Study of Elisha - Part 2

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[0:00] Seeking God's blessing, we'll turn to the first portion of scripture we read, 2 Kings 2.

At verse 23, 2 Kings 2, verse 23. And he went up from thence unto Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou baldhead, go up, thou baldhead. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord.
And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and teared forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to Mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.
Now, after eight years in the fellowship of Elijah the prophet, it is time for Elisha to be parted from his master, and to begin to wear his mantle.
And Elijah one day knows that the time of his own departure is at hand, and he begins a tour of the schools of the prophets, which were located at Jericho, Gilgal, and Bethel.
[1:49] And he takes Elisha with him on that tour. Elisha himself senses, as do the sons of the prophets, that the time has come for his own master to be taken away.

And he has a particular request to make of them. And Elijah knows that he has something to ask. And Elijah turns, and he says, Before I am taken from you, what can I do for you?
And Elisha asks, as you probably well know, for a double portion of your spirit to be upon me. That didn't mean that he was in any respect greedy, or that he wanted to be twice as great a man as Elijah was.
What it meant simply was that he would have a double portion, or twice as much, as it were, as anyone else was to have of the spirit and power of Elijah.
Just as the father would leave a two-fold portion to the eldest son, So Elisha asked for a greater portion than the rest of the prophets were to receive.
[2:51] And he asked that because he knew that he himself had particular responsibilities, and also because he was particularly aware of his own need of that. He had great spiritual need.

He was aware of his own weakness. And the man who is most aware of his own weakness is the man who will most ask help from the Lord. The man who is most in prayer and in meditation upon the truth is the man who knows himself to be nothing.
The man who can dispense with these means of grace is the man who is really walking in his own strength, whatever kind of vain show he might make. It is the amount of time that we spend in reliance directly upon the Lord that determines what manner of man you are and what manner of man I am.
And so he humbly asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit to be upon him. And Elijah, of course, gave that reply, If you see me when I am taken from you, then the request will be yours.
And not too long after that, the great chariot of fire came down from heaven, the great train or chariot of angels, and in the accompanying whirlwind, Elijah was carried up into heaven.
[4:01] Elijah is overcome with grief, and he cries out, My father, my father, for that is what you were to me. And you are the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.

You were our defense, and you were our shield. And what now are we to do without you? But then Elijah is aware, first of all, that he has seen him, parted from him.
That is a sign to him that a double portion of the spirit is going to rest upon him indeed. And along with that, he sees the mantle falling gently to the ground.
And that reminds him that he is to take that mantle, and he is to wear that mantle himself. Because God's work will go on. And whether Elisha feels up to the task or not, it will go on through himself.
There are many times when you feel inadequate for the work and witness that God has called you yourself to, whatever work and witness that is. But it is God's desire to work through yourself and to

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bless through yourself.
[5:03] And you must be willing and ready to undertake that. So he takes the mantle, and he immediately puts it to the test. And he stretches it out over the waters of the Jordan. And he says, where is the Lord God of Elijah?

And the waters parked before him, as a sign that God is still with him. And so he goes, and he makes his way then around the schools of the prophets himself.
He goes to visit Jericho first. He then goes to Bethel. And then he goes to Gilgal. Now it's remarkable that Elisha begins his own prophetic ministry with two miracles.
And if you look closely at the miracles, you will see that one is a miracle of mercy, and the other is a miracle of judgment. The miracle of mercy is performed at Jericho.
That city had been rebuilt in Ahab's day. There was a curse pronounced by Joshua many years before on anyone who would try to build it. That in laying the foundation, he would lose his firstborn son.
[6:12] And in putting up its gates, he would lose his youngest son. That came to pass. It was built in Ahab's day, and the builder lost both his sons. But after that, the city became inhabited.

