

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-18

Theme: Elijah's Last Day.

Last days can be happy times or sad times. The last day at school for many is a happy day, or the last day of work before retirement can be a really good day for many, although some may prefer to stay at school or in work! The last day of a memorably enjoyable holiday can be really sad. This chapter focuses on Elijah's last day and it contains the remarkable account of Elijah's prayer in the wilderness NOT being answered! He wanted the Lord to take his life (1 Kings 19:4), yet we see the Lord never took his earthly life and Elijah went bodily from earth to heaven! Elijah is a large figure in OT and yet we know so little about the man - his background, family, no age when he started his ministry or when he left this world, no length of time for his ministry, but we can work out it would have been some 20-25 years (Ahab reigned 22; Ahaziah 2 and he died in Jehoram's reign). Elijah was a man just like us and his life earthly began and ended. Good men were scarce, but great men like Elijah were rare, yet he, like us all, must leave this scene of time.

This is a serious and sobering thought for us all - as none of us live forever. Those of us who are believers we are to seek to speak of our Saviour Jesus, for we do not know whether or not we or our hearers will have opportunity to speak or hear of Him again. We know all of us will die - our loved ones, friends, parents, husband, wife, children will die. Are we prepared for the time of OUR own death? That needs to be seriously considered - not the most delightful of thoughts, yet it is one event fixed in all of our lives. We all need to

remember that after death there is the judgement and eternity! Eternity will be spent either with God, enjoying Him; or without Him and suffering at His hands the eternal punishment our sin deserves.

You may feel at this point this sermon is terrible, morbid, distressing, yet it may be a wake-up call to someone - as many people do not consider these realities. Many have a sentimentalised Hollywood distorted view of death and any afterlife. Some say *“Death is the end, we die and rot”*. To many we are biochemical units that interact with each other and our environment, then we shut down and are recycled. Yet many people in a funeral service, or standing by the grave of a loved one feel there is more to us than that. We have reason, intellect, achievements even a strange fear of death and also a sneaking fear that we have to face God. The Bible says *“man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27).

Many are prepared to die - brave men and women, or seeing it as a release from pain etc. Others have their funeral details arranged, insurances so that their family will be cared for, wills all done and yet they may not have given one thought to their state on the day of judgement and are not prepared at all. What about all of us here? As we look at Elijah’s departure and going up to heaven, I hope we will examine our lives and question if we are prepared to meet our God. Are we as ready as Elijah was? From this incident I want us to see 4 main things, but only one this morning:

1. Elijah’s Last Day.

I give you a tip- when I say *main things* or *main points*, it usually means I've other headings within a point and this is what I have here - 4 headings!

A. Knowing. If we knew that today or tomorrow was our last day, how would we live and react? What would concern us, what would we do? Perhaps we would be concerned to see loved ones, get our affairs in order, right wrongs; some may shut themselves away and contemplate their lives and make sure they are ready for death. Others may indulge themselves - eat, drink, be merry for tomorrow we die. It seems Elijah knew he was going to be taken from this world - v1 says of it and v9 shows Elijah knew what was going to happen. Yet Elijah wasn't going to fret, become morbid or shut himself away. Nor did he panic or to try and sort out his life and make peace with God. Elijah had no need to hurry to make his peace with his Maker, for he had done that many years before and had walked in peace with God for many a year. Elijah was a wise man and was not foolish enough to postpone making his peace with God the Judge until his last perceived moments. This had been sorted out early in his life and he was ready to leave this scene of time - whether it was expected or unexpected. He was ready to meet his God and Maker. Are we?

Elijah also knew that soon, if it had not happened already, the great and miraculous events on Mount Carmel especially would be forgotten and the people would dismiss what went on there as exaggerated and even doubt such occurred. Elijah knew and recognised the value of God's word that even if its proclamation would be much less dramatic than

fire from heaven etc, yet it would stay in the memory and continue to work long after the speaker had gone. This is why he established the schools or companies of prophets to train up men to further that work of teaching and proclaiming God's word. So Elijah carried on his life, sought to do good, do God's work and visited various places and the companies of prophets there.

B. Considering. We so conveniently overlook the fact that today could be the day of our departure. Our lives are so fragile and we could soon be swept into eternity by an invisible microbe, an undetected weakness in a blood vessel, an accident. What then of our eternal souls? How would we fare if we had to stand before the judgement throne of God today? We need to consider such things. What would we plead, argue as we stood before the awesomely holy God? Would it be our morals, our qualifications, our family and the love we had for them; our suffering, our denying ourselves, our baptism or christening, our regular attendance at churches and the meetings? We are to consider that none of those will stand scrutiny and inspection by God's all seeing eye and His complete knowledge of us. He will see through them all and if He sees one tiny sin, one wrong thought, word or deed, then we will be declared guilty, a sinner and be judged and condemned to hell FOREVER, which has a terrifying finality about it - FOREVER - no release, no escape, no exit and no progression.

