Yahweh is essentially saying, It's like he's saying, am I not sufficient?

It's a great question, isn't it? Do you go and do this thing because you think there's no God that can meet your needs? When we go after little idols in our life, at the heart of it is that belief that our God, that our God is not sufficient.

[4 : 51] We know he exists, but we go after something else for comfort because we think, God can't meet me in my pain. God can't meet me in my singleness.

He can't meet me in a difficult marriage. He can't meet me in my loneliness. He can't meet me in my frustrations. He is not sufficient. I will look elsewhere. And our loving God won't have it.

He will not have that. In the ancient Near East, you know, all the pagan gods were pluralists, right? They're all pluralists. They didn't mind who you were.

They didn't mind if you worshipped a bit of this God and a bit of that. They didn't really care. They're all pluralists, but not the true God. Yahweh says, Yahweh's the only God that says, I will have no other rivals.

And he can do that because there is only one real God. Okay, back to the story. So the messages, take the message back to Ahaziah. He says, who told you that? Then there's the whole hairy coat thing.

[5 : 56] And Ahaziah says, ah, this is Elijah. So how does Ahaziah respond to God's word?

God's message. Does he repent? No. He doesn't like it. He wants another message or he wants to destroy the messenger. So in verse 9, he says, Then the king sent to him a captain of 50 men with his 50.

So the captain and 50 men. He went up to Elijah who was sitting on the top of a hill and said to him, O man of God, the king says, come down. But Elijah answered the captain of 50, if I'm the man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50.

Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his 50. And I know, I know, that is really unpleasant. It's a very unpleasant story.

And our modern Western sensibilities find it distasteful and awful and all those things. But let's just relocate the story for a moment to give it sort of a modern sense of what was going on there.

[7 : 08] Let's relocate the story to like a persecuted country that persecutes Christians. The number one being North Korea right now. Imagine you're an underground Christian pastor living in North Korea and a garrison of soldiers turns up at your house in the middle of the night and that captain of that garrison says, come with us.

You know, it is all over for you, right? Your life is over. Elijah knew this in this story. And God protects them.

That's the simple answer here. Ahaziah is angry, he is distraught with what happens. He sends another 50 men, they all die as well. Ahaziah, he wants a different answer.

He wants the answer he wants, right? He wants the answer that is, surely you will not die. Everything's going to be okay. And if you know the Genesis story, these are the words of Satan and to the heir of Adam and Eve.

You'll be fine. You won't die. He wants a lie. He wants to believe a lie over the truth. He doesn't want to believe the Lord. He doesn't want to believe the Lord.

[8 : 22] That would say to him, repent, I can sustain you in this pain and carry you into glory. What does Isaiah want to hear? He wants to hear a lie.

And he wants to use force to get that lie and likely dispose of Elijah. But none of that works. God protects Elijah and he protects Elijah with fire.

And that is significant because it was the fire should have reminded Ahaziah of what happened a few chapters ago when Elijah challenged the priests of Baal and fire comes down and burns up these sacrifices.

On that day, years before, God had demonstrated that he was the one true God and Ahaziah knows that story. He knows about this fire. So the fire is part of the message.

God's message to Ahaziah is stop messing around with Baal. But Ahaziah does not want to hear what God has to say. He wants to express it.

[9 : 22] But he can't. And that's one of the big takeaways from this whole story. After two garrisons of soldiers trying to shut Elijah down, the end result of that is nothing.

Nothing changes. The message does not change. It goes forward. God's word, his message, it won't be stopped. It will be opposed, but it will not be stopped.

And before we hear about Ahaziah's death at the end of the chapter, a third group of men go up to meet Elijah. And they have an entirely different demeanor, don't they? The first two approach Elijah thinking they have all the power with arrogance.

But this group, well, let's read it in verse 13 here. Again, the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of the fifty went up, fell on his knees for Elijah.

and entreated him, oh man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. Now this is the model approach.

[10 : 23] This is the model approach. An angel tells Elijah to go with him, that he's going to be safe, that everything's going to be okay if you go with these fifty men. And he does. And he stands before Ahaziah and delivers the message, you're messing around with these fake gods and also you won't survive your injuries.

And he doesn't. Okay, let me finish up here. This is a slightly extended finishing up, by the way. God hates idolatry.

God hates idolatry because the best thing that we can know is him. And God has done everything he can for us to know him, even sending his son.

So anything that steps into that position of a God in our life, God will go after it. He will disrupt it. He will disturb it. He will try and intercept those messages.

So be attentive to where God is disrupting your idolatry. Where are the messages in your life with words that you don't want to hear but should hear? Where are the messages coming into your life with words that you don't want to hear but you should hear?

[11 : 45] Let me throw some meat on the bones of this idea a little bit here and see where they land with you. One of the biggest idols, of course, in our culture is sort of radical individualism.

And it's an idol that God is very keen to disrupt. I read this week just gone that self-worship is the fastest growing religion in the world.

And some of the tenets of self-worship are as follows. I'll read five to you. There's more but I'll pick five. Some of the tenets of self-worship are your mind is the source and standard of truth.

No matter what, trust yourself. Two, your emotions are authoritative so never question your feelings.

Three, you are sovereign so flex your omnipotence and bend the universe around your dreams and desires. Four, you are supreme so always act according to your chief end to glorify and enjoy yourself forever.

[12 : 53] Five, you are the creator so use your limitless creative power to craft your identity and purpose. Those are the tenets of self-worship.

But, we know as Christians we were made to revere and awe someone more awesome and interesting than ourselves.

Ironically, you know this, right, the more self-absorbed we are the less awe we feel in general. The flatter our life becomes and the worse it is for everybody.

And I read this week that there's science to back this up. Let me quote to you a professor from the University of California. They say this, each year four and a half million people travel to the Grand Canyon, three and a half to Yosemite and 30 million to Niagara Falls.

Deep down we crave awe. Scientist Paul Piff of the University of California coined the term small self to describe as phenomenon. After exposing his subjects to several elicitors of awe, Piff reported we found people felt smaller, less self important and behaved in a more pro-social fashion.

[14 : 15] Awestruck people are more generous, more dialed into the needs of others and more caring towards the natural world. Do we want happier, fuller lives?

The science is clear. Let us be awestruck by something or rather someone infinitely bigger than ourselves. So the idol of self, self above all else.

It sabotages your joy and God wants to take an axe to it. So listen when he speaks. Where is he speaking to you?

Where is he disrupting those messages? We should listen. The other big message from this passage is our God speaks through his word, through his son Jesus and that speaking simply cannot be stopped.

The word goes out. God's word goes out. It will be opposed. It will be drama. But it can't be stopped. And we should be grateful. It is the hope of the world.

[15 : 21] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.