But there was one problem, and that was that the water was somehow diseased. First, Elisha is called upon to help, and he puts some salt into a new bowl, and he scatters that salt upon the fountain of the water, and the water is cleaned.
Now that is symbolic of the power of the gospel, bringing health to a diseased place and to a diseased people. I don't want to look at that with you particularly tonight.
I want to look at it with you a little later on in the life of Elisha. But it symbolizes the mercy and the power of the gospel, neutralizing disease, bringing health, and bringing blessing.
But he's hardly moved on from there to a place called Bethel, to visit the schools of the prophets there, when there is a great miracle of judgment and destruction.
[7:18] One that has caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. And perhaps as you read this, or as you heard it read tonight, perhaps you blasphemed yourself. And perhaps you said, well, if that is the God of the Bible, then that cannot be and will not be my God.

And you justify yourself for resisting the claims of the gospel upon you. Now that might well be the way that you've thought or the way that you think. But may the Lord help you to see it differently before we've finished looking at it.
It is a work of judgment that Elisha performed and that he had to perform, and performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now I said that it's interesting that he begins with a miracle of mercy and a miracle of judgment.
And it's interesting for this reason. His name, Elisha, means God is my salvation. And his ministry, more than that of Elijah, was perhaps a message of salvation and of blessing.
Elijah thundered the law and called the people to repentance. And the pinnacle of his work was at Mount Carmel, when the people fell on their knees and said, The Lord, he is God.
[8:36] The Lord, he is God. Or Jehovah, he is God. And that is precisely what the name Elijah means. Yah is God. Elijah.

God is the Lord, or the Lord, he is God. And Elijah's calling was to bring people to repentance. To bring back the consciousness of God onto people's minds.
The consciousness that they had forgotten a long, long time ago. And that work was done by a mighty reformer and by a preacher of repentance. But now comes Elisha.
God is my salvation. And his message is largely one of peace and one of salvation. And that reminds us of John the Baptist and Christ.
John the Baptist first is sent to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord. And he breaks their hearts with again a message of repentance. He calls them to that.
[9:34] And he brings God back into the consciousness of the people. And then Jesus comes, whose name again means salvation. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

And he brings the gospel. The good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus compliments and fulfills what John himself said and did.
And so Elisha compliments and fulfills what Elijah did before him. In fact, you can extend the same thing back. I don't want to go too far off the track.

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But you can extend it back into Moses and Joshua as well. Moses brought the law. But he did not lead them into the land of Canaan. That was left to who?
To Joshua. It is the same name as Jesus and Elisha. It means salvation. Joshua brought them into the land of rest.
[10:31] He brought them into the land of Canaan. Now there's an important truth there. It's a timeless truth. And the truth is this. That God, whenever he is about to work, brings a people, first of all, to repentance.

He brings his church to repentance. It's not a matter of the church suddenly being filled with sweetness and light, as it were. Or of revival just being poured out like that.
What God does first is he summons his people into sackcloth and ashes. And he brings us into a realization that we are too much in frivolity and too much in the flippant.
He brings us to a place where we set our face to seek the Lord. And where we turn aside, if need be, from lawful, perhaps even lawful recreations, or things that are taking up our time and energy, and that we give our time and our energy to bring in the Lord's blessing back upon us as a people. Because that is the most important thing to you, and the most important thing to myself. At least it ought to be. And if I so divide my time and so divide my life, that I give most of my time to these things, innocent though they might be, what does that say?
[11:48] Of my urgency in spiritual things. Do I want the salvation of the lost? Do you seek it? Do you wish the Lord to return? Do you desire him to build up Zion? Then turn to him.

It is time for sackcloth and ashes. And if ever the church needed sackcloth and ashes, it needs it today. Let us repent and do the first works, that the Lord may come.
That is when Elisha comes. That is when Jesus comes. That is when Joshua comes. After Moses, Elijah and John have summoned the people and brought them to their knees.
And so may we hear the calling of those men, that the gospel might be blessed to us richly and abundantly. Now then, as I said, I want to leave this incident at Jericho for the moment.
And to turn with you to the second incident that we find at Bethel. I should, I omitted to mention there, I was going to mention the Lord Jesus Christ himself, you'll notice, began with a ministry of mercy and of judgment.
[13:03] His first work as befitting the messenger of the gospel. His first work is a gospel work. He turns the water into wine. As much as to say, this is the characteristic of what I have come to do.

