

THE PRICE OF MOCKING GOD'S MAN

II Kings 2: 23-25 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

What we do in this life echoes in eternity. When I read this text and began to realize the gravity of this situation, I recognized afresh that disrespecting and mocking God's servants has eternal consequences. This passage of scripture reminds me of coming on to the scene of a bad accident as I did on Wednesday morning about 9:00 AM. It was a motorcycle accident with police cars, service vehicles, ambulances and Pastor Larry and I prayed for the rider of that motorcycle. Is he still alive or did he die? We couldn't tell, but it looked very grave for the rider. What terrible accidents and funerals make us do, is come to a full stop and get off the treadmill we are spinning on. We live in an impatient world that defines patience as idling our motor when we feel like stripping a gear. It's hard to be patient, to slow down, and to wait on the Lord in our instant gratification world. Americans want high speed internet in our motels, ATM's at our fingertips, at a moment's notice, express lanes on our freeways, and Google quick replies to all our questions. Coming upon the scene of an accident, where we must wait as police direct the traffic, slows us down a bit in our world and it calls us to think.

All across South Dakota, on the highways, wherever someone has died in an accident, for as many as died, there are that many Think signs. On the hundreds and hundreds of signs is an X with the words, Mark the Spot, and below the big word Think are the words, "Drive safely!" The program originated as an effort in SD to make motorists aware of how dangerous it is to drink alcohol and drive. Half of the Think markers are because of alcohol involvement. The other signs are due to not wearing seat belts, distracted driving, (phone use) and speeding. Coming upon II Kings 2: 23-25 is a distinctive set of 42 Think signs on the road going up to Bethel, coming from Jericho. I've taken a long time to think and meditate and study, and I pray for wisdom as I observe this terrible highway accident outside Bethel and this divine judgment that affected 42 individuals, sinners just like you and me. I think about scenes of blood, tragedy, maiming accidents, and death and I long for Jesus to come soon. That's what we look forward to as we labor for our Master and as we hope and pray for Christ's return. It reminds me of the old hymn I love, "We'll work til' Jesus comes-(3X) Elizabeth K. Mills wrote it in 1837. "O land of rest, for thee I sigh! When will the moment come When I shall lay my armor by and dwell in peace at home? No tranquil joys on earth I know, No peaceful, shelt'ring dome; This world's a wilderness of woe, This world is not my home. Refrain: We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work till Jesus comes, We'll work till Jesus comes, And we'll be gathered home." **This "Think Sign" passage of Scripture today has 5 warnings I am going to sing to you in an adaption of**

the song, “O be careful little eyes what you see, (2X) There’s a Father up above, He’s looking down in love, O be careful little eyes what you see...”

OH, BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR PLANS, WHERE YOU GO! (I.) You may note that I am using the New American Standard Version this morning for one reason. I believe after studying the Hebrew words, this version best represents the original Hebrew language. Notice v. 23. We read, “Then, (that is, then, after the healing of the spring at Jericho, Elisha went up from there—and up, means up from below sea level, for Jericho is near the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth. The Dead Sea is 1, 312 feet below sea level, and Jericho is 825 feet below sea level. Bethel is 2800 feet above sea level, so that means this was quite a trip for Elisha—going up 3625 feet to go from one school of the prophets to the other. No doubt Elisha wanted to meet now with the first school of the prophets in Bethel. Notice we read, “Then he went up from Jericho to Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city and mocked him...” Elisha was definitely doing God’s bidding to go to Bethel and report on the specifics of Elijah’s translation to heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of horses and fire. Elisha had a mission he was on, and God was leading him.

Nevertheless, did those young lads know what they were getting into when they made plans to meet or follow Elisha on the way? Was it near to Jericho, on the steep incline up the Mount of Temptation north and west of Jericho? That was a 2,000 foot ascent up that road and way. But the way went higher over the Michmash Pass, which is the highest elevation in southern Israel with the peak at 3,294 feet above sea level. Did this band of young ruffians meet Elisha on that high ascent, or did they meet him in the last three miles headed back downhill going into Bethel? I don’t know, but the geography tells us that it was not in Jericho or in Bethel. It was an attack of mocking somewhere in that 12-mile trek. Doesn’t that help you know this was not a large group of pre-schoolers—little boys who ran away from home? This was a planned mocking attack of 42 + young lads. Did these young men have any idea where their plan of mocking God and His main prophet would take them? Ravi Zacharias once said, “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.” Where we go is so important? Why did you go on that web site? You knew what was ahead, didn’t you? Did you consider what going into that grocery store and buying that double six-pack for the 4th of July might take you? Did you consider the effects of two beers and how it would affect your driving? Did you ponder that 77 people had died on Wyoming highways this year on July 3rd and now it is 83 so far on July 7? Did you consider what one small amount of marijuana or meth might do to your family? Did you ponder losing your family? Did you consider what 20 minutes looking at sexual perversity would do to your

life, your wife, your husband, your children, or your ministry for Jesus? Oh, be careful with your plans, where you go? Be careful, beloved. 2ndly,

