

Reading: 2 Kings 2:7-18

Theme: Elisha crossing the Jordan.

Elisha was told that his difficult request (v9b) would be granted if he saw Elijah when he was taken from him - Elisha saw this happen (v11-12). Elijah did not die, but was taken up to heaven in the whirlwind accompanied by the chariot of fire. Even though Elijah saw this glorious event, he grieved, yet he did not grieve for Elijah and the glorious state he was in, but for his own sense of loss and grief at parting. Having spiritual life, knowledge and vigour does not remove our feelings, but refines them. Paul says to hurting, grieving, confused Christians that they were to grieve, but not without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Yes Christians, believers hurt and grieve at the death of loved ones, but our grief and sorrow is modified, refined with true hope. It is not wrong to mourn, but wrong to mourn as if without hope.

Elisha grieved and sorrowed, but he had work to do and does not become introverted and overwhelmed with grief. He would return to be with those he cared for and had fellowship with - those from the school of the prophets. Families grieve and share together - which is right and true. Also, the family of God i.e. a local church are to grieve, sorrow together as well as rejoice together. Even if they can't do or say anything else it is good to know they are praying for those in situations of loss, hurt, grief and confusion.

Elisha had to cross the Jordan, go back to the company of the 50 prophets who had been with him. Let's look at Elisha's crossing of the River Jordan. I'll use 3 headings related to Elijah, but use to focus on Elisha:

1. Elijah's garment.

Elijah and Elisha had been parted by the chariot of fire as Elijah was carried off in the whirlwind. As this happened, Elijah's cloak or mantle (*older name cloak*) had fallen off him. Why did the cloak fall off Elijah? One commentator (Edershiem) says it was "*unfastened by hand not earthly and flung from Elijah's shoulders*". It seems a strange thing that the fastened cloak should fall from Elijah when all his other clothes transformed with him, so it is possibly the case; but why leave the cloak? Matthew Henry quaintly says Elijah was going to a world where he did not need it to shelter him from the weather! Also, he was going to be clothed with immortality and did not need to hide his face before the Lord as he did at Mount Horeb.

Remember that this cloak appeared to be the symbol, the badge, the insignia of the prophet's office. This is why the cloak was put around Elisha when he was called and he had no doubt as to what it meant - a clear call to the service of God as a prophet. Elijah had worn it, but now he was taken up to heaven and had no more need of it, as his work and ministry was complete. Yet it was now available for Elisha to take up and wear as he carried on the work and ministry as prophet. It was a very practical, visible expression of him ministering in Elijah's place and authority. It was like a crown being passed from the king to his son - the King is dead; long live the King!

The cloak, probably, only a rough, rustic cloak, but to Elisha it was more precious than if it had been woven from the best cloth and embroidered with gold and silver threads - not

because it was of any religious or sentimental value, but it was taken as the descent of the double portion of the spirit upon Elijah and Elisha was equipped to serve and minister in Elijah's stead.

This had come down to him; he hadn't sought it; he had not sought the call either, but the cloak was his and all would know that he was God's chosen minister. Over the years there has been much discussion as to where have all the pastors gone, especially in the first decade of this century. Yes, many were preaching and helping out in churches, wanting to be pastors etc. but often failed to recognise they lacked the call, equipping, anointing of God and even their desires for the work was questionable. Many seem to have worldly intentions and not a spiritual call and commission. Many pastors over the years have said it was only the call of God that kept them in the ministry.

Elisha had Elijah's cloak - not as something to be religiously honoured and venerated, or as supernaturally special or honourable, but as a badge of office, as a token of the answer to his hard request. We could picture it dropping down from Elijah as he was taken up to heaven and picture it as a sign of power from on high. Elisha took it up as Elijah's successor and with it on, he headed back to the brink of the Jordan. Pray for all in and called to the ministry to be aware and assured of their call and equipping of God for their life's work and they would go on into the future knowing God's assurance.

2. Elijah's God.

Elisha had to cross the river as his friends and ongoing life were on the other side. The River Jordan is often used as a picture, image of death, but here Elisha was crossing it for his future work and usefulness in life! A.W. Pink draws attention to this, showing ministerial victory - sent forth to address those who are dead in trespasses and sins and he is to cross even seemingly impossible situations by using the divine equipping he's been given!

Elisha was faced with a huge problem - the River Jordan - no bridge, no boat and no way over except wade or swim! Elijah and Elisha had crossed over on dry ground; now Elisha's faith is tested - would he continue in the same way and same ministry as Elijah? The answer is yes! Elijah's last miracle was to be Elisha's first - Elisha begins where Elijah left off. There is no vacancy in the prophetic office in Israel. Yes, the workman may have been different, but the work went on - for the work was God's and God would not let it fail or fall.

