God and the world

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[0:00] Well, you and I live in a world where lots of people live without any reference to God whatsoever. Just think of the newspapers, think of the television, think of the stories we hear about dictators around the world doing as they please, regardless of the consequences for their people.

Think of social movements that are acting without any recourse or recrimination. I don't know if you've been following the news recently of Planned Parenthood in the United States who are selling baby body parts.
You might have closer to home, you might have friends who deny God, who pretend God does not exist, who have an empty spirituality that consists nothing more of horoscopes and tarot cards.
If we're honest, as Alan kind of pointed us to earlier on in his prayer, maybe we have to even acknowledge that there are areas in our own lives where we live without reference to God.
We live as if God does not exist. See, in every situation, the implication is that God is not real. The implication is that God is not present.
[1:16] The implication is that God is not in the land. He doesn't live here. He doesn't exist. He's not real. And he's certainly not in the building. Now, we might expect that type of attitude from places that have never heard about God.

But certainly we wouldn't expect it from his people, would we? And certainly in an Old Testament context, we would never expect it from the nation of Israel. For Israel, after all, are God's special people.
And yet as we come to 2 Kings chapter 1, we find that's exactly what's happening. The nation of Israel, God's people, are living without reference to God.
We're told that the country is in decline. Politically, those who are under their charge are rebelling.
We're told just at the end of 1 Kings that economically they're in decline.
We're told that in terms of their leadership, all things are going wrong. We're told that spiritually they've chosen to worship Baal, the idols of their neighbors.
[2:20] Here are God's people living in God's place as if God doesn't exist. And King Ahaziah is leading the way.

Now, it says he fell through the lattice work. It probably means, you'll see my sixth sense of humor coming out in 2 Kings. He probably fell off the toilet. That's probably what it means. Because that's where it would have been in the upper room, surrounded by lattice.
He fell off the toilet. He hurt himself. I don't know if he got a hernia. I don't know if he did something wrong. But he's sick. He's hurt. He's in a lot of pain. He's worried, actually, that he might even die.
So he sends off some messengers. And he says, look, you go to the gods next door. You go to the false gods of Baal. And you find out from them, will I recover?
I remember he's the king of Israel. When he says that, he insults the God of Israel. He implies that God is not here. He implies that God no longer exists. In fact, that's how God understands it.
[3:20] Did you pick it up while Adrian was reading? There's a verse that's repeated three times through this chapter. Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal?

Is it because God is not in the land? Is that why, king, you decide you must go off? Is that why you must go and consult other people? Do you think it's because God is not here?
I mean, here's the great irony in this passage. The God who Ahaziah does not think exists, the God who Ahaziah does not think is here, watches and knows everything that's going on.
So he knows about the secret mission. And he knows about the desires of Ahaziah. And he knows because he is, in fact, the true king of the universe. And so while Ahaziah sends off his messengers, God, in his sovereignty and in his wisdom, sends his own messengers.

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He sends Elijah. And Elijah has a very interesting message for Ahaziah. Now, that's a showstopper, isn't it?
[4:43] It's a showstopper. Well, let's try and make sense of it. Let's try and come to this passage where these events unfold. Don't get excited. I've only got two points today.

But that won't mean the sermon will be any shorter. Just so you know. The first thing I want you to notice is you look at 2 Kings chapter 1. I want you to notice that God's word declares God's presence.
God's word declares God's presence. You see, Elijah is the man of God. He is a messenger of God's word.
All he does is take the message that God has given him and runs with it. Goes to the king and says, here it is. In so doing, when he speaks the message of God, he declares that God is alive, that God is well, that God is speaking, that God is present.
See, I hope you realize that. When we have a speaking God, it means we have a living God. When we have a speaking God who is able to send messages to the king of Israel, it reminds us that God is real.
[5:56] It reminds us that God is present. You see, this is God's way of saying to Ahaziah, look, buddy, you actually don't need to go anywhere else. You don't need to go to your next door neighbors. You don't need to go on holiday to consult anybody else.