And he turns the water into gospel wine and gospel blessing, which is going to give the world to taste. But just in case you think that the gospel has lost its cutting edge, or that because he came as a savior, he is no judge, to reinforce that, his second work is a work of judgment.
When he scourges the people out of the temple, to remind us that he is a judge as well as a savior. Now I'm going to return to that as well just a little later on. But it's interesting how it's paralleled in the life of Elisha. Blessing in Jericho, curse in Bethel.
It almost warrants us to see a direct time between Elisha and Jesus himself. And again, we'll see some of that later on. Now look with me at this journey into Bethel.
[14:11] And we'll notice three things. First of all, the place that he's going to, verse 23, the opening part of it. And he went up from thence, that's from Jericho, unto Bethel.

Secondly, what met him there? And as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city who mocked him. And said to him, go up, thou bald head, go up, thou bald head.
And then thirdly, his response. Verse 24, he turned back, looked on them, cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood and tear 42 of them.
Now then, look first at the place where he is going to. And it's written that he went from thence unto Bethel. Bethel.
What a fragrant name Bethel is. How outstanding a place Bethel has in the history of Israel. How full of spiritual significance that name is.
[15:22] And how full of rich religious history is the name and the word Bethel. The word Bethel itself can be split up into Beth and El, which means house of God.

That's where Abraham pitched his tent when he came into the land of Canaan. He pitched it beside Bethel, having Bethel on the west and Ai on the east.
There, Abraham raised the first altar unto the Lord. And from that moment, it became associated with worship itself. When Jacob was fleeing his own family home, he had nothing but the clothes on his back and the staff on his hand.

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And he was wondering if God had forsaken him, if God's promises meant anything anymore, seeing as he was as desolate as he was. And he went to sleep in this place and he had a dream of the ladder or the stairway, the stairway to heaven, its bottom on the earth and its top in heaven and the Lord standing upon it.
And he woke up and he said, the Lord is around me. The Lord is with me. I didn't know it. But he's guiding me. He's everywhere I go. And he called the place Bethel.
[16:31] That's when it actually received that name. This is the house of God, he said, and this is the gate of heaven. And from that day onwards, this place became important in the life of Israel.

It had profound religious significance. This is where their forefather was blessed. And when Israel returned from Egypt, he built an altar here unto the Lord.
When he returned, sorry, from Pidan Aram, he built an altar again at Bethel unto the Lord. There he praised him and there his goal. And he's about to enter Bethel.
He's entering a different kind of place altogether. Bethel has changed and has changed through the years. Elisha is now face to face with the contemporary reality.
Bethel isn't really the house of God anymore. In fact, it's become the complete opposite. Bethel had become the center of the apostate worship of Jeroboam and the Israelites.
[17:35] This is where they set up the rival worship of Jehovah. It looked a bit like the original and true worship of Jehovah, but it was a deviant form.

It had aspects of idolatry thrown into it and aspects of human wisdom. It was their own rules governing the priesthood. It was their own rules governing the worship.
It was their own rules governing the temple. And seeing as it was done that way, it gradually began to deteriorate more and more and more until in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, paganism came into it into a large measure.
So that this became apostate and it became corrupted. And that, as I mentioned not too long ago, is the way it works with the worship of God. Once corrupted, it begins to backslide and to decline until paganistic values come into it, human wisdom, human thought, and then all the barriers are broken down and the thing becomes corrupted altogether.
The only true safeguard against that is to worship precisely. exclusively as God himself has commanded and outlined in his own word.
[18:47] By the time of the later prophets, Bethel had become known as Beth-Avon. And that means house of vanity. What a stark contrast.