OH, BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR FRIENDS, WHICH YOU PICK! (II.) Who were these ruffians? We read in II Kings 2: 23, “And as Elisha was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city—which sounds like this happened near to Jericho and they mocked him and said to him, “Go up, you baldhead, go up, you baldhead.” Whether near Jericho or Bethel, remember Bethel was the chief seat of idolatrous calf-worship. These were young idolatrous men brought up without discipline or any instruction to follow the Lord. They had been taught not to believe in the truth taught at the school of the prophets in Bethel, but to have no reverence for God or His truth. All the Bible translations are all over the board in translating the Hebrew word **naar**. Some translations say small boys, the KJV says little children, one translation says little kids. The NASB and the ASV calls them young lads. The New Century Version calls them some young men, and the Amplified Version calls them some young, maturing and accountable. But what does it mean? This word naar occurs 235 times in the Hebrew. Naar is translated young man 76 times, servant 54 times, children 7 times, child 44 times, boys-1 time, babe – 1 time. The first occurrence of naar is in Genesis 14: 13-14 translating naar as Abraham’s trained servants, born in his house to go retrieve Lot and his family who captured Lot, his nephew and his family and took them away from Sodom where they were living. Strong’s Concordance states, “It generally denotes a young man of marriageable age, but still a bachelor.” Absalom who rebelled and was king for a short time taking the kingdom from David was called a naar. David said to Joab, “Deal gently for my sake with the naar, the young man Absalom.” Saul (a very tall man, but low in status) at the time God anointed him king of Israel, was called a naar twice (1 Samuel 9:2, 15:17)! **Naar** is also used of David—the mighty man of valor who killed Goliath the giant. All David’s older brothers are called naar. The field hands in Boaz’s fields were called naar—young men. Joseph in Genesis 37 was called a **naar** at age 17. Joseph was also called a naar when he was thirty years old -- Genesis 41:12, 40, 46). Joshua was again called a naar when he was forty-five to fifty years of age, Exodus 33:11 and Joshua 24:29).

Isaac was called a naar at about 25 to 28 on Mount Moriah (in Genesis 22, the spies for Joshua were called naar, and the young men, who gave Rehoboam the king, awful advice in 1 Kings 12 were called naar. Some say, **naar** has to mean little boys because the Hebrew describes naar as qatan which means little. In seeing how these words are used throughout the Old Testament, “little child” (*qatan na’ar*) is used to describe the young rebel Hadad the Edomite (1 Kings 11:14, 17) who was an adversary to King Solomon who fled Solomon’s kingdom and married Pharaoh’s sister-in-law. This qatan naar was no little boy. Now I can

only say—I cannot prove 100% that these were not preschoolers, but by context, we need to notice, this is not a normal small group of children mocking an older person. This is an organized group of young men, maybe a mob or large gang that posed a great threat to Elisha. They were a group of people who gathered themselves together for the one sole purpose—to mock Elisha, the prophet and they may have had worse intentions. Imagine it! Forty-two is a large number of young men in an organized group who had gone out to challenge Elisha. Their mockery implied a malicious intent; especially when the culture of the time insisted on showing respect to elders. Beloved, what kind of friends are you running with? You say it doesn't matter. God's Word is clear in I Corinthians 15: 33—"Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals." Oh, be careful with your friends, which you pick. 3rdly,

OH, BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR JUDGING, WHO YOU BLAME! (III.)

This text is more embattled than most and used by the enemy to say that this is one evil old man who couldn't take a practical joke. This text is used to say God is an angry God who kills little children. Let's look at verse 24. "When Elisha looked behind him and saw them, he cursed or pronounced judgment on them in the Name of the Lord. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty two lads of their number." Notice the picture closely, in verse 23, Elisha met the young men as he went up to Bethel as he was going up by the way. It goes on to say the young lads came out from the city. Verse 24 says when Elisha looked behind him. Either they were following him up the Mt. of Temptation trail, or they came out of Bethel, stole through the woods and came up behind Elisha. Do you see the picture? These young men either got past Elisha and were coming up stealthily behind him as Elisha was on his way into Bethel, or they followed him from Jericho. It was a plot, a plan, perhaps, a kind of ambush—don't picture little kids making mud-pies or praying with home-made trucks on the edge of town in Bethel. The context indicts the judgers and those who judge God and Elisha and blame him for the death of 42 little kids, because he had such a short angry fuse. Those who judge God wind up in the same camp as these young men. They are God-mockers. II Chronicles 36: 16 tells us what God thinks about being mocked. We read, "But they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy. The apostle Paul adds to our understanding of what God thought about what these mockers were doing. We read in Galatians 6: 7, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this shall he also reap."