You certainly don't need to go and consult a dumb, mute idol. Now, you don't need to do that. This is God's way of saying, Ahaziah, I'm right here.
Stop looking elsewhere. I'm right in front of you. If only you have eyes to see and ears to hear. Ahaziah. But Ahaziah doesn't.
He doesn't. In fact, Ahaziah gets miffed. Have you ever been interrupted? Have you ever had your plans changed? I guess you're probably like Ahaziah. You're not impressed with that.
You're not happy with that. Ahaziah is fed up. So what he does is he says, I will send some soldiers to sort Elijah out. We must be very clear. The soldiers here are not a god of honor.
[6:57] They're a declaration of hostility. The captains do not come as friends to Elijah. They come as foes. You see, what the king is trying to do is he's trying to silence God's word.

Because if he can silence God's word, he can reject God's presence. He can ignore God's presence. And that's our world today, isn't it? You remove God's word because then you can live as if God does not exist.
We haven't come very far in two and a half thousand years, have we? We do exactly the same thing today. Just look at social media. Look at the world in which you and I live. We want to reject the Bible. We want to reject the word of God.
Why? Because then we can do what we want. Then we can live as if God does not exist in the land. And every time that is an affront on God. It is an insult to God.
It is a denial of God. And God won't have anything of that. I don't know if you picked up the funny side in the story. There is a funny. I think it's funny.
[7:56] But it might be because I've just got a sixth sense of humor. There is a funny side. You see, the soldiers get a bit of a shock, don't they? The soldiers come with all their might. They come with 50 of their soldiers.

Captain and 50. I mean, those are pretty good odds. One fearful, frightened prophet hiding in the hills. 51 elite soldiers. It's like the military power coming to bear.
The problem is they've forgotten that the messenger is simply that. He's just a messenger. The truth is he's nothing in and of himself. He has no power. He has no might.
And if you read one Kings and if you read two Kings, you'll discover that 90% of the time Elijah's afraid. He's actually quite a scaredy cat. I think that's why he's up in the hills. I think that's why I have to say to him, come down, because he's hiding in a cave in the hills.
He's petrified of what's going to happen. But here's the thing. He is the messenger of God. Behind him stands the sovereign God of the world.
[8:58] Behind him stands all the might of a very real and very present God. Here's where I think it gets hysterical. Man of God, come down.

The king wants to kill you. Yes, that sounds attractive. Now, notice it. Here it is. Elijah says, you can see him. He's playing in the sand. Well, if I really am a man of God, may fire come down and consume you.

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Did you see what verse 10 says? And then fire came down and destroyed them. See, God takes an affront on his person very seriously.
When you think you can live as if God is not real, you're in for a surprise. The fire comes in divine judgment. The fire comes because this is God saying, I'm here.
The fire comes because this is to prove God's word is true. See, when the man of God says God is here, if you do not believe him, you're in for a surprise. If you're familiar with the book of Kings, it's got that great story of Mount Carmel back in 1 Kings chapter 18.
[10:06] Do you remember the Sunday school story? Where the same prophet uses the same instrument, fire, to prove that God is very real to the nation of Israel. These guys are obviously slow learners because they should have learned it in 1 Kings 18 that God is present and real.

They should have certainly learned it with the first captain. But do you notice? What does Ahaz I do? We need another volunteer. Another captain. Off you go. What happens to the second captain? Man of God, come down. The king wants to kill you. Yes, it's just as attractive as the first time. If I am a man of God, may fire consume you. Poof, that's going to be.
Gone again. Destroyed. Why? Because God is very present. You would think that by now the king would learn. God is real.
God is present. God is here. But here's the catch. You and I, we sit here this morning, as I often do in my office, and I say, those silly Israelites. That silly King Ahaziah.
[11:06] Could he not see? Could he not understand? Would he not learn that God is real? And then I look in the mirror and realize that I do exactly the same, don't I?

Exactly the same. You see, the truth is I've got way more than two kings. I've got way more than fire. Because the truth is I've got the person of Jesus Christ.
God himself coming in flesh and blood. I have the promise of the word made flesh and dwelling amongst us. I have the presence of the Holy Spirit, according to Acts chapter 2.
How much more then should I conclude that God is real? And yet so often I don't. So often I live as if God is not here.
So often I live as if God is not around. You know, it's the apostle Paul who wrote in the book of Acts, or who said in the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 17.
[12:10] It explains a slightly different event, but his conclusion is this. God did this so that the people would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him. Now listen to this at the end of verse 27.

