

God Sends Bears in Judgment

2 Kings 2:19-25; Psalm 37:7

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Surely God would not send bears to maul little children simply because they were making fun of Elisha, His prophet? How could it be just to allow a murderer (like Cain) to live out his natural days, or to show mercy to an adulterer (like David), or to restore one fallen into idolatry (like Solomon), and yet to judge little children by means of vicious bears for having a little laugh at the expense of a minister of God?

So the skeptic who will not bow before the absolute authority of God or His Word seeks to implant doubts and unbelief into the minds of Christians. From the very beginning in the Garden of Eden Satan likewise tempted Eve by questioning the Word of God: “Yea, hath God said” (Genesis 3:1). And once the doubt had been planted in the mind of Eve, he declared God was lying, “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4).

Throughout your Christian life, you will face the same temptation: Will you believe the Word of the Lord (who cannot lie), or will you believe the word of Satan (who is the father of lies)? Will you believe that the LORD God of Elijah will justify you for all eternity (Romans 8:33-34)? Will you rest in the Lord that you need not fear the future because the LORD God of Elijah is with you (Isaiah 41:10)? Will you cling to the Word of the Lord that whatever your need He will supply it in His time (Philippians 4:19)?

And when it comes to waiting patiently for God to show His justice in circumstances, in decisions made against you, and in the actions of others that are beyond your control, the question will always be: Who will you trust: the LORD God of Elijah (who cannot lie) or Satan (the father of lies)? The wicked will not escape His justice. The righteous in Christ will be vindicated. The timing of the Lord God of Elijah is not a second too early or too late (Psalm 37:7-9). There is no other place of peace.

Today concludes the series on the life of Elijah. The main points from our text are: (1) The LORD God of Elijah Reveals His Grace (2 Kings 2:19-22); (2) The LORD God of Elijah Reveals His Justice (2 Kings 2:23-25).

I. **The LORD God of Elijah Reveals His Grace (2 Kings 2:19-22).**

A. Elijah was carried alive by a royal escort of angels into the glory of heaven in a fiery chariot. Elisha was chosen by the Lord to succeed Elijah, his father in the faith. Elisha cried out for the LORD God of Elijah to reveal Himself as he came to the Jordan River, and as Elisha struck the river with the mantle of Elijah, it parted and he walked across to the other side to the city of Jericho. There he met with sons of the prophets (now his seminary students) who acknowledged him as Elijah’s successor and their teacher (2 Kings 2:15). While Elisha was there in Jericho, he was informed of a serious problem that affected the town (whether all of it or a significant portion of the town). The problem: the water was “naught” (2 Kings 2:19—literally, evil, i.e. corrupted). Whatever the problem with the water, it did not bring forth life and fruit, but brought forth death and barrenness. How long this problem had continued we are not told.

B. Let’s pause for a moment to consider the urgent need and the merciful healing.

1. **The Urgent Need.**

a. The great city of Jericho was the first victory for Joshua and the Israelites after coming across the Jordan River into the Promise Land (Joshua 6). After God miraculously brought down the mighty walls of Jericho, Joshua pronounced a curse upon Jericho, upon the man who would rebuild Jericho, and upon his sons (Joshua 6:26). This curse of Joshua had for the past 500+ years been believed and feared because none sought to rebuild the city or the walls. It may have had some poor inhabitants, but it was largely

a city still in ruins since the time of Joshua (due to the curse of God’s judgment).

b. In the idolatrous reign of Ahab and Jezebel the false religion of Baal worship had been introduced, and the curse of Joshua had lost its power and fear in the minds of many. Hiel, a wealthy citizen of Bethel, despised the Word of the Lord and rebuilt the walls anew (1 Kings 16:34). God’s judgment fell upon Hiel in that he lost his firstborn son when he began to lay anew the foundations of the walls, and lost his youngest son when he completed his work by setting up the gates. This was a cursed city and the toxic water bespoke of that curse. All of that sets the backdrop to this cursed city to which Elisha now comes.