This is a serious and solemn thought - yet consider that all of us are born in sin and hell should be the end for us all. Thankfully God has done something for mankind - He has

made and provided a way for helpless ones like us to stand without fault or sin before Him, His awesome holiness, purity and Person. We are to consider this is what He did in sending His One and only Son to die in our place and to take the punishment our sin deserved, so that when we trust Him as our Saviour we are eternally given and credited with the perfect purity and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. When that happens, we are to consider that God cannot only look on us, but accept us as perfect and we have peace with Him and He with us and we can be accepted into heaven. We are to recognise our only safe plea when we face God, even as believers will be "*Jesus has lived, has died for me*" [CH2:583v5] - it is exclusively what Jesus has done for us and not anything we have done, experienced or felt. If we feel we can bring anything we have done, experienced, gone through as reasons as to why God will accept us, let us into heaven, then we may not be trusting in the Lord Jesus alone as our Saviour and we may not be truly at peace with God. It is in Christ alone that our hope is found!

We need to make our peace with God through the Lord Jesus. We are not just to be religious, or go to church, or have experiences or religious type feelings or leanings, it is not even about being moral, or praying or reading our Bible. To have peace with God we need to have believed in the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour, to recognise He and He alone and all that He's done is our ONLY hope and way of salvation and that only by Him can we be saved and all our sin be forgiven.

Elijah made his peace with God and was ready to depart this life whenever. Yes Elijah didn't know of the Lord Jesus, His person and work, but Elijah trusted God through the OT ordinances and ways, which would find their fulfilment in Christ. The OT sacrifices pointed forward to the one perfect and final sacrifice that God would provide and all these OT sacrifices drew their effectiveness, their sufficiency from that one glorious sacrifice.

C. Working. So Elijah, knowing his eternal future was secure, could get on with the work he was called to do, so he went on with the work of encouraging these companies of prophets to keep on going on and to be faithful to God. Elijah had the amazing honour and privilege of conversing with heaven and heaven with him. It seems he had been shown, told that this was his last day. It is interesting that the companies of the prophets and Elisha also knew the Lord would take Elijah that day. As an aside, one commentator questioned why Elijah visited these places specifically and did not go directly to the other side of Jordan. He suggested they were places that meant much to him in his life experiences and thoughts:

Gilgal - was a place of beginnings, the first steps of Israel into the Promised Land. It is good for us to remember when the Lord first spoke to us, remember those places of growth and development in our Christian life.

Bethel - the place of the altar - where Abraham and Jacob set up altars to the Lord, which were places where they met with God and God them. Elijah could see many such times in his life - Kerith, Zarephath; these were places and

involves sacrifice and tears, and yet also meeting with God. Can we see such time and places?

Jericho - a place of battle. This was the place of the first battle Israel had in the Promised Land. Elijah could have recalled his battles and God's deliverances. In our lives there have been battlefields - where we faced fears, foes, temptations - of survival in teenage years as a Christian, in work, University, in tempting and testing times and yet we have known the Lord's help, His keeping, His restoring and we can so clearly know that without His help we would have been failures and shipwrecked our faith.

Jordan - place of death. We often picture the River Jordan as the river of death - going from our place of pilgrimage to the Promised Land as Israel did. Elijah could have reflected on the shadows of death that had come over his life - the hunt for him by Ahab and Jezebel, then his running away and wanting to lie down and die; his prayer to that end - as all hope and desire for life had been squeezed out of him. Perhaps he laughed at how his life had been spared and self-centred pity and selfishness had died instead as he had been spared to serve the Lord further.

D. Realising. We have to realise we have our Jordans to cross - there have been and will be dark shadow times where our self-pity and self-centredness will have to die, but we have to realise that one day we will have to face the Jordan Elijah never did - physical death. We have all been touched by this - the death of a loved one of friends, of a parent, some sadly of children; but one day we will all have to come to the river Jordan of our own death. One day it will be our own last day and here we come back to the start of this point

- **Elijah's Last Day.** He was ready to meet with his God and Maker. Yet he had the privilege and honour of knowing the Lord would take him. I don't know if he knew that way would be as it was, or if it would be by death, but Elijah was ready however and whatever way his last day ended!

We do not know when or how it will be for us. Unless the Lord Jesus returns, we will go into death and have to cross Jordan. Are we ready to die and to meet God? There is only one way to be ready to meet God and be at peace with Him, and we are to realise that is by trusting the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour.

That is the first point of 4 - **1. Elijah's last day.** Next time, God willing, we will go on to see the next 3 main points:

2. Elisha's Determination.

3. Elisha's Difficult Request.

4. Elijah's Departure.

I pray that we would all think on these things, make our peace with God and be ready to go to the joys of meeting Him all through what the Lord Jesus has done our behalf as we have trusted Him as our Saviour.