Though God is not far from any one of us. See, I wonder when you came to church today, I wonder if you came expecting to see a good-looking pastor like you've got.
And then you were disappointed to discover Nick's away and Luke's here. I wonder who you came expecting to meet with today. I wonder who you came thinking would be present here.
I wonder if you got prepared to come to church today, whether you were expecting to have God here. I wonder if you consciously thought about that. That God is in this place.
God is not far from us. He is right here. And if you were thinking that way, I wonder how you would act. See, I want to suggest when you are clear in your minds that God is real, that God is present, I think you will live a holy life.
[13:12] I think you will be concerned with character. I think you will be worried about that. You will be worried about godliness. And I think you will be concerned with witness. See, I think what chapter 1 reminds us is that this God who is real and this God who is present expects his people to bear witness to him.

Exhaustive witness, in fact. Now, I know that we're not Elijah. I know that we're quite different from him. But in some ways, we're quite similar. See, God has always expected his people to tell the world that God is here.
God is real. God is present. In fact, that's one of the reasons why I suggested we read Acts chapter 1 today. Because what is the thing Jesus says to his followers just before he leaves? What is his final command?
He says to them, you will be my witnesses. You will go and tell the world that I am king. You will go and proclaim to the world that I am real, that I am here.
God didn't make the world and then go on holiday. He didn't abandon it. He didn't decide not to exist after that. God is here. And our job, if we are his people, is to live in the reality of his presence.

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[14:22] Our job is to tell the world that he's here. I know sometimes we think we've got to put God in a suitcase, don't we? And we've got to take him to the far ends of the earth. News flash, he's already there.

This is his world. It's not like we've got to take him anywhere. What we do have to do is we have to tell the world he's there. We have to proclaim to the world, here, there, and everywhere, that God is real and God is present.
And they better shape up. Because if they don't, they're in trouble. I think that's why Jesus says, not just that you'll be my witnesses, but you'll be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. That's why our witness should be exhaustive.
We believe in a sovereign God over the whole world, don't we? We believe in a God who is broad and big in his scope, don't we? And therefore, we should be telling people everywhere that he's here. I wonder if when you pray this week, as you reflect on your own hearts, as you reflect on the presence of this great God, as you understand the need to proclaim this God to the world, I wonder if you'll pray that God, in his mercy, would raise somebody from this church, from this church, to go and tell the world that God is real.
Maybe somebody from this church. There might be one of the teenagers or the children next door. There might be one of you sitting here. But why don't we pray that God would raise somebody from our midst to go and tell the world, an unreached people's group, a group who've never heard about Jesus.
[15:51] Why don't we pray that God would raise up one of ours to tell somebody else God is real? Of course, when we know that, here's the second thing.

I told you the points wouldn't be short. Here's the second thing. See, when we understand God's presence, well, we'll understand that God's presence demands God's worship. Presence always leads to worship.
When we recognize that God is real, when we recognize that he is here in our midst, what will we do? We will worship him. See, when you come face to face with a holy God, when you come face to face with a God full of righteousness, when you come face to face with a magnificent and glorious God of the world, what will you do?
I'll tell you what you will do. You will fall down on your face in awe and adoration. You will bow the knee in worship, in reverence, obedience. See, here's the shock in 2 Kings chapter 1.
Ahaziah should have worshipped God. The dumb idiot should. I mean, remember who he is. He's the king of Israel.
[16:59] If anybody should have known God is real, it should be the king of Israel. After all, God appointed him. And if he knows that God is real, what should he have done?

