

1 Kings 22:51 - 2 Kings 1:18 // An Abject King meets an Unstoppable Prophet

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[0:00] Our reading comes from 1 Kings chapter 22. We'll start to read at verse 51, and we'll move on to 2 Kings, the entire chapter 1 as well.

! So that's page 366 of the Church Bibles. Ahaziah, king of Israel. Ahaziah, son of Ahab, became king of Israel in Samaria in the 17th year of Jehovah's King of Judah, and he reigned over Israel for two years.

He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin.

He served and worshipped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had done. After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel.

Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, Go and consult Baal-zabu, the God of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.

[1:15] But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-zabu, the God of Ekron?

Therefore, this is what the Lord says. You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die. So Elijah went.

When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, Why have you come back? A man came to meet us, they replied. And he said to us, Go back to the king who sent you and tell him, This is what the Lord says.

Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending messengers to consult Baal-zabu, the God of Ekron? Therefore, you will not leave the bed you are lying on.

You will certainly die. The king asked them, What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this? They replied, He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt round his waist.

[2:23] The king said, That was Elijah the Tishbite. Then he said to Elijah, Then he sent to Elijah a captain with the company of his, of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of the hill, and said to him, Man of God, the king says, come down.

Elijah answered the captain, If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men. Then the fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

At this, the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, Man of God, this is what the king says, Come down at once.

If I am a man of God, Elijah replied, May fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men. Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.

So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. Man of God, he begged, Please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men and your servants.

[3:40] See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life. The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, Go down with him.

Do not be afraid of him. So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king. He told the king, This is what the Lord says. Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zabu, the god of Echre?

Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die. So he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

Because Ahaziah had no son, Ahaziah succeeded him as king in the second year of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. As for all the other events of Ahaziah's reign and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the king of Israel?

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks, Alan. You can find an outline on the notice sheet. Please keep your Bibles open at the end of 1 Kings, beginning of 2 Kings.

[4:59] And let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this portion of your word. And we ask that you will give us ears to hear your voice.

Minds that can understand. And hearts willing to change and follow you. In Jesus' name. Amen. So we're back in a series in the Old Testament book.

And we're back in a series in the Old Testament book.

is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. You see what he's saying? If we make an idol out of something like money, he gave the example of money or popularity or beauty or sexual allure, or being seen as intelligent was one of his examples, we idolize those things and think they'll get us everything that our hearts long for and love, then we will end up consumed and crushed.

And then he said this, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is they're unconscious. They are default settings. So that is the human heart. We pledge our allegiance to things that we think will get us what we really want.

[6:53] Now King Ahaziah appears for us at the end of 1 Kings. So if you've not been with us, we're after Moses. We're after Joshua. Joshua, when the people of God have been brought into the promised land that God gave them.

We're after King David who ruled over them. And now we have this succession of kings over God's people. And if you had like a Guinness Book of Records with a feature on worst kings of Israel ever, the main feature would be on Ahaziah's dad, King Ahab.

He's a disaster. And he's just died at the end of 1 Kings. So that would have seemed hopeful. But tragically, in Ahaziah's case, the apple has not fallen far from the tree.

So at the end of 1 Kings, if you just look back at verse 51, how long did Ahaziah live? Two years.

Not very effective. Verse 52, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

He followed the ways of his father and mother. And then verse 53, what did he do wrong? He served and worshipped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, just as his father had done.

[8:02] And in chapter 1, we're going to think about his story. The wrong turn the king makes. The real problem the king discovers. The pointless strategy the king tries.

And then three lessons from an abject king. So first of all, the wrong turn the king makes. Have a look with me at verse 2. Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself.

So what's happened there is the kind of ancient equivalent of being upstairs, leaning on a window, and the glazing falls out and you fall out. Or falling down the stairs if the lattice was a banister.

He's hurt himself. And he's in bed. And then we hear what he does next. Verse 2, he sent messengers saying to them, Go and consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.

So this is his wrong turn. Not so much the wrong turn to fall down the stairs, but the spiritual wrong turn, summed up wonderfully by the angel who appears to Elijah the prophet in verse 3.

[9:06] Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, he says to Elijah, and ask them, Is it because there is no god in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?

It's brilliant, isn't it? Would it be possible to put it in a more passive-aggressive way than that? As he waits on the roadside for this company of the king's men with their camels, with all their luggage, for this long journey out of the promised land to a place called Jaffa in Philistia, where there was a temple to Beelzebub, and saying, All right, boys, shame you've got to go such a long way, isn't it? Why are you going again? You need to hear from a god in Philistia. Isn't there really no god in Israel that you could have asked that question? When, of course, there is a god in Israel.