What a complete change. How have the mighty fallen? The house of God has suddenly become the house of vanity. glory. And all it takes is one generation for that to be so.
One generation can destroy my family and destroy yours. You can undo what your mother and father has done painstakingly with yourself over many years.
By your own carelessness and your faithlessness in transmitting that to your own children. The Lord's work requires work. How often has that been brought home to us?
You think perhaps that your children will automatically imbibe what you yourself imbibed. And you leave them carelessly open and exposed to every kind of influence under the sun.
[19:45] Thinking that they have what you have until too late you realize that they don't. Because you didn't take the time and you didn't give it the endeavor. And they haven't grown up like yourself at all.

You've lost them. And sometimes it's because, sometimes it's because you haven't worked at it. And Bethel, the house of God in your forefathers, has suddenly become in your children the house of vanity.
And it takes but one careless generation to effect that. And how often you see it in the institutions and even in the churches of our land. You look through the place names, take a map for yourself, look through the place names of Scotland.
How many places have kirk in them or have kill in them? How many places in our own highlands? Almost every place has some kind of association with a church or with God.
Because these places were once characterized by that. This was what characterized them. When the people named them, that's what mattered to them. But you look in these places now, in your folk kirk or in any other place and what is the house of God there?
[20:58] nothing. Nothing. If the people were going to name those cities today, I'll tell you they would name them something else. They would name them something else.

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Of course the motto given to Glasgow was let Glasgow flourish. By the preaching of the word of God, that is cut off. It is no let Glasgow flourish. That is indicative of what would have happened. It is simply to get God out of it. Now that is what rules now. Put God out of the thing, out of your cities. And what was once good and beautiful and wholesome has now become ugly, vain and empty.
Walk through the cities of our own nation, Edinburgh, full of spires and full of churches. That looks so promising and a visitor thinks it's promising. And then you go to these houses and it's a bingo hall or it's a place of amusement or it's a cinema or it's a dance hall.
And what can you say? But that Bethel has just become Beth-haven. That the house of God has become the house of vanity. And when that happens, the cup of God's wrath and fury waits to be poured out in such a place.
[22:08] These changes can happen very, very quickly. And I ask you, what do you think of our own heritage here, in these islands, of your own heritage in Stornway?

Do you think it's a fortress impregnable? Oh, my friend, the worst thing to see is complacency in a church. Or to think that we've had this for 50 or 100 years, we'll have it tomorrow and we'll have it next year.
Not so. Not so. All it takes is the carelessness of one generation to transform it from a house of God into a house of vanity.
And that is what the word of God tells us. It's up to you and it's up to me to preserve what the Lord himself has given us. Now, inside Bethel, there was one good thing.
And that was a small school of faithful prophets in that place. In spite of the persecutions and in spite of the hostility of the ruling classes, still this school was somehow preserved.
[23:19] God himself preserved it. And God looked after it. And Elisha is here coming to visit it. And he's coming to encourage it.

Now, it's interesting that the Lord's people will have a desire to maintain the Lord's cause wherever they are. It's not a matter of selling out anywhere.
Wherever there is a foothold, the church of Christ should seek to advance in it. And that's what was done here in Bethel, especially when it's a stronghold or a prominent place like Bethel.
It wasn't just written off and they weren't told, leave Bethel. He went there and visited there and stayed there. And that is the attitude that the Lord's people should have to bring the world back into subjection to the gospel.
It's none of this wringing hands and saying that the whole thing is hopeless and lost. What's the point of that? What is the point of that? Have things not been low before?
[24:18] Were things not desperate before? Is that not a time to urgently revive what's weak and to quicken it and to implore the Lord to return? Well, that is what Elisha is doing. And he goes into the weakness of this prophetic school in Bethel and he goes to exhort it and he goes to encourage it.

Now, what meets him there? What meets him there? Well, we're told in verse 23, as he was going up by the way there came forth little children out of the city who mocked him and said, go up, thou bald head.
Now, first of all, I think it is one of the most unfortunate things that this word here has been translated little children. It can mean that, but it is a clear fact that this word in the Hebrew is used to apply to adults as well, to those who are young in adulthood.
For example, this word is applied to Joseph at the age of 17 years of age, when he was taken from Shechem, when he was taken from his father south down to Egypt.
Then again, this word is applied to Jeremiah when he was called into the prophetic office. It's applied to Solomon when he was 20 years of age.
[25:44] And it's quite clear from the whole context that you don't have little children in this passage here at all. What you have is young men, those who are in adulthood, and those who are going towards the prime of their strength and the prime of their days.

