

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-18

Theme: The tests of Elisha.

Life can have many tests for us all in different ways – some more important than others. This evening we will see some of the tests Elisha had to face. We saw an introduction to Elisha from 1 Kings 19; yet from there to 2 Kings 2 up to 15 years having passed. In that time Elisha had been learning from and training alongside Elijah. His call was only the start and he was being tested, proved all the time and these tests were varied, but showed both Elisha and Elijah that the call was real and Elisha was being equipped to step into Elijah's role after Elijah had been taken to heaven when his work was complete. There will be a time when our work will be complete and we will be taken from the scene of time, until then we are to do what we can and as we are able to do for the Lord and His people.

Elijah's departing was the start of Elisha's full rigour of his ministry, for his training as an apprentice would end and he would be the man of God for his generation. We can see the graciousness of the Lord for both Elijah and Elisha - in that they both had evidence to confirm that Elisha was the man of God's choice and equipping. Let's briefly consider the tests Elisha went through and in doing so, we will have a checklist outline of a course of discipline for our Christian lives. There were 7 areas of testing:

1. Affections.

Going back to Elisha's call in 1 Kings 19 - we saw Elisha was in a successful situation, was an industrious man, had great affection and concern for his parents. His call to serve God

“full-time” did not override his concerns and duties to his loved ones, nor his love for them. Yes, he had been called by the Lord through Elijah and may have had an unseen battle with his affections - for he had to give up a secure job, all he knew, the close love and affection, of what we assume was, a happy home.

Elisha was not some hard-nosed, unfeeling man, but was a man of great affection and vows in 2 Kings 2:2, 4 & 6 not to leave Elijah and calls him “my father” in v12 and when Elijah is taken, he tears his garments as a sign of his grief and sorrow. It would cost Elisha, not only financially or of lifestyle, but also in terms of his affections. He had left his parents, his home, all he knew and loved. He left his comfort zone and set his affections on God and the things of God above and beyond his natural affections.

The Lord calls on us to love and serve Him above and beyond any natural ties, but does not call us to ignore, dismiss them or excuse any duty laid on us by them, but to set our God first and foremost in our love and service. Our love for God has the first claim on our hearts and yet part of that love is to care and to do our best for our families. The Lord who places us in families, expects us to honour our parents, to love and care for our husband or wife or children and be a good witness in that. We are to rightly bring up any children we may have and yet in all these things our God claims our first and best love.

To be a Christian has meant that some people have had to choose God above family. Some families have cut-off a believer as a son or daughter, even as a wife or husband. Yet

love for God calls us to place Him above and beyond natural love. Are we ready to give such love and devotion to this great God of ours? At the moment, it does not mean in our culture we will be abandoned, cut-off from families. Yet the love of God in our lives can strengthen, deepen, enrich our love for our families etc. Elisha's affections were tested. Now see:

2. Sincerity.

We see this crystallised in 2 Kings 2. We saw something of this incident a few years ago when we looked at Elijah's last day, but it is good to remind ourselves of Elisha's sincerity and his staying true to Elijah. Elisha had said in his call, "*I will follow you*" and had done so for the past 15 or so years. Yet now in this incident, he is given the chance to go back, to ease up, to take his foot off the accelerator as it were, as Elijah said 3 times "*Stay here...*"

Being a Christian is not an easy matter - it is not a short race, but a lifelong race - not a sprint, but a marathon. Many accompanied the apostle Paul - they seemed so fine, but some left him (2 Timothy 4:10). Others seemed so keen, made much progress, yet fell away, withered away (*parable of soils-cares, love of the world, ease of life*). The Lord Jesus expects sincere commitment - not to put our hand to the plough and look back (Luke 9:62). Elisha took his hand off a plough to go into the service of God, not looking back, even though Elijah gave him chance to do so. Elisha was sincere in his service as he says "*I will not leave you*" in v2, 4 and 6.

As Christians we are to be sincere in our serving and following our Lord Jesus - in good times, hard times, hurting

times, testing times and glorious times. We are not to be fair weather Christians - missionaries have spoken of “*rice Christians*” - just following for what they can get out of it, but we are to serve our Lord sincerely all our days. Moving on we see:

3. Determination.

Elisha did much walking that day. At Bethel and Jericho, he would have known the history of events that happened in them. He could have said he would stay there and get ready for his future role. Yet he did not, but determined to follow Elijah and stick with him no matter what. Elisha had a single-minded determination. Nothing, but nothing, would shift him from his determination to stay with Elijah - the only thing that separated them was a supernatural event! We need to have a holy determination to follow and serve our Saviour no matter what. There will be a time when our own leaving this world will bring us into the glorious immediate presence of our Jesus.

