

Wednesday, September 14, 2022 • Read 2Kings 2:19–25

Questions from the Scripture text: Who spoke to whom in Jericho (v19)? What do they say about the city? But what is the problem? For what does Elisha ask (v20)? Where does he go (v21)? What does he do? In Whose behalf does he speak? What has He done? What is the condition of the water at time of writing (v22)? According to what? Then where does he go (v23)? Who come from where? What do they do? What do they say? What three things does Elisha do in v24? In Whose Name does he do the third thing? What come out of the woods? What do they do? To how many? Then where does he go (v25)? And then where?

How should we interact God's Word, especially as represented in God's servants? 2Kings 2:19–25 looks forward to the first serial reading in morning public worship on the coming Lord's Day. In these seven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **since our interaction with God's Word is a life-and-death issue, it is profoundly important that we respect those servants whom God sends with that Word.**

A tale of two cities—two attitudes toward God's Word and God's man.

Be like Jericho. That might pass as a trite sermon title, but it is very good advice from our brief passage. This is a tale of two cities—one that is suffering miscarriages, and one that is full of children. But when the passage concludes, Jericho is now fertile, and Bethel is bereft. The hinge upon which the fortunes of the two cities turn is their attitude toward God's Word, as displayed in their attitude toward God's man whom He has sent them.

Jericho is an odd case. They are like the son who said that he wouldn't go at first, but later he comes around. The school of prophets at Jericho had recognized that Elisha bore the spirit of Elijah (v15), but they didn't trust his wisdom (v16–17). But then we go from Elisha being embarrassed to say "no" in v17 to the men of Jericho embarrassed as Elisha says "I told you so" in v18. But what a blessed "I told you so" if God uses it to give Elisha honor in their eyes.

God's Word is powerful to heal the humble and receptive.

We find out, in v19, why the men of the city were so desperate for Elijah. "The water is bad, and the earth miscarries." An unusual phrase to use with crops, the latter probably has to do more with human babies and perhaps livestock babies. "Location, location, location" can only go so far, if the water and earth at the location are killing you.

Elisha performs a prophetic action with a bowl and salt, but the text makes clear that it is not the action that is the main idea but the Word of Yahweh: "thus says Yahweh" (v21) and "according to the word of Elisha which he spoke" (v22).

God's Word is what is invincible, but His Word is invisible. So, the Lord often attaches something visible to His Word to direct us to it. If we get hung up on the bowl and the salt, we will miss that the main thing is Yahweh's Word in the servant's mouth. The servant himself is not the Word, but in a similar way to the bowl and salt, he represents God's Word to them—not as illustration so much as mechanism, an ambassador for God. The word "please" in v19 is just two characters long in the Hebrew, but it was a harbinger of good things, as it indicated the city's humble, appreciative posture toward God's Word in the mouth of God's servant.

God's Word is powerful in wrath against the despising and resistant.

Things are not so in Bethel, to which God's servant never actually fully arrives. Probably, if Elisha had made it all the way into town, the school of prophets there (cf. v3), and the other adult town-folk would have treated him respectfully. However, youths tend to have more mobility and time on their hands. The original says not just "lads" but "young lads"—probably in the 10–12-year-old range. And the way that Elijah and Elisha have been thought of in the homes of the town now comes out—literally—in the youths of the town.

More comfortable than Jericho in their current circumstances, if Bethelites cannot have Elijah then they are not particularly interested in the ministry of Elisha. At least, that's what their children seem to have picked up. For, they come out of the city in v23 and start mocking him. As children are wont to do, they pick on his appearance ("you baldhead"), and let him know that if he was taken to heaven too, they would be fine with that ("Go up! Go up!").

We don't know exactly why Bethel was so opposed to Elisha (and probably to Elijah before him), but we can guess that being the host city of one of Jeroboam's two golden calves, they were not too keen on any preaching about the purification of worship from man-made ideas. After all, the religious tourism industry was very good for the local economy. A golden bull in Yahweh's Name could easily be adapted to use for Baalism (which included bull worship), and vice-versa as times required.

But there are enough other sins that God's preached Word would have made them uncomfortable in, so that we aren't quite sure which led to the despising of Elisha. What we are sure of is that the Word of Yahweh in His mouth in v24 was as powerful against their hard hearts as it had been powerful for the humbler hearts in Jericho.

Our attitudes toward God's Word deeply (and can devastatingly) affect the impressionable around us.

The prophet denounces (more literal than NKJV "curse") the children in Yahweh's Name, and Yahweh Himself shows that the townspeople's view of His worship and His Word has been counted as "hating Me" in the sense of Exodus 20:5. The sins in the fathers' mouths have been visited into the hearts and mouths of their children, and now God visits them with an outbreaking of the judgment that deserves.

