

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-18

Theme: Elijah's Departure.

Last time we looked at Elijah's last day and the serious lessons for us - as we were challenged as to our preparation for our own last day - whether we see it coming or it comes unexpectedly we need ready to meet our God by having the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. We also noted that this passage gives us a mysterious and yet glorious lesson that prayers can be answered negatively, yet can end up greater than our desires and expectations! Elijah had prayed to die, yet he never did! God did something remarkable for him. Our main heading last time was **1. Elijah's last day** and we saw that he did not panic, but visited companies of prophets - probably to encourage them to go on with a work and also because those places were close to his heart and experience. Now we move on and see the other 3 points of the 4:

2. Elisha's Determination.

To my mind it seems almost comical as Elijah tried to get Elisha to stay behind at a number of places - Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho. It seems Elijah wanted rid of his companion and hiked him some 35 to 40 miles over the countryside. Why do that? Various ideas have been suggested as to why Elijah wanted Elisha to stay behind - that it was to spare his friend the sorrow and grief of his sudden departure; another that it was out of humility - for Elijah possibly knew the means of his departure and wanted this glorious honour to be unknown and unseen by human eyes. Personally I feel Elijah was testing the strength of Elisha's love and attachment to the work Elisha had been had called to by God - to care for God's servant Elijah and also be his successor. If Elisha could be persuaded to stay in ease, to leave his tutor on his own, then a question would be raised if he was a worthy successor! Elijah needed to know that the call of God, the years

of training and working together were effective in Elisha's heart and life.

In the sad story of Naomi, as she grieved the loss of a husband and 2 sons and she was returning to the land of Israel, she told, encouraged her daughters-in-law is to stay in their own land. Both initially refused, but then Orpah returned. Ruth pledged herself to Naomi with strong words (Ruth 1:16-17 *“Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”*). I feel that here Elisha had the same feelings for Elijah and had vowed to stay with him to the end. Elisha knew the Lord would take Elijah that day (v3 & 5) and he would not leave him, but was strongly determined to stay with him. Three times Elisha expressed his determination not to leave Elijah (v2, 4 & 6). Elisha had served with Elijah for some 10 to 15 years and he was determined not to leave him, especially as he knew his departure was close at hand. His resolve and determination must have been further strengthened as the prophets at Bethel and Jericho spoke of Elijah's departure (v3 & 5). Elisha is an example and challenge to us!

In the light of all our lovely Saviour the Lord Jesus has done, is doing for us and will do for us, are we determined to follow Him and serve Him ALL our days? Sadly many are fair weather Christians and give up when the going gets rough or tough or contrary to what they wanted or expected! Surely the Lord Jesus is worth giving our best for and our all for. He does not demand or expect that we will all be great heroes of the faith, or be dynamic missionaries, preachers or leaders. Yet He notices when we do little things for Him and His people - even a cup of cold

water given in His name will not go unrewarded, so serve the Lord faithfully even in small matters. As we do so He may be pleased to entrust us with service in bigger matters. Be determined to serve the Lord as it could be our last day to do so, or our last opportunity to do good to others for it is our or their last day!

Elisha stayed with Elijah and both of them crossed the Jordan together and did so by miraculous means.

3. Elisha's Difficult Request.

Elisha was the heir to Elijah and Elijah made his will verbally and asks v9 *"Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"* Elijah basically said that soon Elisha could ask nothing more of him. Sadly some people pray to departed believers or to their ancestors; others pray to or through angels; to or through Mary. Yet none of these are allowed in Scripture, in fact they are forbidden. We have only one recorded instance of someone calling out to a dead believer - the rich man in hell called out to Abraham, and if we read the account we find it did him no good! We are told to pray to the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit. We have the honour and privilege to pray *"Our Father..."* We are instructed to pray in *"Jesus' name"* as Christians i.e. all Jesus is and has done allows us to go directly to the throne of grace to the God of grace on the throne and it is not some sort of celestial password or magic phrase that pays! To ask or go through any other is blasphemy, as it says basically that Jesus lied when He told us to pray only in His name and that He and His work are not enough.

Elisha asks v9b *"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,"* and was told he had asked a difficult thing (v10). Elisha did not ask for riches, wealth, fame, power, success or an easy life, but

for a double portion of the spirit which rested on Elijah. Elisha knew he needed to be enabled, qualified to serve God in his day and age. If the great Elijah needed God's Spirit, then Elisha felt he needed a double portion of Him - he was aware of his weakness, so it was essential to have a double portion of the Holy Spirit!

Elisha knew it was of God's giving, but Elijah, as the prophet of his day could - while alive - pray and ask for this. Elisha was told it was a difficult thing not to discourage him, but to show him the value, the worth, the preciousness of what he asked for, especially compared to his own felt unworthiness to receive it. Matthew Henry wrote *"Those are best prepared for spiritual blessings that are more sensible of their worth and their own unworthiness to receive them."*

We are to be concerned for more of God, for a greater outpouring of His Spirit in our day. Pray for more of God's Spirit to rest on the preparation and ministry of His word - whoever is ministering here in the church. To do this will be to ask for a difficult thing, but also a most valuable and precious thing to be given to us. Do we see our need of more of God and His Spirit to come down upon us in a mighty way? We need this - for God to come down and deal with us as individuals, as a church, on the surrounding area of Wheatley, as well as Doncaster and our godless land. This should be our burden to cry to God for this and not be lax to do so. It is a difficult request, but not for our God. He has done it before and there have been times of great outpourings of His Spirit. Pray that we would all see the value and worth of such and ask, call on God to do so once again.