It's the god who formed Israel and rescued Israel, the god of the Bible, the living god. But to go to him, Ahaziah would have to repent. He'd have to change allegiance, and he doesn't want to do that. He's a chip off the old block of his dad. Now, the idol is not going to deliver for the king, and that's true of our idols today. And the strange thing about idols is if you actually stop to think, we often know that, that if we're idolizing a relationship, or our career, or even a hobby, or our kids' hobbies,

or our kids' achievements, of course we're expecting too much of those things.

[10:38] They're not going to fulfill us. So why don't we give up on them as idols? It's because idols enslave us. And I think we get a glimpse of that in our chapter today, okay, from the name of this false god.

The name we're given for the god is Beelzebub. And Beelzebub means lord of the house. But scholars are confident that the writer here is using satire, because with a small change of name, what scholars know is that the name of the god of Philistia was actually called Beelzebul.

That's what means lord of the house. But in our translations it says Beelzebub, which is just one change of letter, but instead of meaning lord of the house, it's lord of the flies.

So it's like lord of the dung pile, lord of the place where the dead are. It's a satire on their name of their god. Lord of the flies as in, if any of you had to read Lord of the flies at school, that's what inspired, I had to read it at school, William Golding's name of his book.

In fact, have you got a next slide, Matthew? Just to show you this. Is there, what, go to the next one? No, no, it's gone, right, go back, go back.

[12:02] Okay, there's a back story here, and it's just a bit, but I'll now tell you since I started, that when I was talking at the 9.30 about Beelzebub, I mentioned that he, as well as being lord of the flies, Beelzebub is in the song Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen.

So I had a picture up of Queen, and then people at the 9.30 said to me, what did it have to do with Bohemian Rhapsody? And so the callum on the slide was obviously, he thought he didn't mention him, I'll take Queen off.

So that's, so it's gone. But anyway, so lots of contemporary cultural references, or 1970s ones, to this chapter. But here's the thing, right?

In 2 Kings chapter 1, the name of the idol is Beelzebub, which means lord of the flies. The idol is actually called Beelzebul, and when he's mentioned in the Gospels, it's when the Pharisees are accusing Jesus of having a demonic power, and they say it's by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that he's able to drive out demons.

So Beelzebul is nothing, the idol. He's a mockery. He's a fiction. He's not there. And yet Beelzebul is the prince of demons.

[13:23] So is an idol a demon, or is an idol nothing? And I think the Bible's answer to that is both. So if we go back, Matthew, to that slide with the references on.

In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says both about idols. He says we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and there's no God but one. But then he says, in chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians 10, the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God.

So is an idol nothing? Yeah, an idol is empty. Is an idol demonic? Yes. Yes. Not that there's a demon in the idol, but there are powerful spiritual evil forces, and they are glad to use our propensity to have our hearts drawn away from God by idols to ensnare us.

So if you imagine a missionary in the Amazonian rainforest or in Africa, and they find a tribe, and the tribe are captivated by a wooden block that they're worshipping, that they think controls the climate.

And they're all entranced, and they all have ceremonies. And the missionary goes up and picks up the wooden block and throws it away. And it breaks the power of it.

[14:46] And they say, look, it's nothing. The idol was nothing. The worship of it was not nothing. There's demonic power that enslaves us. And that's why our addictions are so powerful.

It's why we find that even when we can see falsehood behind things that we're drawn to worship, we find it so hard to let go. That's our first point, the wrong turn the king makes.

Secondly, though, we see the real problem the king discovers. Let's pick things up with the message that Elijah was given for the king. Halfway through verse 3. He says, Is it because there is no God in Israel that you're going off to consult Beelzebub, the God of Ekron?

Therefore, this is what the Lord says. You will not leave the bed you're lying on. You will certainly die. So Elijah went. And the messengers take that message to the king.

And he says in verse 5, Why have you come back so early? And in verse 6, they say, A man came to meet us. And they give the message word for word. The king is suspicious. And in verse 7 says, What kind of man was it?

[15:50] And verse 8, They replied, He had a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist. The king said, That was Elijah, the Tishbite. He knows. If there's a prophet with camel's hair,

he is Elijah, the bane of his father's life.

Ahab hated Elijah because Ahab only had time for God's word if God told you what you want to hear and affirms you. But Elijah is a true prophet, a faithful prophet.

And what we find when we let God speak for himself with his word is that he corrects us and challenges us and disagrees with us. And lots of the time, we don't want a God who disagrees with us.

And so the real problem for King Ahaziah is this. The true and living God detests our idols. The God who is really there is a jealous God with an appropriate jealousy.

He loves us faithfully and he calls us to love him back faithfully. And so the jealousy of God is like the jealousy of the wife or husband whose spouse promised on their wedding day all that I am I give to you and then is now giving their affection to another.

