

2nd Kings 1: 1-18; “If I am a Man of God”, Message # 18 in the series – “Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 7th, 2018, for those gathered at his home.

The truth that the Lord would have us to consider tonight is this. If you would honor God and be blessed by God you must show respect for the word of God as it is delivered by the man of God. Elijah, we have seen in our past studies, was God’s man for that time. He was a prophet of the Lord, and God’s servant to deliver His word to kings and the children of Israel. In his words he represented the word and the will of God. He should have had the respect of the kings that he spoke to, and all of the people, as well. And yet, in our studies, we have seen how Ahab and Jezebel, and now king Ahaziah, have had no respect; no real regard for the word of the Lord to them, by Elijah. Both Ahaziah and the first two captains of fifty which he sent to Elijah did not inquire of God in a way that would bring to them a favorable answer.

We want to learn from this so that we, when we inquire of God, will have a favorable answer to our prayers and our greatest questions. The question that I would pose to you is this: What is the proper way for any person, great or small, to inquire of God? We are given 2 answers to this question in our text. 1st of all – If you would inquire for your own welfare and well-being, you must understand that God is jealous for His own glory. (verses 1-6) And 2nd – If you would inquire of God to receive a favorable answer, you must not despise the messenger or make haughty demands, but humbly ask to be shown mercy. Let’s together consider these things in terms of our being able to rightly inquire of the Lord.

1st of all – If you would inquire for your own welfare and well-being, you must understand that God is jealous for His own glory.

Now, we see here that the nation of Moab, which had been subjugated by David, during the time of his reign, rebelled against Israel after king Ahab died. They wanted to test Ahaziah’s mettle and see whether he would be strong enough militarily to force them to keep paying tribute to him. Matthew Henry says – “When Ahaziah rebelled against God, and revolted from his allegiance to Him, Moab rebelled against Israel, and revolted from the subjection that had long paid to the kings of Israel.” “The Edomites that bordered on Judah, and were tributaries to the kings of Judah, still continued so, as we find in the chapter before (2nd Kings 1: 18), till, in the wicked reign of Joram, they broke that yoke (2nd Kings 8: 22) as the Moabites did now.” “If men break their covenants with us, and neglect their duty, we must reflect upon our breach of covenant with God, and the neglect of our duty to him.” “Sin weakens and impoverishes us.” (end of quote) And this is very true. And so, we must see here that all of Ahaziah’s trouble stemmed from his having no regard for God in his heart and his mind, to pray to Him, or even to prepare his heart to seek God. Instead, he was enamored with a certain false god which was being worshiped in Ekron.

We should understand that God understood where Ahaziah’s heart and his allegiance lay, all along. God was the one who ordained that he should not recognize his own danger and fall through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and be injured so severely that he did not know whether he would recover from the injury or not. Whatever comes to us in God’s providential ordering of events, is meant to lead us to repentance; to seek of Him wisdom and a favorable outcome for ourselves, in relation not only to our bodily concerns, but the eternal and everlasting concerns of our soul. We need to understand that God is the one, and the only one, who keeps us in life. Turn with me over to Matthew 10: 28-31. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” “But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin?” “And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.” But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Now, Jesus is the One who speaking here, and He is exhorting his disciples; telling them what is most important. What is most important is to fear God, for God is the One who is able to destroy both

soul and body in hell. To fear God, in the case of our study tonight, is to inquire of God when you are sick, and not only to inquire as to whether you will recover, but to inquire of Him whether you are prepared to meet Him; whether you have really come to saving faith in Him; whether you have repented of all of your sins before Him, and whether you have asked Him to show you how you can best glorify Him with the remaining time that you have upon this earth. Truly, every man ought be afraid of losing their soul. “What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul.” And yet Ahaziah is more worried about whether he will recover, than he is with whether his soul is right with God. Notice the details which are mentioned by Jesus which show us God the Father’s particular care over our life. The little sparrows which were sold in that day for a copper coin. Not one of them fell to the ground apart from the Father’s knowledge; but even more, apart from the Father’s will! And indeed, the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. You and I do not have that detailed knowledge, or even the concern for the numbers of the hairs on our head. We may be more afraid of losing our hair than we are of losing our soul. We may inquire of many places online, and seek the knowledge of many people, about how we can get our hair replaced, but we may not be concerned to inquire of God concerning His purpose in letting our hair fall out! It is to show us that we ought to prepare ourselves to meet our Maker.