Jericho had gone from an epidemic of miscarriages to sustained fertility. But the baby-boom of Bethel receives a crushing blow. Forty-two suppers went uneaten that evening. Forty-two little graves were dug. Forty-two little beds went unslept in. Forty-two of the saddest funerals took place the next day.¹

O how important it is that when the Word and its appropriate applications rub us the wrong way, we be soft-hearted and ready to make changes! O how important it is to have one of God's faithful servants as our preacher—and if we do, that we labor to maintain affection and respect for the person and the preaching as literal God-sends. If we do so only superficially, our children may pick up more on what's in our hearts than we think is actually showing. And if we fail to rebuke those older youths who often become sophomoric critics as they enter adulthood, their critical attitude may do mortal damage to the younger youths upon whom they rub off!

Sometimes, to a faithful preachers' grief, someone develops a personal conflict, relational distance, or some other reason for not loving his person. This is a grief not only for the Christian affection that is lost, but especially because it does so much harm to the hearer, who unwittingly

¹ This illustration originates with JC Ryles in a sermon that he preached to children from this text.

dulls and then hardens his heart against the Word preached. More horrifically, children often pick up (from a parent or an older sibling) on the attitude toward the preacher, develop it more intensely, and follow through more fully, and end up destroyed in this world and the next.

Of course, when we have a faithful servant today, we have an advantage to help our hearts: it is Jesus, our ascended Mediator, Who uses him to speak to us. Affection to God is now bound up not just in the Word sent by servants, but the Word made flesh: Jesus, Who dwelt among us. Jesus, Who died for us. Jesus, Who rose again. Jesus, Who ascended. Jesus, Who is enthroned. And Jesus, Whose blood speaks for us in heaven, and Who speaks His Word to us from heaven. What a help it is, when we are tempted to think or speak of a faithful preacher in a Bethelite way, to be able to shape our honoring of the man on earth by our affections for the God-Man Who sits in heaven as our Redeemer!

What are the various ways that you have the Word of God? In which of these ways does the Scripture tell us that Jesus addresses us from heaven (cf. Heb 12:22–25)? Whom does He use for this in your life? What is your attitude toward this and toward His servant? Upon whom might your attitude be rubbing off?

Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word in the Scriptures that You caused to be written for us, and especially in Your Son, our Lord Jesus. Thank You for appointing and using faithful preachers as servants. Forgive us for when we don't honor Your servants by affection for their person and receptivity toward their person. Forgive us when we sin more greatly by being dull and hard toward the Scriptures themselves. Forgive us when we sin most greatly by failing to appreciate that Your Son is our great Prophet in His church. Before we and our children are destroyed, grant that we would love to hear His Word preached, and keep His and Your servants faithful to the Scriptures, so that indeed it would be Your Word that is preached, we ask in His Name, even Jesus Christ, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP119W "Lord, Let My Cry before You Come" or TPH173 "Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast"

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(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Second Kings. Chapter 2 verses 19 through 25. These are God's words than the men of the city said to a larger, please notice the situation of the city is pleasant as my lord sees, but the water is bad and the ground is barren and he said, bring me a new bowl and put salt in it.

So they brought it to him Then he went out to the source of the water and cast in the salt there and said that says Yahweh I have healed this water from it. There shall be no more death or barrenness. So the water remains he holds to this day, according to the Word of Elisha, which he spoke, Any went up from there to Bethel and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him.

And said to him, go up your bald head go up. You bald head. So he turned around and looked at them and pronounce to curse upon them. In the name of Yahweh and two, female bears came out of the woods and maul 42 of the youths. Anyway, went from there to Mount Carmel and from there.

He returned to Samaria So far, the reading of God's inspired and and Aaron Tourette.

And this short passage needs seven verses. We have a tail of two different cities First, the City of Jericho where Elisha begins and the way. The people there are interacting with the word there is, apparently something wrong with the water, not entirely. Sure how they know the taste or the smell or something.

But the problem is the livestock and the human population are miscarrying. When it says the ground is barren and it's actually saying the land or the, the earth, the land miscaries. And you can see the in the words of Yahweh that a company, the prophetic Act or dramatic illustration that goes along with the word in verse 21.

When he says from it, their shall be no more death or barrenness and so it's not really that the land is barren and in terms of but producing crops, it's that the land, meaning the people and probably also the livestock of the land, our miscarrying. And so the people view, the Lord himself and the Word of the Lord, as their hope.

