

I knew this woman once, we'll call her Betty. Betty was in a Disciple II class I facilitated a couple of years ago. One night she told this funny story. When Betty was very young she joined the U.S. Army. When Betty was in basic training and she was told to go the Post Office on base to pick up the mail. Well, she didn't know where the Post Office was. So she asked for directions. (pause) For a soldier in basic training this was a very BAD idea. Soldiers are supposed to be self-reliant. Soldiers are supposed to be able to figure things out for themselves or at least be able to read the signs on base to find the post office. Betty was in big trouble. Do you know what Betty's punishment was? (pause) Betty was given the privilege of guarding a telephone pole, outside the post office for three hours with her rifle pointed at the top.

I bring up this story because in our Scripture this morning the king of Judah was a man named Ahazi'ah. As a king of Judah he was supposed to know from whom to find help in time of need. Ahazi'ah was supposed to know, as we are supposed to know, whom to turn to when he was sick or in trouble. He was supposed to know who had authority over the people in Israel and Judea. Moreover, Ahazi'ah was supposed to set the example for the people to follow.

Psalm 121:1-2 says;

"I lift my eyes up to the hills
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth."

Ahazi'ah had an accident. He fell through the pergola on his roof and was hurt. Evidently he was hurt badly enough Ahazi'ah thought he was going to die. This is exactly the kind of situation in Israel when you would need to seek God's guidance and council. However, instead of asking for help from the Lord God Almighty, Ahazi'ah sent messengers to inquire of Ba'al-ze'bub, the god of Ekron. The text here is very clear. When it refers to the Lord, God is capitalized. When the text speaks of Ba'al-ze'bub, the god of Ekron, god is lowercase. Hear me friends. The Bible makes this distinction because there are other spirits. There are other spiritual beings. Beware of people who claim to be spiritual but not religious for how exactly do they know which spirit they serve without the religion of their forefathers as a guide. Ahazi'ah made just this mistake.

Ahazi'ah sent his messengers to inquire of a god he very likely did not know. Ahazi'ah did this in the face of the God who knew Ahazi'ah very well. The Lord God Almighty sent Elijah the Tishbite to ask the messengers of the king a very serious question, and to hand a serious judgment to the king's messengers for their king.

"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Ba'al-ze'bub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus says the Lord, 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die'" (2Kings 1:6).

The whole reason Israel exists at all is because of God's providence and grace. God told Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves" (Gen 12:3). There at the base of Mt. Sinai before God handed the children of Israel the Ten Commandments God made this offer to Israel; "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). The people answered, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). Then, the Lord makes it very plain what God wants from Israel.

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any

likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:2-6).

Ahazi'ah had made a very grave mistake and had set a terrible example for Israel. Ahazi'ah, the king, had sought the counsel and guidance of a foreign, little "g" god while ruling the land which the Lord God, capitol "G" Almighty had given to Israel. God rightly asks the question, Did you do this because there is not a God in Israel? (pause) Church, what was the consequence of Ahazi'ah choosing to seek counsel from a little "g" god?

"So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken." (2Kings 1:17).

The king died because he sought the counsel of another little "g" god instead of the Lord God Almighty. The northern ten tribes of Israel would be conquered and scattered, never to return because they created and chased after little "g" gods. The southern two tribes of Judah would follow Israel's fate only to return after 75 years in exile.

The message I take from this is anyone, or any church which is supposed to be devoted to God will be left to face the consequences of their actions if they choose not to put God first. (long pause)

Have y'all seen the news this week? U.S. troops were called back from their positions in Northern Syria. The Turkish army moved in and attacked the Kurds. There are pictures and video of women and children; families trying to escape the violence. U.S. troops are following orders. They are standing by.

There was an attack on a Jewish Synagogue on Yom Kippur this week. Yom Kippur is the highest holy day for Jewish people – kinda like Easter for Christians. Yom Kippur started the evening of October 8th and ended the evening of October 9th. In Germany a man tried to attack a synagogue because he wanted to kill the people inside much the same way Dylan Roof barged into an African American church in Charleston back in 2015.

My sisters and brothers whom are we following? What little "g" gods are we following when indifference is ordered and obeyed? What little "g" gods are we following when hate is okay? What little "g" gods are we following when we become so afraid of change; or losing power; or no longer being the majority that it is okay to turn a blind eye to those who would hurt and kill? Where is our outrage? Where is our anger placed? (pause) Oh yes. It is okay to be angry. The question is what are we angry about? Are we angry because we spilled the milk, or are we angry about the children who are going without milk? Are we angry that we were cut off in traffic, or are we angry there are those who do not have a job because they don't have adequate transportation? Are we angry because somebody sat in our pew or are we angry that not enough is being done to seek the lost in our community so that the pews would be filled with those who seek God?

My sisters and brothers the things we value most, the things we care about most tell our families, our coworkers and our community what is most important in our lives. If we really are saved then the things that make us happy, and the things that make us angry should center around God, and not politics, or sports. When those things become more important the world is left asking if it is because there is no God in our towns, in our communities and heaven forbid, in our churches. If there really is still a Lord God Almighty at work in our hearts, and I believe there is, then perhaps we should act like it.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen