

2 Kings 1:1-18 – The God who won't be snubbed.

Introduction

I wonder if you can remember the last time you felt snubbed by someone. Can you remember the last time you felt the sting of being ignored, overlooked, rejected.

I can still remember the first time I felt snubbed. It was when I was in grade 2 and I found out that everyone in my class *except me* had been invited to a particular boy's birthday party. That cut me deep. When I tell that story to my kids they are outraged. They get how messed up that is.

When was the last time you felt that? Perhaps you were snubbed when you were out at the shops. You made eye contact with someone you know, you said "hi" and got nothing...

Perhaps you've had a little taste of being snubbed when you're out driving. You graciously let someone into the flow of traffic and get no thank you wave what so ever... What snubbery!

The interesting thing about being snubbed though is that the offender often has no idea of just how much hurt they have cause. They don't realise the relationship has been wounded and needs repair. Sometimes the snub has to be called out for that to happen.

Now it's one thing to snub a friend down the street, we get that that's bad, but imagine being called out for snubbing the Living and Almighty God. Imagine God coming to you and saying 'You have ignored, overlooked and rejected me.'

How would you respond?

In tonight's passage we see God giving that kind of message to King Ahaziah. He had snubbed the living God in his greatest moment of need and is called out for it. And the question that lies before us is "will we learn from his experience?"

Will *we* walk the foolish path of snubbing God in life and death? Or will we walk the wise path of trusting God in life and when facing death?

I have broken the text up into 3 parts – Ahaziah ignores God, Ahaziah opposes God, Ahaziah is judged by God.

1. Ahaziah ignores God.

So, first let's look at the way Ahaziah, ignores God.

Now, what do we know about Ahaziah? At the end of 1 Kings 22 we read that Ahaziah was the Son of Ahab, the evil king of Israel who ignored God and lived in persistent idolatry. Now unfortunately for Israel, Ahaziah, is a chip off the old block. You see that recorded for us at the very end of 1 kings (22:53):

*⁵² 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. ⁵³ **He served and worshiped Baal** and aroused the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, just as his father had done.*

King Ahaziah was a chip off the old evil block.

But the thing about God that we've come to see in this series is that He won't just sit by being ignored and traded in for an idol. In Israel's law God had warned His people that if they ignored him and followed idols, they would suffer his turmoil and judgment as opposed to His life and blessing.

And that is the very note the book of 2 kings starts on. Ahaziah experiences two big crises as King over Israel – one national the other personal.

The *national* crisis is seen in the opening comment about Moab in v.1. We're told that this nation which had been subject to Israel now rebels *against* Israel. Israel's power and influence are falling apart. But you see, Moab's rebellion *against Israel* is a judgment for Israel's rebellion against God – led by Ahaziah.

But there is a *personal* crisis too. Verse 2:

² Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself.

We're not told how this young king manages to fall (my money is on drunken party). What we are told is that it was a bad fall. Bad enough to make him question whether he'll even recover. And this sets the scene for our passage tonight – King Ahaziah is staring his own end in the face. What will he do?

Will he wake up to his need for the true God's help. Or will he keep snubbing Him?

C.S. Lewis famously said that: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains." Maybe you've experienced that – where it's been through a moment of crisis that God has been able to get your attention so that you were able to might know Him.

I think God is shouting in Ahaziah's pain here. As he lies on his bed in distress, this is God's wake-up call to to leave his life of destructive idolatry. God is giving Him space, opportunity for repentance.

So what will Ahaziah do?

Will he hear God shouting at him in this moment? Let's see where he goes for help in verse 2:

So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and [call a prophet of the Lord, for only He has the power to help me... He doesn't say that does he? Instead it's...] "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury."

Ahaziah snubs God in the most dramatic fashion! Instead of going to the God of His people – the true God, He looks beyond Israel, into Philistine territory to inquire of a local false god there – maybe *the god of Ekron* can help. This isn't just offensive to God, it's stupid!

This is akin to a gunshot victim who is bleeding out, stumbling past the doors of a hospital and choosing instead, to go into the doors of the Maccas next door. Instead of going to the emergency surgeon, he goes up to a 16 year check out boy and says "I'm dying and need *your* wisdom, I need *your* help!"

Ahaziah not only snubs the *true* God in the most offensive way, he misses out on any help he could have received.

And so we see God's chilling pronouncement come to Ahaziah in verse 3:

³ 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-Zebub, the god of Ekron?' ⁴ Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'" So Elijah went.

It's like God is saying to Ahaziah in verse 3: "Ahaziah, do you care so little about me, do you think so little of me, that the first god you turn to, isn't me the true God, the God of your people's ancestors, but your people's enemies?" Do I rate so low on your list of priorities, that you can so easily by-pass me in your greatest moment of need?"

If you by pass the doctor for a 16 year old maccas kid, don't be surprised when it backfires –
"Ahaziah, "You will certainly die!"

That's the essence of God's message to this king who snubs God.

Now, when the messengers walk in the door ready to give that message to the bed-ridden king, he's all confused in verse 5.

"Why have you come back?" Didn't I just send you to Ekron?

And they respond, by basically saying "well yes, but then we got stopped by a man who told us to turn back around and give you a message from the Lord, not Baal-Zebub (v.6)"

This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!"

How would you respond to a message like that? Shock? fear? Perhaps you just want to gather a few more facts first. Who was this guy? Is he credible? That seems to be Ahaziah's first response.

Now, they don't have all the answers, but they can at least give a description (verse 8):

⁸ *They replied, "He had a garment of hair^[a] and had a leather belt around his waist."*

Now, another possible translation of that verse reads that Elijah was a hairy man, not simply that he wore a hairy garment. Either way, the point remains that there is a lot of hair going on with Elijah and that this, along with a unique belt, is a dead give away for who he is.

Ahaziah knows he is dealing with Elijah the Tishbite – the prophet of the Lord.

Now, we'll get to Ahaziah's response to this in just a moment, but I think it's worth pausing to reflect why God cares so much when people simply ignore Him.

Maybe you're listening tonight and thinking: "I haven't actively cursed God, I'm not an ardent atheist, I have no issues with others' worshipping God, I just don't think he needs to be a huge part of my life – I have other options for hope and meaning." Why does God seem to take such offense to that kind of attitude?

Here's why. When we ignore God, we are communicating to Him that He is either irrelevant, inadequate, or imaginary. Let me explain each of these.

To ignore God is to suggest He is irrelevant. It's to say to the creator and sustainer of all things, "You're not really necessary." That's actually a huge insult. And that's what Ahaziah did – he acted like God was just one option among many. Good for some, but not the right fit for him. But God calls us all to see him as infinitely relevant to our lives – that's why Paul says to the Athenians that they can't go on ignoring the true God, He commands all people everywhere to repent and turn to Him.

To ignore God is to suggest that He's is inadequate. It's to say to the one who holds our very lives and this world in His sovereign hands, that he can't really do much for us – so why bother Him – we can do better elsewhere? In his greatest moment of need Ahaziah goes to Baal-zebub because he believed that option could give him something God couldn't. You see, that attitude is the heart of idolatry. It's the belief that something other than God has the power to help you, save you, or give you what you most need. To ignore God is to say he is inadequate.

To ignore God is to suggest He is imaginary. It's to say that the living God is kind of non-existent and therefore has no place in serious thought on real issues. It's the reasons you never hear God's name mentioned on the news or in the papers. It's the kind of attitude that simply writes God off as a myth that other people cling to as a crutch. God was offended that Ahaziah treated him like he didn't even exist – "Is there no God in Israel!?"

When we ignore God and put our hope or trust in other things, we are communicating that He is either irrelevant, inadequate or imaginary. And that is sinful.

And don't think this is just an attitude that happens outside the church. It's easy for us, as Christians to act like Ahaziah and ignore God in times need and run to another.

I've seen this tendency in myself. When I feel the stress of life, or when some curve ball issue hits me or our family, my temptation is always to look inward before I look upward. I noticed this even last week, when I had to help my family out. My first reaction, wasn't "God help me" but "How can I fix this?" Instead of first going to God in prayer, I went to my phone to make various calls. It actually wasn't until I was driving on Eastlink later that evening, that I suddenly realised, I hadn't really in a serious way brought God into the equation. Now, don't get me wrong, being proactive in a

moment of crisis is good, but ignoring God in that moment is not – Ahaziah shows us this. Our God is not irrelevant, nor inadequate, and certainly not imaginary. So why would we think, we, as weak and frail humans, could handle the situation better than He? Maybe you're a bit like me, and can easily forget this. In the moment of my stress, God could have just as easily said to me: "Is it because there is no God in the Shaw household that you are choosing to go first to your phone and rely on yourself? We need to make sure our powerful God is the *first* port of call particularly in moments of great need.

Ahaziah shows us that it is both foolish, and if left unchecked, dangerous to ignore the living God.

2. Ahaziah opposes God.

So, we've seen Ahaziah ignore God. Second, Ahaziah oppose God.

That's how he responds when God calls out his sin. It's not humble repentance. It's hostile opposition.

You can see this in the way he sends out a 50-man military contingent to march up against Elijah. Look at verse 9:

⁹ Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'"

These men are not designed to be a guard of honour – this is an open declaration of hostilities. And that's certainly how Elijah sees it, that's why God has to tell him later in verse 15 not to be afraid, even when the third captain says all the right stuff.

What's going on here, I believe, is an attempt by Ahaziah, to twist the arm of God's prophet in order to squeeze out a different more favourable word from God. He thought hostility, not humility was his ticket to life.

But verse 10 shows us what happens when humanity stands in opposition to the Holy God and his true Word.

¹⁰ 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 fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

But Ahaziah doesn't quit there does he? Instead, he sends out a second military contingent,. Verse 11:

¹¹ 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!'"

¹² "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.

I suspect most of us find this picture very confronting. And I'm not going to claim to have all the answers on it. But I do think this picture reveals a couple of crucial things we need to learn about the nature of God's judgment.

The first thing that we learn is that it is no small thing to ignore or oppose the living God – We would like to think God should just put up with us snubbing Him for other idols like other religions or money, or sex. But the truth is that He takes that attitude seriously, and sees it as a great offense worthy of great judgment. The fact that God sends fire in this moment is supposed to remind us of his actions on Mount Carmel – where the God who answers by fire, he was shown to be the true God worthy of people's worship

But second, whenever God shows us a picture of his terrifying justice it comes as a helpful warning to us. Because God doesn't want us to suffer his judgment he sometimes lets us reflect on the horror of it. Because He loves us, He warns us. It's the same reason, Jesus speaks on various occasions about Hell. He doesn't want us going there! As God would later say through the prophet Ezekiel:

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'

A healthy fear of God's judgment is not a bad thing.

It's kind of like the quit campaign which uses terrifying images to warn of the dangers of smoking – lung disease, eye problems, death. These are not given to just to make smokers feel terrible about themselves. They are given for their good – so that they might heed the warning and avoid the terrible risks associated with smoking.

A friend once shared with me that it wasn't until a pastor actually had the guts to tell him that his salvation was at stake that he actually stopped treating God like his Word was optional in certain areas of sin in His life.

Sometimes it's a grace of God to grow in us a godly fear of His justice on our sin. It wakes us up to reality and forces us back to our Lord and saviour.

That's what we sing about in the second verse of Amazing grace:

Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear

And grace my fears relieved.

How precious did that grace appear,

The hour I first believed.

Ahaziah had no fear of God and that would be his downfall. But there is one man here who does fear God. The third captain sent out to nab Elijah. Unlike, his king and the two captains before him, this guy approaches Elijah with humility, not hostility.

¹³ 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, your servants! ¹⁴ See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!"

This guy rightly heeds God's warning and comes in humility not hostility. Where the first two captains march up confidently in the authority of Ahaziah and shout demands of God's servant, this captain doesn't even ask him to come but simply begs on his knees for life. Where the first feel the weight of God's wrath, this guy feels the relief of God's mercy.

1 Peter 5:5 says that:

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

That's what we see here – The third captain (who was himself on the enemy side) humbly asks for life, and graciously receives it. Grace had taught his heart to fear, and grace his fears relieved.

How should Ahaziah's in the face of his death? He should have acted like his third captain. He should have humbled himself. He should have fallen on his knees before the true God and pleaded for the life he didn't deserve.