So they come to Elijah, they say, please notice We have good location, But the water is bad. And what's the point of? Good location? If we're all going to die off and that's not the bowl or the salt or those things, those are obviously just a prophetic action because verse 21.

The prophet says, thus says, Yahweh, I have healed this water. So, the Lord is invisible, and His word is invisible, but it's the Lord and His Word who are doing it, and he gives the action with the bowl and the salt etc as a visible reminder. Oh, Are we remember seeing the salt poured in from the bowl?

And or cast and thrown in from the bull. And we remember what he said. When he did that, that it wasn't the salt. That was healing. It, It wasn't the Elijah. That was healing. It was Yahweh who was removing the miscarrying from the people and from their livestock similar to how the Lord uses other signs and seals to drive home.

Not that it's the sign or the seal that does it, that it's the Lord who does it. So for instance, at the Lord's Supper You see and you smell and you touch and you taste the bread and the wine. But he doesn't want us to think that the bread and wine are doing us any good, but he's using them to help us because we can't see the Lord Jesus.

We can't see His grace and so he gives us a visible sign of an invisible reality. Very, very similar relationship there. So the people humble themselves before the Lord and His word, they look to the Lord and His word, for their help, for their deliverance. And he delivers them.

Well, Elisha heads west from Jericho to Bethel away from the Jordan River. And you remember what was at Bethel? Just like what was that? Dan was not Dan. Didn't have a school of the prophets. There was a school of the prophets and Jericho. Like we've seen there's a school.

The profits in Bethel and the school of the Prophets in Bethel. Are apparently not. Very popular. Because Bethel is also the, the southern outpost of the Jeroboam calf method of worship a method that initially was in the vein or in the tradition of the calf that Aaron made at Mount, Horeb Mount Sinai.

But also because bail was, is displayed and some ancient statues and figurines that we have found as riding on the back of a calf and calves. And bulls were often used in bail worship. It was a nicely adaptable worship center, for whichever way the religious winds of the land were blowing at the time but the people of

Bethel, of course, were then a religious tourism destination.

Just like those in the book of Acts who, whether you know, magic was a foundation of the local economy in one place or the silver industry for making figurines of Artemis where a foundation of the local economy in Ephesus. So the people in Bethel are prejudiced against or hostile, too, is a better word.

The people in Bethel are hostile to the prophet and the school of the prophets. Their hostility to He always their hostility to the word of Yahweh, worshipping. The true God and the true way word. Thank their economy and it just wasn't as fun for the senses because of all of the wicked things that we're also doing in connection with that worship.

So he's on his way, Elisha is on his way up to Bethel and there's a bunch of kids who have heard the way that mom and dad talk about the prophet and the School of the Prophets. And they've also, apparently heard about what happened with Elijah maybe, when the 50 men from Jericho, we're running throughout the land looking for Elijah.

They had said, yeah, he was taken up in a whirlwind, and we don't know where he went. However, they found out about it, they knew about it because as Elijah is approaching the city, the children of the city and the word use here, actually translates, not just in the R, which means lad, but there's a, there's a second word attached to it.

That means young lads or adds the the the idea of being younger a lad and R could be any young men who hadn't been married yet. So it can go from toddler years up into the 20s. But the with this word attached to its probably 10 to 12 year olds, So they come out of the city and they say, go up baldy, go up baldy and they're not saying go up to the city of Bethel.

What they're saying is we wish you would ascend into heaven, too. So we could be rid of you. Like we just got rid of Elijah and he turns around and he looks at them and they pronounce a curse on them in the name of Yahweh. Now modern commentators say oh, this is horrible thing.

That the servant of God the preacher to God's people would pronounce a curse on these youths. But the fact of the matter is, we're sinful from conception and we're wicked and hell. Deserving from conception and the Lord. As we are thinking about and hearing about as we think about the second commandment in our catechism lessons, these last few weeks, He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him and hating him in the wrong.

Way of worship had absolutely worked itself out in. Hating him, more consciously more intentionally in the rest of their lives and how they acted towards his word. And we know that it's not a great leap. From someone who wants worldly worship, and if they can't abide ordinary simple, Bible Biblical worship.

It's not a big step from that. To the person who says, oh, these sermons are so theological, and they require so much and they're so long. And they make me feel bad about the way I live my life. I wish you wouldn't pick on this or pick on that.

It's very, very similar, isn't it? The, the connection of the false worship in Bethel to the resistance to and hostility to the Word of God, which is resistance to and hostility to God himself. And you remember how Paul full of the Holy Spirit, spoke to Elisha you the son of the devil full of all, or, you know, full of all fraud and all the seat, you son of the devil, etc.