4. Elijah's Departure.

Elijah had intimated that his departure was close at hand and that for Elisha to get the difficult thing he had requested, he had to keep close and see it - which probably made him even more determined to do so! It is fascinating to notice how it happened. It was not in a Hollywood style, but in v11 they were walking and talking together and then suddenly... Elijah and Elisha were separated by the chariot of fire and Elijah was taken up into heaven - not in the chariot as such, but in the whirlwind. Elijah did not die, but was taken up directly into heaven. Although it doesn't say so, Elijah's body had to be changed, transformed to be able to dwell in heaven. He was not the 1st to experience this - Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him. One writer says that Elijah *"was the 2nd man that leapt the ditch where all the rest of mankind fell, and went not downwards to the sky."*

As to why God would take Elijah in this way, we can only speculate, but it does remind us that our time and manner of departing from this world are in God's hands - in the hands of our loving heavenly Father if we are believers in the Lord Jesus. Here was the spectacular answer *"NO"* to the self pitying prayer to die which Elijah had prayed years before! Psalm 31:15 says *"My times are in your hands"* - the times in our living and of our dying. We are to thank God for His love and care for us in all the situations of life we find ourselves in and are going through. We are to thank Him that in all times and situations His ways are best - even if we cannot always see that. We will go to be with Him - not a moment too soon, or a moment too late. We may have to go through dark times, through ways we would not choose, but one day as believers, we will pass from the scene of time into heaven and be in His presence and know fullness of joy for ever more (Psalm 16:11).

Elijah had these amazing accompanying signs at his departure - a chariot and horses of fire, a whirlwind. Commentators argue that these are the cherubim and seraphim. The seraphim are the burning ones (Isaiah 6) and the cherubim in Ezekiel 1:13 are described as *“burning coals of fire or burning torches”*. In Psalm 68:17; 18:10 the Lord is pictured as riding on the cherubim - they are as His chariot; also 1 Chronicles 28:18 (NIV) *“He (David) also gave him the plan for the chariot, that is, the cherubim of gold that spread their wings and shelter the ark of the covenant of the LORD.”* C.f. Ezekiel 1, Zechariah 1:8, 6:1 and Revelation 6:2.

We are to recognise that for every believer, no matter how low in this world’s views, angels will be present at our death to accompany and carry us into the glory of heaven e.g. Lazarus the beggar. Angels are ministering spirits for the heirs of salvation i.e. believers and they are present and active in our lives, especially at the moment of our death. We are to realise that for every believer our physical death is the beginning of a new sphere of life. CHS once said *“One day you will hear that Mr Spurgeon is dead. Don’t you believe it! I’ll be more alive than I have ever been!”*

Death is ahead for us all, unless the Lord Jesus returns, and we need to be ready and at peace with God through the Lord Jesus because only then will heaven be our home. We need to be ready now. Are we? If not then we are to seek God through the Lord Jesus. Speak to me, speak to others here and we will tell you of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, who can be your Saviour too. If we are ready because we have believed, can I encourage us all to think of heaven often! Doing so will weaken sin and the world’s grip on our lives. It will cause us to live holy and godly lives as we see what lays ahead for us, especially knowing we could

appear before God at any time. As believers death is being absent from the body and present with the Lord.

Elijah did not die, but had a foretaste of what all believers will experience when the Lord Jesus returns - our bodies will be transformed - given resurrection bodies whether we are dead or alive at that time and we will be caught up into the air and be forever with the Lord. We are to encourage one another with such thoughts (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Elijah went from earth directly to heaven! He was not found when the 50 prophets looked for him; for he was in a far, far better place! Yet he was seen bodily in Israel again - some 800 years later he is on a mountain in Israel and he is there with Moses and they are there in glorious splendour. What are they doing? They are talking with the transfigured Lord Jesus and speaking to Him about His death that He would accomplish in Jerusalem. Yes Moses and Elijah were great, were glorified believers in heaven, but the centre of their attention was the Lord Jesus, His death and all it would accomplish for not only us, but for them also. As great a prophet and man of God as Elijah was, we are not to focus our attention and love on him, but we are to focus our love and attention on the Lord Jesus who is Elijah's Saviour too. There on the Mount of Transfiguration God the Father told awestruck Peter, James and John "*This is my Beloved Son, hear ye him*" - keep on listening to and obeying Him. We also must do that. With the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then our death, no matter how prolonged or agonising, will be the way to the glorious home He has prepared for us in heaven. Yes we will see and recognise Elijah, Elisha, Moses, greats throughout history, our loved ones who are believers, and all believers. Yet our attention will be focused on the altogether lovely one the

Lord Jesus and when we see Him, we will be lost in wonder,
love and praise for all that He's done for us.