Those are the kind of people brought before us in this chapter. Now, we're not told how many there were of them. All we're told is that 42 of them died.
Now, notice that. It's very often said that there were 42, but what's actually said is that the bears tear 42 children off them. It's very probable that there were many more than this number.

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There could even have been hundreds, for all we know. Who these youths were, we'll see just a little later on. But there were many of them. 42 were mauled by these bears.
Secondly, the question, what were they doing? Well, we're told that they were mocking Elisha. They came forth out of the city and mocked him and said, go up, you bald head.
[26:55] Now, bald head was just then a term of abuse, just as it's still sometimes used today as a term of abuse. A bald head was meant to be a person who was weak, or a person who was insignificant, or a person who was an outcast.

It was just used off the cover, derogatory in that way. You are a bald head. Up you go, you bald head. That is what the youths were casting in the teeth of Elisha.
Now, the mockery goes much deeper than that. It is not just a matter of calling someone a bald head, and that is all. It goes deeper.
How? Well, there are two ways in which it goes more deeply. First of all, this. The word mocking in the New Testament is translated as persecution.
Persecution. This Hebrew word in the Old Testament has a Greek word in the New Testament, which is translated persecution. And that is precisely what this mocking is.
[28:02] And I want especially to draw your attention to another incident in the Old Testament, when Isaac was being weaned. Whether that was the first weaning or the second weaning, maybe he was around five, six, seven years of age, the second weaning.

And Ishmael, his brother, began to mock him. Now, Ishmael himself was 17 years of age at that time. He was again in adulthood. That was considered very much into adulthood amongst the Hebrews.
And we're told that he began to mock him. And that was so offensive to Sarah, Abraham's wife, that she turned to Abraham and she said, cast him out of the household. Now, why was it so offensive to Sarah?
Was it just a matter of one boy playfully mocking another? No, it was not. It was deeper than that. It was a spiritual thing. Or, if you like, a non-spiritual thing. What Ishmael was doing at 17 years of age was mocking the God of Isaac and he was mocking Isaac's religion.
He was mocking Isaac because he was already sharing the religion of his father and of his mother Sarah. Whereas he was very much in the religion of his own mother Hagar.
[29:12] That was his way and he had well chosen it by the age of 17. And he takes the winning and everything that's associated with it as his opportunity to laugh at his religion.

And to laugh at the religion of his father. He mocks it and he persecutes him as Paul tells us. He persecutes him. And that is precisely how you should understand the mocking of Elisha by the youth here in this chapter.
They are laughing at this man and they are laughing at this man's religion. They are laughing at his religion. And that comes through in another way. They are saying to him, Go up, you bald head. Go up, you bald head. Now the word means to ascend. And I have no doubt that they're not saying to him, Go up to Bethel, you bald head.
What they're saying to him is, Ascend up into heaven, you bald head. In other words, we have heard, and they're in the arrogance of their own youth, we have heard of this supposed great miracle that your master and your teacher actually rose up bodily into heaven.
[30:25] And not only that, but he's supposed to have done it in a whirlwind with a chariot of fire accompanying him. Is that true? Of course it's not true. You go up like him.

You show us your power. You show us the truth of these things. On you go, Elisha, you bald head. Ascend up into heaven, like your own master and like your own teacher.
And when you understand it like that, you begin to see the depth of the mockery that is going on of this man, Elisha. This is the prophet of God. Here is God's anointed. And this is what is cast in his teeth by the youth of this place, Bethel.
Now, that tells us something more. These youths are not here, shall we say, spontaneously.
It didn't just happen that they were all out walking, hundreds of them, one day and they just met Elisha. That's very unreasonable. The fact of the matter is that they know who he is.
[31:30] And not only that, but if you look at this dispassionately, you have to understand that they were expecting him. This is none other than what you could call a kind of welcoming committee for the prophet of God.