But the big clue that. It's not bad for Elisha to pronounce this curse on these people. Who hate the Word of God. The heated it and Elijah, they're glad Elijah's gone. They hated and Elisha. They wish Elisha was gone, The real clue that it wasn't wrong for license to say is because the Lord does.

When Elisha said Elisha was not the female bear whisperer, That was an action of the sovereign. God? And so, just like it was the Word of God, not the bowl, and the salt and the prophet that healed Jericho, it's the Word of God. Not an irritated balding prophet who visits the iniquity of the parents of Bethel upon the children.

A bet, though. So, God's word is not just powerful to heal. Those who are humble and receptive towards him and towards his word. God's Word is powerful in wrath against those who despise God and resist God. And this was a dreadful. This was a dreadful lesson for the people of Bethel.

42. Children. If you think about before the passage began, what was going on in Jericho, They didn't have children, the land was miasma. What was going on in Bethel? What we don't know what the whole population is and hopefully this wasn't all of the children. I bet they'll but there were a lot of them.

There's there's the implication here of something of a baby. Boom in Bethel. But 42 children didn't come home that night. 42 children their suppers were not eaten. Their beds were not slept in the little 42 little graves. Were dug in the morning. 42 funerals. Conducted and the lesson ought to have been, although we know the way we are, but it ought to have been, Oh, that we would not have allowed such feelings towards or thoughts towards God and His word to arise in our hearts, or come out in our conduct or in our speech, is you can't just say, I better not let my kids hear that.

I think that way or perceive that, I think that way because kids here and kids perceive and it's God who visits the sins of the parents upon the children. So you may have parents or maybe in this case elder siblings since these are the younger years perhaps it was the older use the late teens and early 20s.

The youth subculture of that though, who had led these 10 to 12 year olds astray? You can't just you can't say, we'll just not Well, let the kids see it because you may think you have learned to put on a veneer, a surface of liking, the worship of God and liking the Word of God but your children know your younger siblings.

No, if you care about your younger siblings, if you care about your children, you need to seek from God and actual love for him. An actual love for his way of worshipping and actual love for his word. So that your children who perceive what's real about, you will see the real work that God has done in you and know that when you're praying for them to have the same, you're praying to the God who's already done it for you and he is your hope that he will do it.

And then so that they don't learn to be pretenders like mom and dad and one day. Quit pretending so that they don't have the iniquities of mom and dad and older teenage or young twenties brother and sister that they don't have this iniquities visited upon them. God has done a great mercy for believing children or children from believing families.

Not families called Christian, but families where Christ is known. He's done them, a great mercy, to make them impressionable, but we do then great harm. When we are false, when we are superficial, when we are fake in our religion, because they are impressionable, and they can perceive whether we delude ourselves into thinking that we are real or not.

And so there's the question here that is put to the the king. In verse 25, he went from there to Mount Carmel and from there, he returned to some area. And he said, what do you mean put to the king? Well, why does Elisha go to Carmel first before he goes to the capital city of some area where the king is?

It's because the same offer now is being made. It's reminding us of when Elijah was on Mount Carmel. And there hadn't been the rain and God brought the rain and he gave the prophet to be able to run in front of the chariot in the mud all the way from Carmel to Samaria.

Offering the wicked rebellious King, the opportunity to be led by the Word of God. Instead of, by the inclinations of his own heart. And so there's a reminder here verse 20. Finally that the power of God is in his word offered to us either to be our deliverance and blessing as it was for the humble and receptive in Jericho or the power of God is offered and threatened to be our destruction.

If we despise him and His Word and if we resist him and His Word, oh, my dear children. God is God and His word is His Word and there is no neutrality particularly for you who have heard His word so much in your life. But hearing it is not the same as believing in being blessed.

The Lord grant you grace that you would know him and be humble before his word and be receptive to it. That he may be powerful through his word for your deliverance and not for your destruction man. Let's pray Our Father in heaven. We thank you for this portion of Scripture.

We thank you for how vivid it is. We thank you for how true it rings home with us. And so we pray for the help of your spirit that he would give us hearts of flesh and the hearts of stone that he would make us submissive to you and to your Word that he would do and continue to do such a work in us as that when our children or when our younger siblings perceive the reality with us, they would perceive the very thing for which we look to you to do in them that you would make them soft hearted.

And that your word would be a word that gives them life instead of death through Jesus Christ, as they trust in Him and our joined to him. And in their union with Him, receive his atonement, receive his righteousness, receive his life, to be in them, by his Spirit. Whom he gives them.

Give us and our children, your spirit. We pray that you might be our life, our salvation. Our blessedness for, we ask it in, Jesus name in whom you have made yourself our life, and salvation and blessedness. Amen.