Now we'll think a little bit more about the implications of that in just a moment. But I first want us to see where Ahaziah ends up at the end of all of this. Throughout his life, and now in his death, Ahaziah snubs God – He ignores Him and then (when called out) He opposes Him. And so, Ahaziah is finally judged by God. Which is point 3.

3. Ahaziah is judged by God.

Look at verse 15:

So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.

¹⁶ 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-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!” ¹⁷ So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken.

Ahaziah had snubbed the only One capable of giving him life in the face of death. Instead of humbling himself and seeking the blessing of the Lord, He simply fades off the scene as quickly as he arrives. He dies with no heir to succeed him (v.17), the line of this young king is cut off and his short reign is forever consigned to the annals of the kings of Israel.

Ahaziah stands as an example of how *not* to face your end.

There was a series on the ABC a few years back called “you can’t ask that.” Each episode featured a group of 4-5 people who shared a unique and often misunderstood background or circumstance – it could be anything from people who are alcoholics, to ex-prisoners, to members of the deaf community. The only expectation of those who appeared on the show was that they had to answer any question that was sent in about their particular circumstance.

No question is off limits.

One particular episode was a group of 4-5 people who were united by the fact each of them had a terminal illness and was facing death. During this particular episode this question came up: “Have you suddenly turned to religion?” which from the answers given, seemed to be understood by most of them as “have you turned to the Christian God? Though there were different response, they all arrived at the same conclusion: No.

One woman instead found a degree of solace in the idea that she would be remembered by others.

One man instead found a bit of comfort in the idea that his atoms would return to the universe.

One man simply said this:

I was brought up a Catholic, I did the whole alter boy thing as a Catholic, but I don’t see that the Almighty has any place in my death.

Maybe your listening to all this tonight, and you’re kind of resonate with the people on this episode. You’re not convinced God would have a place in your death.

Now, while that’s a common view in the world we live in this passage is showing us how devastatingly wrong that mindset is. If we continue to ignore God and push him aside, we will have to face his just and eternal judgment for that attitude.

But God doesn't just tell us how not to respond. He tells us how to respond in a way that we can find life in the face of death?

The third captain gave us the clue didn't he. I said we'd return to him. He showed us that we could avoid God's wrath, and receive life in the face of death if we humbly cry out for mercy to God. God opposes the proud, but gives grace (undeserved favour) to the humble. And God tells us that the way we humbly cry out to Him today, is not by falling at the feet of another of his prophets. But by falling at the feet of Jesus His Son who saves us by dying for us. If we want to know God's forgiveness for our sin. If we want eternal life in the face of physical death then we need to humbly cry out to Jesus for mercy.

I've used this illustration before, but our rescue is a little bit like this – imagine you're at the beach, the two flags have been set up by the lifesaver to mark out the safe place to swim. As you head into the water, the lifesaver says to you – just remember mate, keep between the flags and you'll be right. Go outside the flags and you'll end up in trouble.

Now, while you give him a nod, you know in your heart that you intend to ignore Him. The water and the waves outside the flags just look too good to miss. And, you make a few judgment calls on the life-saver himself – control freak, just out to spoil your fun.

And so after a moment or two of swimming between the flags you stealthily start swimming outside the flags.

But about ten meters outside the flags you suddenly get caught in a rip – it starts taking you out to sea – no one sees you go. You try swimming against it – but it's no use. You only tire yourself out and become completely exhausted. Your situation is hopeless – you're as good as dead. And then it hits you. There is one hope left. And it's found in the very person *you've chosen to ignore/snub*. The lifesaver. And so, in *humble* desperation you throw up your hand and call out to him hoping that he sees you with his binoculars. He does see you – and thankfully he rushes in and saves you.

The God you and I have refused to listen to and chosen to ignore is the very one who comes to rescue us in his Son Jesus. But Jesus not only put his life in danger, He willingly gave it up for sinners. We don't deserve to be rescued, but God the Son (Jesus) is a good and gracious lifesaver. He is merciful to those who have snubbed God and promises to always rescue those who call out to Him. As Paul says in Romans 10:13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Jesus) will be saved.

What place will the Almighty have in your life and in your death? Don't be like Ahaziah who snubs God and ends up under God's judgment in death. Put your trust in Jesus, who mercifully promises you God's blessing of life.