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It's not the welcome that he would desire. I've no doubt his heart is heavy going up to Bethel. He remembers its proud past and he's about to confront all that's bad in it.
Perhaps he expects to meet the son of the prophet to escort him into the city. No. What he meets is a rabble. But it's not really a rabble. It is an organized rabble.
It's an organized mob. And in fact, I am pretty convinced, for what it's worth myself, that these young people actually belonged to the rival school of the prophets that existed in Bethel.
That they belonged to Jeroboam's religion. That these were the upholders and the future priests, those who were training and those who were learning to be the upholders of the pagan false religion with all its immorality and all its false ways.
[32:34] These were the upholders of it in Bethel. And they heard that Elisha was coming, the leading representative of the church of God in the place. So they'll come out and give him a reception.

And if he's going to do anything in Bethel, well, they see to it that he won't. By this time he's reached its gates, he'll be so discredited and he'll be such a laughingstock that no one will listen to him and that no one will take him seriously.
And that is what is going on at the close of this chapter in Bethel. And that's how you have to understand it. Now we all know what these organized campaigns are like against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.
We know that there are people still in the world who like to do it. To bring up the representatives of the church and to blacken or malign them. Or take a congregation. Or take a church and say, see, look, this is what is true about it.
And the insult is thrown. And the epithet is thrown. And the character is brought down. And the church of Christ is made to look pathetic in the eyes of people.
[33:37] And the objective is attained. How much so-called journalism passes for that in the world today? I thought a journalist would just tell me facts. But no, today's journalists are master analysts.

They know the world inside out. They'll not only tell you what's happening, but they know why it's happened. How it's happened. What everybody thought and what's going to come of it. And that is how they proceed to tear the church of Christ down in the eyes of people.
It's the same thing that's happening here. They shout out, and I've no doubt that there are other witnesses. It's not just the reception committee that's gone out to make this man as nothing.
I've no doubt that there are other representatives of the city. And here they all are shouting at them, Elisha, go up, ascend, you bald head, you weak, you insignificant man, ascend up into heaven as your master did.
Go on, show us your power. Show us the power of your gospel. And in that way they mock him and they try to bring him to nothing. Now, of course, all that is just an attempt to ridicule his God.
[34:44] It is an attempt to ridicule his God. That is what it is. Those who hurt his people attack the apple of his eye.

And that is right at the heart of the eye. To hurt the people of God is to attack God himself. And that is how the Lord takes this and how the Lord responds to it.
He loves Elisha. Even if he looks like somebody that's not perhaps as powerful as his predecessor, he loves him. And he will defend him because he is his own anointed at this time and in this situation.
Now, my friends, and especially young friends, I warn you against sitting in this corner's chair. Sit anywhere you like before you sit in that chair.
Because that is the chair next to hell itself. The chair of the scorner. Blessed is the man that walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men, nor stands in sinner's way, nor sitteth in the scorner's chair.
[35:56] Have you ever noticed the progression in that? It's not just a poetic progression. There is a spiritual progression in it. First of all, walking in the way of the ungodly.

Further than that, standing in the way of sinners. Last of all, sitting in the chair of the scorner. Now, you know yourself that somebody who sits is, as it were, immovable.
Or he's in his place. He's sitting there. While he's walking in the way, that's one thing. But standing in it is another. But then he sits in the chair of the scorner.
Now, my friend, if you're in the chair of the scorner, and I mean this, you're in the most dangerous place that your soul could possibly be in. And what does the chair of the scorner mean?

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Well, it means just that there's a certain coarseness in your life in dealing with the things of God. There's a flippancy and a carelessness about the very way that you speak about God and that you speak about the church.
[37:02] You mock him. You make light of him. You make light of his name. You use it irreverently. And you delight in using it irreverently. And if there's someone even around who shows that he's maybe sensitive to the things of God, you take particular delight in showing just how you can blaspheme that name.