The taunt, "go up, you bald head," was a reproach. Old Testament scholar John Whitcomb states this was an expression "of extreme contempt to Jews. They were pronouncing a divine curse upon Elisha, for people then looked upon baldness as

an outward sign of God's curse. In Isaiah 3: 17 and 24, God's reproach on evil proud daughters of Zion was—"Therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion with scabs, and the Lord will make their foreheads bare.. Instead of well-set hair, a plucked out scalp." In Micah 1: 16, speaking about God's judgment on those who came against God's people, the prophet Micah said, "Make yourself bald and cut off your hair, because of the children of your delight. Extend your baldness like the eagle, for they will go from you into exile." Go up, you baldhead thus was like some of the expressions I will not repeat today of telling someone you don't like where to go. It was a curse these young men were throwing at Elisha. The mighty two volume work by Alfred Edersheim, himself a Jew was that this was not in reality Elisha cursing the young men as much as God using Elisha to pronounce His judgment on them. Edersheim wrote, "It should be noticed that it was not Elisha who slew those forty-two youths, but the Lord in His Providence, just as it had been Jehovah, not the prophet, who had healed the waters of Jericho." If you blame Elisha for this, realize ultimately Elisha had no power to call forth from the mountains 2 she-bears. That was God who did this. Isaiah 28:22 states, "Now, therefore be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord of hosts a decree of destruction against the whole land." Jude 18-19 warns of mocking for us today. We read, "In the last time, there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts. These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly minded, devoid of the Spirit." Peter wrote in II Peter 3: 3-4, wrote "Know this, first of all, that in the last days, mockers will come with their mocking, following their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Today God is mocked because Jesus hasn't yet returned. But Peter adds in II Peter 3:9 that "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." I warn us all never to blame God for what He does, for Hebrews 10: 29—31 declares, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." That day between Bethel and Jericho, God showed a small beginning of His judgment for those who mock Him and refuse to believe. So I tell you, O be careful with your judging, who you blame. 4thly,

OH, BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR ADDING, WHAT YOU COUNT! This may seem like a small point, but studying the Word shows that there were not 42 young men only that came after Elisha. Notice II Kings 2: 24, where we read clearly, "Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two of their number." We need to watch what we read in the Word closely. This gang or mob

of young male ruffians outnumbered 42. The she bears only got to 42 of their number. How many more there were, we are not told. Again, this was no group of little boys throwing rocks at the prophet. This was a band of idolatrous young men out to rough up Elisha with words to sting and run him off, to mock his call to speak for God, to tell him to go join his mentor Elijah and leave this earth. It was an awful thing that went on in this attack. One more thing about keeping our finger on the text is – Do we know if these 42 died, if some of them died, or if none of them died? The text tells us these 2 she-bears tore up 42 of their number. . . Actually, the word used here, is “mauled” “tore up,” and not killed. The Hebrew word for tore up or mauled is **baqa (baw-kah)**. Its meaning, according to Strong’s Concordance is “to cleave; to rend, to break, to rip or tear open, to make a breach, to break forth, to be ready to burst, to cut out, to divide, and to tear.” The Hebrew word here allows for a wide range of injury and not just being killed. Maybe they all died, maybe a few died, maybe none died, but if there were no deaths, these young men knew in their terrible injuries that God will never be mocked. Is it possible any of them lived, and with broken bones and lost limbs, actually repented from worshipping the two evil Bethel and Dan golden calves set up by Jereboam I, who told Israel to worship these two calves as the gods who delivered them from bondage in Egypt. If these young men lived longer, or died, God didn’t choose to let us know. Either way, the judgment was strong. Today, many evangelical believers throw out numbers God gives and they not only refuse to count, but they discount the Millennial reign of Jesus when He returns for 1,000 years. (Rev. 20) Oh, be careful with your adding what you count, or what you discount. Fifthly,

OH, BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR WORDS, WHEN YOU MOCK! This is the heart of the problem with these young men. They never counted the cost of mocking God and His prophet. Notice verse 24, “And they mocked Elisha.” The Hebrew word **qalas** means to scoff at, ridicule, or scorn. The term does not suggest innocent conduct. It wasn’t some little children saying “Nana nana hey— Goodbye—you go up too.” It wasn’t little boys saying, “Nana nana nana! Their reproaches upon Elisha were expressions of contempt for his prophetic office, thus, ultimately they were directed at the God whom he served. They were entirely responsible for their actions. Their punishment, therefore, was God’s divine judgment intended to serve as a dramatic example in all Israel of God’s judgment on rebellion and mocking Him or His servants. The Lord’s punishment for this awful mockery was the mauling of 42 young men of this larger band of men by two female bears. The penalty was clearly justified in God’s mind, for to God, to ridicule His prophet Elisha was to ridicule the Lord Himself—and to mock God’s choice of this former farmer for His prophet. The seriousness of the crime was indicated by the seriousness of the punishment. The appalling judgment was God’s warning to all who would scorn the prophets of the Lord or the ministers of His

Gospel. This is a message to warn us. God is clear about what we are going to do as we come to His table. In I Corinthians 10: 20-22, we read, “No, but *I* say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?” Don’t mix the table of the Lord with other evil practices. May none of us ever mock the Lord, His servants, or His supper which we share today. I love you all! Amen.