[17:00] It's an appropriate jealousy for what should rightfully belong to them. The living God deserves our trust exclusively, our worship. Psalm 100 gives us two reasons why God deserves our worship.

It has a call to worship, shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, worship the Lord with gladness. And then it tells us why. First reason, it is he who made us and we are his.

God created us and so he's rightfully king and we should worship him alone. The second reason, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

That is that he has bought us, he's rescued us, he's faithful to us. And so when one of God's people or God's king in this case, made by God, rescued by God, turns to worship false gods, they come under his just judgment.

And it's sobering then to think this is the predicament of the people all around us today. Idolatry that we see, people worshipping money, sex, power, it's not just a problem because those things won't deliver on their promises and so they'll leave us miserable.

[18:09] It's not just a problem because they're bad for our character, false gods. It's a problem because it leaves us under the judgment of a good God. So what should the king have done about it when he gets the message from Elijah?

What should he do? Repent. Obviously he should repent. The statement sounds unequivocal. You will certainly die. But when God makes a declaration of judgment like that in the scriptures, it is if nothing changes.

We see that in the book of Jonah when the message Nineveh received from Jonah is 40 more days and Nineveh will be destroyed. But they repent. They turn back to God. They call on his mercy and God relents of the calamity.

And so this, you will certainly die, is a call to repent. But Ahab is just like his father.

His father on Mount Carmel when Elijah prayed and the fire came down from heaven to show that the God of the Bible is the living God. He just needed to repent too. But instead, Ahaziah, third point, the pointless strategy, the king tries.

[19:26] Now, I don't know what you thought when we had the chapter read. Maybe you thought, did this really happen like this? Is God really like this? Well, as we get into it, this, I mean, it is a historical event, but what's brilliant about these events is how carefully written up they are for us.

So, you can see it here on the screen. I know you can't read the words. I'm just going to show you this pattern because it helps us understand what's going on in this chapter. This is the story of the chapter.

First, Ahaziah consults an idol. And all through the chapter, it's about people coming up and going down. Coming down and going up.

So, the king is in bed. He's gone up to bed because he's hurt himself. And Elijah is up a mountain. And three times in the chapter, we get word for word exactly the same phrase.

So, that's the red lines that are on the screen there. I'll read them for you now. It's the same three times in verse 4, in verse 6, in verse 16. The message to the king, you will not come down from the bed to which you've gone up.

[20:35] But you will certainly die. It's what the angel tells Elijah. We then get told it's what the messengers tell the king. And then it's in verse 16 just the same. Why repeat the same sentence three times?

Well, in between, we get another cycle of three. And that's the ones in blue on the slide. So, we're just going to close in on those. And what happens is a captain is sent with his platoon to Elijah.

And they go up to Elijah and they say, man of God, the king says, come down. And, let's just be clear, the king is not inviting Elijah for dinner here, is he?

If you're inviting someone for a social engagement, you don't send the marines to go and get them. This is an act of war. The king is capturing Elijah so that he can say to him, change your message or I'll chop your head off.

So, the king's men go up, they tell Elijah, come down, and Elijah says, verse 10, let fire come down. And, verse 10, fire came down and they died.

[21:42] If you don't like God's word and you try and shoot the messenger, you come under judgment. But, in verse 11, the king hears a bit and he sends another captain in his platoon. This is the definition of insanity, isn't it?

People say, trying the same thing again and again, expecting a different outcome. So, he sends another captain with 50 soldiers. The second company, verse 11, they tell the prophet, come down. And, verse 12, Elijah says, may fire come down. And, fire comes down from heaven and they die. Then, in verse 13, the third captain goes up and he's humble and he falls down and he pleads for mercy.

And, then an angel says to Elijah, go down. And, Elijah gets up and he goes down. And, after all of that carry on, in verse 16, what does he say when he finally arrives to the king?

Exactly what the king had already heard. You will not come down from the bed to which you've gone up, you will certainly die. And, then look at verse 17. So, he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

[22:51] The point being, see the point of this chapter? It would make perfect sense as a chapter if, verse 6, you will certainly die, was immediately followed by verse 17.

So, the king died. Verses 7 to 16 does nothing. All of that going up and coming down was an exercise in futility. In other words, when the king tried to use brute force and military power and political might to distort and change God's message, all it led to was fire from heaven.

Why? You can't stop the word of the Lord. And, that leads us to our fourth point. Three lessons from an abject king. The first one is, God's word is an unavoidable word.

The first hearers of this book, kings, they were in exile, they'd lost their homes and their good life and they might have asked themselves, what could restore our fortunes now as people?

What could bring us happiness? Well, what about putting your hope in political power to bring you happiness? Or, military power to bring you security?