Or just how easily you can put it into the dust and trample upon it. Very well, you are sitting in the scorner's chair by behaving like that. You blaspheme and you blaspheme easily.
And not only that, but you mock the people of God. You mock his prophets. You mock his ministers. You deride them. You deride the way they look or you deride the way they speak. You bring them into the dust or you bring them into the gutter and you delight in doing that.
It's your delight. You like to make the church look objectionable in the eyes of people. And you deride his works. The works of God. Where are his works?
In the Bible. His sandy works. They're declared for us here. All the miracles he has done. You poo-poo that and you rubbish it. And you don't believe a word of it.
[38:09] Perhaps you spend your strength for all I know trying to disprove these things. And laughing at them. And laughing at them in public. You're sitting in the scorner's chair. It would be one thing for you.

Some kind of saving grace. I speak loosely in that respect. If you restrain yourself from that. Or if you sat back and said, well, I don't understand it, but I'm not going to mock it. But no, not you. You will make it as cheap as you can. And you laugh at it as much as you can. You're in the scorner's chair. Before I came out to church, I looked up the word scorner in the book of Proverbs because I knew that the word scorner was often mentioned in the book of Proverbs.
And it is. You can look it up in the concordance. You can look it up in the book of Proverbs. Yourselves, if you have one. Look up the word scorner. Everything that's said about the scorner is so negative. And the one thing that struck me in all these texts was this, that the people of God were told not to bother rebuking a scorner.
Does that not terrify you? If not, perhaps you're too far gone already. Perhaps you're too far gone already. If it's your business, especially young man and young woman, you were still in school to mock these things and to profane them.
[39:23] And if you don't care about what I'm telling you just now at all, if you don't care about it, then that might be a sad indicator that you are so far down this road that it's a waste of time for you to be rebuked at all.

All these texts seem to say not to waste your time in rebuking a scorner. Because he's in the chair next to the door of hell.
It's one thing to neglect. It's another thing to abstain. It's yet another altogether to scorn. And these people were scorning God's work when they were saying, Ascend, Elisha.
They were mocking the ascension. Perhaps you mock the resurrection of Christ. You mock that he ever rose from the dead or ascended into heaven. You make fun of the way in which Christ was taken from the earth into the celestial presence of God.
And you ask silly scientific questions about how it was possible for his body to do that. That is mockery. Mockery. Mockery. And as I said, that brings down the judgment of God.
[40:31] In a serious way, as we'll see in a moment. Now, what was Elisha's response? Well, in verse 24, he turned back and he looked on them and he cursed them in the name of the Lord.

It seems as though this crowd swiveled round behind him, a large number of them. And there's no doubt that they were a threatening mob. You know how threatening a mob can be when mob rule prevails.
Here they are, tens, perhaps hundreds of them. And they're coming up behind him and closing in on the man of God, insulting and jeering at him. And perhaps he fears for his life.
Or does he fear for his life? He turns round and his eyes flash like steel. And if they thought he was a soft touch compared to Elijah, they were wrong. He looks at them.
And he seems to look for a while, perhaps before he speaks, but when he opens his mouth, he curses them. And he doesn't curse them out of his own personal vengeance or personal vendetta.

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[41:33] He curses them, we are told, in the name or by the authority of God. He pronounces them dead. Spiritually dead. He pronounces them under the curse of God.

And he pronounces them as under imminent threat of judgment. And when that word comes forth from the mouth of the prophet, out of the woods nearby, there come two she-bears.
Now the she-bears or the female bears were more voracious, voracious and more ferocious than the male. And they come out seemingly angry.
And they break into this company of young prophets outside the gates or outside the walls of the city. And God sets them loose in this company of young, mocking, irreverent, irreligious people.
And they destroy 42 of them. In an act of fearful judgment, they are cut down. And the Lord displays there his power and his glory.
[42:46] 42 young men because of their irreverence and their irreligion. Now you know as well as I do that amongst young people irreverence is growing and irreligion and mockery.