He should have worshipped God. He should have bowed the knee. He chose rebellion. And he chose defiance. Indeed, he chose adultery.
That's what he chose. Dear friends, we mustn't sugarcoat this. When you give the love that is meant for one to another, that is adultery.
See, the love that he had should have been given to God. God. His sovereign, gracious, merciful God. Instead, he gave it to the idols of Baal. That is spiritual adultery.
That is what idolatry is. And in fact, he led his people astray, didn't he? Did you see that in the two captains? Do you see their attitude? Man of God, come down! Second guy?
[17:58] Man of God, come down! Quickly! Why? Why would they have such hostility? Because they too have turned their backs on God. See, here is the king who should be leading his people in worship.

And the truth is, he's leading them into the wilderness. Here is a group of people who have rejected God. Here is a group of people who have denied God's presence. And because the fire is not enough for Ahaziah to understand, eventually God says to Elijah, Elijah, you go.
Go into the king's bedroom. You won't be harmed. Don't be afraid, Elijah. It'll be okay. You go. And when you go there, tell this to the king. Have a look at verse 16. You go and you say, this is what the Lord says.
Is it because there's no God in Israel for you to consult, that you've sent messengers to consult Baal's above? The God of Ekron, because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on.

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You will certainly die. Now notice verse 17. It's brilliant in its understatement, isn't it? So Ahaziah died according to the word of the Lord.
[19:04] Elijah had spoken. See, God's word is true because God's presence is true. And if we will not worship God, then we will face God's judgment. We will face God's wrath.

We must remember in this world, there is no neutrality. Switzerland does not exist in the real spiritual world. You can't sit in the fence. You can't sit on the fence either.
You see, either you worship God or you face God's wrath. Can I just stop there for a moment and just point that out to you, dear friend? I mean, it might be that you're sitting here today because somebody's brought you along.
It might be that you've come with a family member or a friend. It might be that you come regularly, in fact. But the truth is, you've never bowed the knee in worship to God. I need to say to you, dear friend, that there are only two ways.
Either you bow that knee in worship or you will face his wrath. And his word will come true because he is real and he is present. Of course, in this passage, worship is the means to life.
[20:10] So Elijah enjoys safety. Elijah enjoys security. Elijah enjoys life. Why? Because he responds to God in reverence and obedience. He responds to God in worship.

When God says, Elijah, take this message, even though he's afraid, even though he's petrified, what does he do? He says, yes, Lord, I'm on my way. See, when you worship God, it's life.
The third captain, he's the clever guy. I mean, you don't want to be sitting in the barracks, do you? When the king comes in and says, I need a third captain to go. I mean, you've really lost 102 soldiers.
You know this can't possibly end well. The third captain, however, is the cleverest guy in the passage. Do you know why he's the cleverest guy in the passage? Because he sees God behind Elijah.
He sees God. And do you notice what he does? He comes to the man of God. He doesn't say, come down here quickly, the king wants to kill you. Do you know what he says? He says, man of God, I'm in deep, deep trouble.
[21:09] I'm in deep, deep trouble. Because I actually understand that behind you, somebody controls life. I've seen it. I've seen 102 men die already.

I understand that this cannot have a good outcome if I do what my predecessors do. This cannot have a good outcome if I do what the king wants me to do. And do you see it in the passage? He says, now please, please tell me. Have respect for my life. I come in humility. I come in reference. I come in submission. I mean, here's the irony of it.
I hope you get it. Here is the captain who's supposed to be instructing Elijah. Here is the captain who's supposed to have the military might behind him. Here is the captain who's got all the power, humanly speaking, in his hands.
And do you know what he says to Elijah? Essentially, he says, what must I do? What must I do to live? What must I do to be saved? Do you see what he understands?
[22:08] He understands that behind Elijah is God. And when you understand that, you worship this God. You bow before this God. You come in reverence. You come in submission. You come in obedience. You come in worship.

It's no mistake when Paul has explained the gospel in Romans chapters 1 through 8. And he shows you how Israel are included in that in chapters 9, 10, and 11.
And then he tells you now how we are to respond when you understand the gospel. Do you remember Romans chapter 12? When you've understood the mercy of God. When you've understood what God has done for you. What should you do?
Do you remember Romans 12.1? You should offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. Holy and pleasing to God. And you know how that verse finishes? This is your true and proper worship.
See, when you understand who God is and what he's done for you. What should you do? You should worship him. True worship always understands that God is present. That God is real. True worship always responds in humble submission.
[23:09] Total dependence. Faith. True worship expresses itself in reverent obedience. We live the way God wants us to live. Dear friends, can I suggest to you that that is why we should be witnesses.