Elisha may have looked at the river Jordan, but his eyes and heart were not dismayed, for more importantly he looked to the God of heaven, his unchanging God. His confidence was not in a cloak or in a departed man, but in the God of the man. His question or statement was not of unbelief, but was saying in essence *"God, the God of Elijah is still God and is my God!"*

As we saw last time, it was a test of his faithfulness, his faithful trust in the God who answered prayer, that he really had been given a double portion of the same spirit as Elijah had and so Elisha was willing to step out and exercise that

equipping and gifting. It was also declaring that Elijah's God was his God and he would serve Him. Yes, Elisha was grieving and hurting, but even when the earthly source of his creature comforts had gone, his God had not and he went to the Lord who lives forever. The God Elijah served, honoured and knew, had great encouragements and help from, this God was the God Elisha called on and would serve, honour and know.

God blesses His church with men and women of God. It is in His own time God also removes them. Ministers may come and go; yet the work of the gospel ministry goes on. No one is indispensable. There will come a time when I will not be the minister here. Yet the work will go on, for it is God's work and He can raise up a man or men to care for and oversee the work.

My aim as long as I am here, is to point us all to God not to myself, but to the God of the Bible, to the Saviour He has given and to the so great salvation that people can know. Once that is done, I want to build every one up in the love of God, in the knowledge of His ways, so all can stand firm in all the situations of your lives - because you know the Lord in and through His word, know His enabling, keeping and equipping. I do this so that you also can minister to, serve others, point others to God and the Lord Jesus, even when you face barriers to your going on in the service of the Lord.

Elisha did as Elijah did - he called on Elijah's God and the waters were parted! He too walked across on dry ground on the bottom of the river Jordan! This was seen and witnessed

by the 50 prophets and they recognised the spirit of Elijah was resting on Elisha and recognised the God of Elijah was with Elisha. Pray for people to recognise that God is with us as His people - by the difference He makes in our lives, in the way that we live, behave, react and speak in good times, in testing and hard times.

These ones gave honour to Elisha. We are not to worship or pray to any man or woman, but the word of God says we are to hold those who serve our God, in the highest regard in love because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:13) and also Paul's words in 1 Timothy 5:17 - that links them to oxen (v18). Scripture is balanced – pastors, ministers are not to demand honour, respect, but are to serve humbly and faithfully; but then those who benefit from such a ministry and service are hold them in high regard and honour, but are not set them on a pedestal, but to rightly respect them in the Lord. Now we see:

3. Elijah's gone!

The 50 prophets suggest a search for Elijah - just in case the Spirit of the Lord had put him down in some mountain or valley. Strange they should say this, as they also knew Elijah would be taken from Elisha that day (v5). I wonder if you've thought why they did this in the light of the knowledge they had, even possibly the view they had at a distance of Elijah's departure. Possibly it could be activism - they had to be doing something; yet it may have been they didn't quite like what they were left with! Elisha was no Elijah, after all, he'd not been schooled as they had; he was a farmer-boy turned prophet; he was but Elijah's servant - poured water over

Elijah's hands (3:11). It seems Elijah didn't cut much of a dynamic figure - what with his receding hairline (v23) and of a young age (possibly mid-40s) and, honestly, they'd want Elijah back and were prepared to go searching over hill and dale – even with the prospect of being the one to find Elijah - a bit of fame and prestige there!

Elisha initially said no, but they kept on pressurising him and he said “*Send*”. Why did he give in? Here are just a few thoughts... They wanted Elijah back, perhaps someone may have suggested he was reluctant to send because he wanted to be No.1 - reputation and position is so important to some people, but Elisha's humble service for 10-15 years gives us no reason to think this and should not have given them this idea! Elisha was a man of peace and he knew that to yield in this matter was no great shakes, for they would learn he was right. Sometimes in indifferent or secondary matters, peace and not points-scoring is more important. He could have said “*Look, I have a double portion of Elijah's spirit, I saw close up the fiery chariots and horses and saw Elijah go up to heaven in the whirlwind. Don't be foolish. Listen to me!*”

Elisha recognised their zeal and good intentions, so let their zeal have its head. Sometimes we can be unwise in our zeal and even refuse to listen to good advice. The book of Proverbs advises us all on taking wise counsel e.g. 15:22 & 24:6 - it is taking advice not necessarily just from those we are close to, but from those who are wise, spiritual and mature and whose advice we respect. It is not lack of faith to check things out - the Lord wants us to count the cost i.e. think about things

seriously and pray open heartedly and not just wanting the Lord to confirm **our** choice and decision!

In letting the school of prophets have their own way, they came to recognise Elisha's word was as true and reliable as Elijah's and came to respect his word and judgement on future occasions. We are to never treat anyone's advice or opinion as infallible or that they are the Oracle. We are to look at and into God's word in situations we face and are not to be lazy or copout of making a decision. I try to say in advising people "*God's word says....*" but also "*my opinion, thoughts, suggestions are...*" – there is a big difference. Elisha was often directly, divinely inspired, but I am not and no man or woman is; so, we need wisdom and patience in moving on, in taking or giving advice.

Elisha's solitary crossing of the Jordan showed that Elijah was gone, but more importantly, that Elijah's God hadn't! Thankfully, his God is still our God and may we continue to know His help, guiding, leading, equipping, empowering in mighty, even a double portion way in our days, so that He will get all the glory..