Turn over to Psalm 66, verses 8 and 9 – “Bless our God, O peoples, and sound His praise abroad, who keep us in life and does not allow our feet to slip.” (NAS) You can see here that it is not ourselves who keeps us in life; it is God, and it is God who does not allow our feet to slip, either physically or spiritually. As we trust in Him, we shall be watched over and protected by our great God. Look also at Psalm 37: 23 and 24. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.” “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.” Now, once again, notice that all of the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and the Lord actually delights in our way if we are a righteous person; if we inquire of God for all of our needs, both physical and spiritually. And even when a good man may fall, he will not be utterly cast down (he will not be hurled head-long, it says in the NAS), for the Lord is the One who is holding him by the hand. How precious is God’s lovingkindness to watch over us in this wonderful way; both physically and spiritually. And verses could be multiplied to this effect. Jude 24 – “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.” “Amen.”

But in Ahaziah’s case, he does not inquire of the Lord, but he sent messengers to Ekron of the Philistines, because he wants to know whether he is going to live or not. And so, the Angel of the Lord said to Elijah – “Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’” “Now, therefore, thus says the Lord: ‘You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’” When the messengers came right back, Ahaziah asks them why, and they tell him that they have met a man who told them to return and ask him this question – “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are inquiring of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?” “You shall surely die.” Let us understand that what Ahaziah did was to commit a great sin in his inquiring of this false god. The Lord of the Flies; for that is what Baal-Zebub means.

Matthew Henry says that Baal-Zebub “was one of their Baals that perhaps gave his answers either by the power of the demons or the craft of the priests, with a humming noise, like that of a great fly, or that had (as they fancied) rid their country of the swarms of flies wherewith it was infested, or of some pestilential disease brought among them by flies.” “Perhaps this dunghill-deity was as famous then as the oracle of Delphos was, long afterwards, in Greece.” “In the New Testament the prince of the devils is called Beelzebub (Matthew 12:24), for the gods of the Gentiles were devils, and this perhaps grew to be one of the most famous.” (end of quote) What we should remember is that God is jealous for His glory. Isaiah 42: 8 – “I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images.” This means that God cannot reveal Himself in all of His saving and keeping

power and strength to the person who worships false gods. He not only will not be favorable to them, but as in this case of Ahaziah, He most certainly did allow his foot to slip, and would not heal him after he fell through his lattice. And, everyone who read this should understand that Ahaziah died and went to hell because he did not inquire of God. But all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now 2nd – If you would inquire of God to receive a favorable answer, you must not despise the messenger or make haughty demands of God or him, but humbly ask to be shown mercy.

Verse 7 says – “Then Ahaziah said to them, ‘What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?’” “So they answered him, ‘He was a hairy man, and wore a leather belt around his waist.’” “And he said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite.’” Now, I am sure that Ahaziah had either seen Elijah before, or he had heard from his father Ahab what he looked like. His servants gave him a good description of the prophet – “He was a hairy man, and he wore a leather belt around his waist.” But we find Ahaziah despising God’s prophet by sending him a captain of fifty with his fifty men to find Elijah and tell him to come down so that presumably they could take him personally to Ahaziah to be thrown into prison or killed. Ahaziah despised the messenger of God to him. When they said to him – He is a hairy man it meant that he wore hairy garment. The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary says, “Elijah originated this distinctive attire, which became henceforth the mark of the prophets as preachers of repentance.” “This stern rough garb was worn not as an act of mere asceticism, but as a symbol of sorrow over the people’s iniquities and the impending judgments of God.” (end of quote) We can say that the “leather belt around his waist”, should have spoken to Ahaziah about the mission and ministry of the prophet. He was a man of self-denial, and he had a holy contempt for all God-denying words and actions. He was an austere and serious man who was on a mission to speak to the sinner; that is the king, a word from God. His whole appearance bespoke that word – Repent Ahaziah and believe in the only true and living God.