It's in the music you listen to. The popular music of today is more and more full of words and of music which fly in the face of the truth of God.
Bringing God down, bringing Jesus of Nazareth down, not only to the level of a man but even below that. You're listening to that. You listen to that and you think it's okay.
You think you have a special license because you're young. You think when you're young things don't really matter. These died young. 17, 19, 20, they died.
And they died under the judgment of God. And you can die just like that yourself. The day will come when God will say of you, you mocker, that it is enough.
[43:54] God is not mocked for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. And the scorn of us in the dangerous position whether he's young or old.

And if you are mocking and irreverent whatever your age, you are in the most serious condition imaginable as far as your soul goes. And here they are torn down by the two bears.
Suddenly there is a death, a stillness. There's not much said. And Elijah or Elisha turns his way solemnly and makes his way into Bethel.
And now they know that a prophet of the Lord is among them. Now, I want you to notice some things just in the closing. First of all, perhaps you say, well, this kind of judgment is unusual.
Well, in a sense it is. But it would be the norm were it not that God himself is merciful. Why do you live? Why do you draw birth? O sinner, you who are not reconciled to God, why do you still have your life?
[45:00] Because God is long suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. That is why you live. If God was just to enact his justice there and then upon you, we would all be cut down and we would all have been cut down a long time ago.

But the day shall surely come when the sinner shall perish perish, and when they shall perish, irrevocably, lost, utterly lost, and undone.
And this incident is also a reminder, and we need them knowing again, that God is not asleep. And just when the world thinks it can do what it likes, God roses himself as a mighty man of war, and God comes down and breaks forth in the world.
And just when the world thinks it's had its day, God works in a particular way. God is not mocked. Don't go to the brink, lest you find yourself in a place where you cannot come back.
And then again, there's this, God is establishing his own prophet. And God has his ways of establishing his own people, of certifying who they are, and especially those who are proclaiming the truth.
[46:15] We said already that perhaps Elisha might not have been as formidable as Elijah. Maybe he was even for one thing bold as his predecessor was not, and not by many people was looked down upon.

Is Elisha not to be listened to because he looks weaker? Or perhaps he has a softer voice? Perhaps he looks more meek. Is he just to be abused?
No, he's not. Meekness is not weakness. And the Lord saw to it that he defended his own prophet and that he stood up for him. God will protect his own people.
And it's remarkable to see, even sometimes in a place like school where he has his own Christians, young, and sometimes they look perhaps to be insignificant in the place, or perhaps easily put down upon, he has his ways of vindicating them, and he has his ways of standing by them, so that bystanders see, if they're honest, that the Lord's blessing and the Lord's mercy is upon them.

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He never leaves his own people without strength, and he never leaves himself without a witness. And Elisha shows here the severity of the Lord as well as his goodness.
[47:31] And last of all, my friends, this reminds us that salvation has its dark side. It has its dark side. Elisha means God is salvation, but nothing has changed with respect to the judgment of God.

Is that not so? Jesus of Nazareth was the one who spoke of hell, and he was the one who spoke of lostness, and of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.
He was the one who cast the money changers out of the temple. The gospel is like that. There's a lot of people who like to dwell on gentle Jesus, as they say, and they like to think of him as meek and mild.
Meek he was, mild he appears to me not to have been. He is meek, but there he stands before you as a judge and a savior. Is he compassionate and merciful in the gospel?
He is, and he is preeminently the preacher of the good news of the gospel. But is he with reverence, is he easy to be won over? Can he be fooled and can he be deceived?
[48:37] Can you make play of his mercy and his kindness? No, he cannot. Look at him on the throne with a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth and he will wield it.

The gospel sword has two sides. It cuts both ways. It will save and it will destroy. Make no mistake. Kiss the son, lest in his wrath you perish from the way.
If once his wrath begin to burn, bless all that on him stay. Let us pray. O gracious God, we pray that they would keep us from the chair of this corner and enable us to have respect and reverence to the things of God.
We ask thee to restrain us by thy grace and give us that heart that will seek thyself and that will seek the mercy of God and Christ, that our souls might be saved and that we might know the joy unspeakable and full of glory.
For Christ's sake, Amen.

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