c. The curse of Joshua that fell upon Hiel and his sons and fell upon the lifeless water in Jericho speaks so clearly of the condition of all mankind in Adam (young or old). We are all dead and lifeless in our trespasses and sins before a holy God (Ephesians 2:1). We are not just sick; we are like Lazarus dead and lifeless in the grave. The curse of God upon the whole human race renders us all totally unable to offer God any “good work” that He will find acceptable due to the evil and corruption at the very springs of life within us—in Adam all die (1 Corinthians 15:22). Even ordinary work that one does without the grace of God in Christ Jesus is evil before the Lord (Proverbs 21:4). We are all without hope in this world in Adam (Ephesians 2:12). And as a result we are all children of wrath that deserve the just curse and judgment of God now and for all eternity (Ephesians 2:3). We are absolutely helpless to change ourselves—that is why the Scripture says we are dead. We are as helpless to change ourselves as that dead and lifeless water was to change itself. If we do not understand our desperate and hopeless condition in Adam, we will continue to look at ourselves as a good person before God, deserving of His mercy. We will have no reason to cast ourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. If you don’t know that you are dying, why would you seek life? If you don’t know your house is on fire, why would you call the fire department?

2. **The Merciful Healing.**

a. Elisha commands the people of Jericho to bring him a new cruse (jar) with some salt therein (2 Kings 2:20). Elisha went to the spring of the waters from which the water originated, cast the salt into the spring, and made the following declaration in the name of the LORD (2 Kings 2:21). And having done so, the waters were from that time forward healed of all death and barrenness. Life-giving water now irrigated the land in bringing forth fruit and vegetation. God was confirming in this mighty miracle that He was the Lord God of Elijah and of Elisha—Elisha came in the power and spirit of Elijah. The people must therefore give heed to God’s Word through Elisha, and not simply fixate upon the miracle that was performed.

b. The miracles God wrought through Christ, the prophets, and the apostles were not ends in themselves, but were means to an end—to show them their need of a much greater miracle—the healing of the dead and lifeless water in their own soul that polluted and corrupted all that they did apart from the grace of God. But even in that which was cursed and dead, God chose to bring forth life. God makes the bitter waters sweet. He makes the crooked way straight. He takes that which is ugly and makes it beautiful in His time.

c. The healing of this corrupt water points to the healing of your foul and corrupt soul by the grace of God. It is the death of Jesus Christ that removes the curse of sin (Galatians 3:13). It is the blood of Jesus Christ that is the salt that purifies and cleanses you from all sin. It is preaching of God’s Word that is the new cruse (jar) that is the means of grace in proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that irresistibly calls God’s elect to Christ through the gospel of Jesus Christ and grants you faith alone in Christ alone. And note that the text says that the waters were healed from that time on. So likewise is that one who is justified before God—there is no more condemnation—there is eternal life that flows like a life-giving river from out of the heart to others (John 7:37-38; Ezekiel 47).

d. Hear the invitation offered to you today (Revelation 22:17). One of the most necessary blessings in this life and yet one of the blessings for which we least express our praise and thanksgiving is clean water. How many millions of people around the world are drinking from polluted rivers, seas, and lakes (and as a result are diseased and dying). Do you daily give thanks to the Lord

for clean water? Should you not a hundred fold more give praise and thanks to the Lord for the living water that flows from Christ's death that has cleansed you, that is sanctifying you, and that grants you everlasting life? Where there is no praise and appreciation for this blessing, there is no true understanding of the blessing you have received and of the lifelessness of your depraved and corrupt nature. Where there is no praise there will be no growth, no fruit, and no sanctification. It is not you, but is the water of life that brings life.