But Ahaziah, even though he was given this short space to repent, he still did not repent. He was lying on his bed, and he was feverish and dying, and yet all that he could think of doing was taking revenge upon Elijah. No, we need to understand that when he said – “It is Elijah the Tishbite”, he said it with disgust, for he despised not only Elijah for giving him this word from God, but He despised God Himself by his words and his conduct. We can reasonably conclude this, because of the way that the first captain and his fifty men came up to Elijah to speak to him. The only words spoken by the captain were – “Man of God, the king has said, ‘Come down!’” He no doubt said the words – “Man of God”, in a demanding and disrespectful way, as if to say to Elijah: You will pay for your speaking these words of judgment upon the king. You will pay with your life. This set in motion an instantaneous judgment from God upon this captain and his fifty.

Elijah says to him in verse 10 – “If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.” Now, when Elijah said this, he was not thinking of taking his own personal revenge. He was simply fulfilling his office as a prophet, openly demonstrating what the Lord Himself had shown him that he should do, in order to faithfully represent the Lord’s justice, His honor, and His glory, in this whole matter. This authority to call down fire from heaven on this captain and his fifty did not come from himself, but from the Lord. His spirit was right. He had done it once before; calling down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mt. Carmel to show that God was the only true and living God. He did it here because these men were siding with wicked king Ahaziah in his despising of God and His word. It was not the spirit of James and John in Luke chapter 9, verses 51-55. “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face.” “And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.” “But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.” “And when His disciples saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did.’” “But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.’” “For the Son

of man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." **John Gill says on Luke 9: 36 – "but to save them;** as they might easily observe, by His casting out devils from the bodies of men, and healing all sorts of diseases: and therefore, though it was agreeably to the legal dispensation, and the times of Elijah, to punish offenders in such a manner, it was not agreeable to the Gospel dispensation, and to the ends of the Messiah's coming into the world." (end of quote)

This leads me to observe that it is possible to have a righteous zeal which then leads a believer to think of performing acts of judgment which they think will vindicate God's cause, but which are not really God's will for them to perform. And we need to make sure that our spirit does not fall into such a revengeful spirit. Turn with me over to Romans chapter 12, verses 17-21. "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men." "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. Therefore 'IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM; IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP COALS OF FIRE ON HIS HEAD.'" Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Here we see the spirit of all of what Christ came to bring and to do; to overcome evil with good. When the Christian person sees the evil that is done either against themselves or others, it may instantly come to their mind, that they must revenge that evil in like manner. But the spirit of Christ is to overcome evil with good.

If it is possible, you must attempt to live peaceably with all men. This does not mean that you cannot defend yourself or others from evil. It means that if the evil has already been committed, you must not think of revenging that evil yourself, rather give place to the wrath of God. Your doing good will be done by you, in the place of the evil, and this will be like "heaping coals of fire" on the perpetrator's head. In doing this you are bringing the perpetrator to a burning shame; his own conscience may by the Spirit of God's working, be brought to self-condemnation and repentance, when he sees your loving and gentle behavior. When you restrain yourself from taking your own revenge, you know that God will be able to bring righteous judgment and recompense upon the perpetrator of evil, in his good time and way, if there is no repentance in such a one.

In coming back now to our passage in 2nd Kings, we need to see that Elijah's bringing this judgment of calling down fire from heaven upon those who were sent to take him back to Ahaziah so that judgment could be pronounced on him, was something that did bring the 3rd captain of fifty who was sent to Elijah, to a healthy fear of God's judgment, and to his pleading for mercy from Elijah. Verse 13 – "Again, he sent a third captain of fifty with his fifty men." "And the third captain of fifty went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him: 'Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight.'" "Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifties with their fifties." "But let my life be precious in your sight." "And the angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.'" And so, Elijah did go down with him, and he declared the message to Ahaziah personally; that since he did not inquire of God, he would surely die. "And so he did die, according to the word of the Lord, which Elijah had spoken."

In closing let us see that if any person perceives that they have sinned against God in dishonoring Him, by the way that they have lived, and conducted themselves toward a Christian who was doing their duty in speaking the truth of coming judgment to them; if that person sees that the judgment will most certainly come upon them if they do not repent, if they then turn to God in the way that this captain turned to Elijah, saying, "Let my life now be precious in your sight." That person will be forgiven if they plead for mercy, calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus. Not only will their life be spared if they did not carry out any evil command given to them by a superior, but their soul will be saved in the Day of Christ. Let us rejoice at the greatness of the grace of Christ, and how it is manifest how a penitent sinner should act as is evidenced in this third captain of the fifties.