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We should tell the world to worship God. Because when they worship God, they will experience life. You know, you've got family members and you've got friends who think they are living it up, don't they?
They think they're enjoying freedom. What they're doing is they're enjoying destruction. Because they're on their path to wrath. But when we preach the good news, when we proclaim Jesus as king, when we call people to repentance and faith, what we are doing is we're leading them to life. See, life comes through worshipping God alone. Of course, we must say, we'd be very wrong not to in light of this chapter, we must say that the worship God demands is exclusive worship.
We must be clear here. God is not permissive. God is not tolerant. 2 Kings chapter 1 tells me that. 2 Kings chapter 1 reminds me that God will not deal with competitors nicely.
[24:18] He will not take his place amongst many. God is not happy for Ahaziah to worship God on the one hand and the Baals of the Philistines on the other. Now, God demands exclusive worship.

God demands to be the one and only. We cannot somehow fool ourselves into thinking that we can just include God into what we want to do anyway. We can't assimilate God into an existing worldview.
No, what we must do is redefine our worldview completely based on who God is and what God demands. I don't know what you made of the Scots yesterday. Did you watch the game?
Are you allowed to talk rugby in this church? I don't know what you made of the Scots yesterday. But let me tell you, there's something called the Scots Confession. The Scots came up with it in 1560.
Let me read to you the opening lines because it is absolutely brilliant. In 1560, this was the Scottish Confession. They wrote this, We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust.
[25:36] See, they hit it on the head, didn't they? God demands exclusive worship. And so we must be careful. When we do mission, when we do witness, when we do evangelism, we are not just throwing another God into the mix for the world.

We're not just adding a little bit of flavor into the stew. We are saying there is one God, and we worship him alone. Can I tell you, that is why the gospel is so offensive.
That is why the gospel is offensive. Because the gospel at its heart says, There is no other way to God, except through Jesus.
It might be you're sitting here today, and you're thinking all roads lead to Rome. It might be you're sitting here today saying, Well, you can have a little bit of God on the side, and keep doing what you like. No, you can't, dear friend. It is God or nothing.
It is all of God or nothing. What God demands of you is exclusive worship. And it is, in fact, that exclusive worship that will force you this week to go, and as Alan rightly said earlier on, reflect in your own life.
[26:48] It will be this exclusive worship that demands you to examine your heart and to examine your conduct. It is this worship that says, Are there areas in your life where you live as if God does not exist?

Are there choices you're making without consulting Him first? Are there priorities you're pursuing without prayerfully coming to God?
Are there behaviors you've adopted because you're feeding your own sinful desire, and yet you know in your heart it is rebellion against God?
Have there been things in your life that you've adopted that when you look at it carefully, it really implies that God does not exist, not just in the land, but in your life?
You see, this passage calls us to worship God exclusively. And I think when we worship God exclusively, do you know what we'll do? We'll witness for Him exhaustively.
[27:52] When we know that He's great, when we know that He's brilliant, when we know that He's the only God in the world, what we'll do is we'll tell others about Him, and we'll tell others about Him because we want them to come to life.

Dear friends, as we sit here today, I wonder if you're clear that God is here. I wonder if you're clear that God is not just here in this church, but He's here in this country, and He's here in this world because it's His.

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He made it, and He saved it through His Son, Jesus Christ. God is revealed in creation. He is revealed in history. He is revealed in the cross. He is revealed to be real, to be present.
I wonder if you sit here today, you've got that confidence. God is real. And then I wonder if you know that He demands that you worship Him exclusively, and that you witness for Him exhaustively.
Let's pray. Father, give us, we pray, eyes to see and ears to hear. Lord, help us to be convinced today that you are real, that you are present, that you are mighty and powerful.
[29:02] Lord, help us today to respond in exclusive worship. help us to respond today in exhaustive witness as we tell the world about Jesus here, there, and everywhere.

In your name we pray this. Amen.

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