II. The LORD God of Elijah Reveals His Justice (2 Kings 2:23-25).

A. Elisha then travels about 7 miles to Bethel. Bethel was an idolatrous city—a city of calf worship instituted by King Jeroboam. However, the Lord had his faithful remnant in both the cursed city of Jericho and in the idolatrous city of Bethel. They did not run and hide in the mountains, but were a light in very dark times of wickedness and apostasy. They did not join with those who had fallen away, but were a testimony for the Lord among the backsliders and idolaters.

B. As Elisha approaches Bethel he is met by 42 “little children” mocking him with the words in 2 Kings 2:23. When we better understand the context and the words used here, we will better understand the severe judgment of the Lord.

1. First, when the English text refers to them as “little children”, we might imagine small children (six or seven years old). However, the Hebrew words used here can refer to “small young men” (those who have become young men at about 13 years of age). The same Hebrew words are used to refer to Hadad, an Edomite, who fled the sword of David to find refuge in Egypt, 1 Kings 11:17. Likewise, this Hebrew adjective for “little” is used to refer to Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother, who is called “little one” (Genesis 44:20) and yet Benjamin by that time had 10 of his own children (Genesis 46:21). Thus, these were not likely six or seven year old boys, but strong young men.

2. Second, these 42 young men showed contempt for Elisha (“bald-head”). The sheer number of them was a threat (they were a gang looking for trouble). To call someone “bald-head” was to show contempt and hatred for that person. It would be equivalent today to giving someone the finger. They not only showed contempt for Elisha, but more importantly showed contempt for the God of Elisha who sent him.

3. Third, this mob also mocked Elisha and Elisha's God when they ridiculed him with, “Go up.” Word had passed quickly that Elijah had gone up into heaven (whether they believed it or not). They were glad to have Elijah gone, and now they wanted Elisha gone as well. Who knows what this mob might have done if God had not intervened? That is the threat that Elisha faced from these hoodlums. They came from idolatrous families that hated the LORD God of Elijah and hated the one true religion given by the Lord and taught and practiced by Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, and Elisha. This vulgar, dangerous, hateful mob and their parents were about to receive God's swift judgment.

C. Elisha turned back to look at them (which tells you they were threatening him from behind—a dangerous position to be in), and then Elisha uttered words of judgment upon them “in the name of the LORD (2 Kings 2:24). Elisha did not lose his control and shout some profanity or take God's name in vain in a fit of anger. Elisha pronounced upon these hoodlums God's judgment, and it was God Himself that sent the two bears to maul them (2 Kings 2:24). We know not how many were killed (if any), but we do know they were mauled. That day God revealed that how people treat His minister who is sent by the Lord and proclaims His Word is how they also treat Him. Their love for the Lord will be revealed by their love for the minister who brings to them the living water of life.

D. Application

1. Parents, the salvation of your children is not in your power to determine. However, it is

within your power to love them, pray for them, teach them, and lead them in the paths of righteousness and truth (1 Corinthians 3:6). By your example, you are either leading them to Jesus or away from Jesus. None of us are sinless, but even in our failures we can show to them the gospel of Jesus Christ through confession and forgiveness. Never minimize the power of the gospel observed in the way you parents treat one another. The gospel will likely mean little if they do not see it in your relationship with your husband or wife.

2. Children, God is longsuffering with those who are rebellious, but God's longsuffering will come to an end (Romans 2:4). These hoodlums didn't become hoodlums just when Elisha arrived. They were bent on the destruction of the one true religion before and perhaps a threat to the sons of the prophets; but God waited to send His temporal judgment.

3. All of you, don't mock the Lord and play games with Jesus. A far greater everlasting judgment in hell awaits all those who openly or even secretly show such scorn for the Lord, for His minister, and for His Word. He sees your contempt, your hatred, your scorn, your begrudging obedience, and your playing games with Him. Nothing is hid from Him. Stop drinking from the poisonous water of the foul streams that will lead to your destruction. The Lord Jesus declares to you: Come now and drink of the pure and everlasting water of life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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