[24:04] Are they not more reliable than God? Well, here is a king who thought that and he falls out of a window and after that he can't even get down from his own bed.

All his status and his power was no use in trying to thwart the word of God. And, for us today, that's challenging, isn't it? Because, it's all too easy for us to try and avoid God's word when it challenges us in what God says to us in the Bible about how we view our money and possessions or what God says to us about his design for sex and sexual purity and how that includes our thought lives and looking lustfully at others or what God says about caring for those around us in need, about living a life of sacrificial service where others need it.

When we're tempted to live more selfishly than that, it's so easy, isn't it, just to make ourselves forget that God says that in his word, to avoid God's word.

But 2 Kings 1 shows us you can't avoid God's word. But with that warning, there's also real encouragement there for the faithful people of God who do love his word.

And that's our second lesson. God's word is an unstoppable word. The word to the king was meant to be a call for him to repent. But he didn't want to do that, so instead he tries to stop the prophet.

[25:32] 150 soldiers later, we see Elijah was the prophet who couldn't be stopped. And that encourages all of us who are Christians today because God has entrusted his word to us to make it known to the people around us who are under judgment.

Their only hope is to run to Jesus. And all around us we face such pressure, don't we, not to speak God's word about Jesus to others. And 2 Kings 1 encourages us whatever pressures we would face, legal restrictions or just enormous social pressure, the pressure of, well if I speak about my faith I'm just going to get ridiculed, I'm going to get mocked, I'm going to be ignored, ostracized.

2 Kings 1 says to us, nothing will stop God's word. God has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to be his ambassadors, his witnesses and nothing will stop the word from going out.

That's a key message for the early church in the book of Acts as the apostle Peter when the spirit comes at Pentecost is extraordinarily transformed to be bold.

He was so afraid when Jesus got arrested he denied him three times and then he gets up on the day of Pentecost and he says to the crowd in Jerusalem you yourselves know that Jesus was a man acclaimed by God to you through, commended by God to you through signs and miracles. [27:03] You put him to death but now he rose and he rules and you need to repent. And then they arrest Peter and John and they command them to stop speaking about Jesus and they release them and say don't speak about Jesus anymore and they gather in Acts chapter 4 the believers to pray and what do they pray for?

Boldness. Lord make us bold to speak your word and then they're filled with the spirit to speak the word boldly and then the book of Acts ends with another apostle imprisoned the apostle Paul and the last sentence in the book of Acts is that is Paul taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

So now that baton is passed on to us and 2 Kings 1 says whatever power and strength rails against you don't be afraid to share God's unstoppable word.

And what moves us to do that is our final lesson from this abject king it's that God's word it's unavoidable it's unstoppable and it's also merciful it's a merciful word.

Just as that third captain discovered when he fell on his knees and pleaded with God and found that the cry of mercy is a cry that God seemingly can't resist.

[28:26] We were looking at this as a staff team this week we were on staff conference and looking at how in Luke's gospel the cry of mercy is the cry it seems Jesus can't resist. He's on his way to Jerusalem with the most important to-do list anyone has ever been given.

Go and be the saviour of the world and on the way a blind man by the roadside begging cries for mercy and Jesus stops. And he says what do you want me to do for you?

And for us the times we live in are times when the world is under judgment but the mercy of God is freely available and knowing God's mercy is what moves our hearts to turn from the idols around us and turn back to God.

In Luke chapter 9 there's a reference to this scene in 2 Kings 1 the disciples of Jesus they're on their way with Jesus and they go ahead of him to a village in Samaria and the Samaritans won't welcome them and they say to Jesus Lord do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?

They think we're with Jesus now it's 2 Kings 1 kind of time that's the right next step fire from heaven and Jesus rebukes them why? He's not come to bring the fire he's come to bring the offer of mercy to us to the world and just think about the comparison Elijah refused to come down to be arrested by soldiers who would have put him to death and instead the fire of judgment fell on them but Jesus freely chose to come down when soldiers came for him on another mountain the Mount of Olives he let himself be arrested and brought before a governor who he knew would put him to death so that the fire would come down on him instead of on us and at the cross he endured the fire from heaven in our place so that now God's word to us and to the people around us isn't you will surely die it's thanks to the mercy of God turn back to me and live let's pray together mighty God and loving heavenly father we live in times of great change all around us but we praise you because your word is unchanging unavoidable and unstoppable forgive us when we try to ignore your word in our own lives we know in Jesus today you're turning the hearts of people back to you that now is the day of salvation and so we ask may you enable us to pass on your word boldly and as we come to the Lord's table now we ask that you will fill us again with a deep grasp of your mercy to us in Jesus name

[31:21] Amen may you