If we are a believer, we are divinely called to follow the Lord Jesus, to fix our eyes upon Him and not on any man or woman, but on the One who loves us and we to keep our eyes fixed on Him and keep on following Him until the time when He calls us home. Yes, a time will come when we will be separated from our loved ones on earth and are to set examples to them in our following the Lord Jesus, so they can learn from our example and we pray they would even come to follow Him for themselves.

4. Faith.

Elisha knew the history of what had happened at Bethel and Jericho: God had made Himself known at Bethel in a glorious way as He met with Jacob. It could have been tempting to stay there to seek such. Elisha could have said this was what he wanted and made spiritual reasons to stay in a place full of history and God's blessing. Sadly, many people want to stay in days of past blessings; revere such times as they, like Peter at Jesus' transfiguration, want to remain and enjoy such blessings. Yet we are to keep moving onwards.

A time and place of blessing is always a real test to our faith - as we want to stay and enjoy the blessings even when God is leading us on. It could be into a different situation e.g. Philip at Samaria knew great blessings and yet God sent him out into the desert (Acts 8:26ff)! Philip obeyed and one person was converted and the gospel was taken to Ethiopia! Blessings, ease, successes do not remove the need for obedience, faith and duty. Elisha moved on with Elijah and would not leave him.

In our lives and situations, the Lord may move us on and in faith we are to go, even if it is out of a place we would not want to leave, even the place of blessing to go from a Bethel to a Jericho – to a seemingly battle situation, but one where further blessing will be known. Elisha had faith to move on and not stay put. Yet we also see he needed to have:

5. Patience (Perseverance).

Elisha had been told by both lots of prophets that his master would be taken that day and he knew it, yet he told them not to speak of it - as it could so easily distract him from his

purpose; it could cause vain talk and prove a distraction to him or Elijah! He was patient in his staying with Elijah, even as Elijah seemed to try and leave him behind; still Elisha patiently kept on with him and was not going to stop, but stay with him whatever the day brought. He was patient and persevered. Yes, he had opportunities to ease up, to stop and stay at favourable points, but he kept on keeping on!

We are to not to consider giving up, but are to run with perseverance, patience the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). Sometimes God in His providence gives us tests to see if we will keep on going, keep on going patiently, persevering - even when things scream out “*Stop, ease up, give in!*” Jesus is not a hard task master; we see Him care for His disciples as He called them aside to rest a while. We need patience and wisdom to know what is what! The rest-a-while-situation is for the purpose of refreshment and **equipping for further service** and not to simply take things easy.

6. Character.

Hardships, long distances, refusal to take it easy - what tests to pass, but Elisha was also tested by the prospect of incredible blessings as Elijah told him to ask for anything! What we would we have asked for? This was the most searching of all the tests - as his heart's desire would be shown! Yet Elijah knew Elisha, and felt sure he could ask this to him. In response, Elisha asked for a double portion of the same spirit that was upon Elijah. He rose above earthly desires for success, prosperity, ease, long life and wanted that which

would bring the most glory to God and the best for God's people!

We can easily miss what Elisha is saying here - as a double portion of inheritance marked out the firstborn son and rightful heir (Deuteronomy 21:17). Elisha asked that he be known as Elijah's rightful heir and successor - truly God's servant. In asking this, he owns he was dependent upon God for his work and ministry. We can pray for God's Spirit to rest upon us all with power, especially upon us as a church as we seek to tell of Jesus! We need God the Holy Spirit in our lives to be able to live for and glorify God. Pray for a rich, full anointing of Him on all who proclaim God's word here in the church. The work of preaching is one which no one is equipped for and the Holy Spirit's enabling and empowering is needed for such a work.

7. Faithfulness.

Elisha asked for a hard, difficult thing, but he saw Elijah taken and Elisha went forward on the basis of what he had been promised. Yet it was a testing time - for the Lord wants His people to faithfully use the gifts He has given them. It often means we have to overcome our fears, feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and trust the Lord to help us use, exercise those gifts we asked for and hope have been given, to work for His glory and the benefit of His people.

Elisha was on his own. All he had physically of Elijah was the cloak that fell off him. Immediately on his return, he is confronted with the river Jordan - a big problem! Elijah had no problem with the Jordan - hit it with his cloak and it parted,

but here was a test, a problem for Elisha - would his faith in the God who answered prayer, be strong enough for him to exercise that gift, would he be faithful to his God giving him this double portion? The answer is “Yes!” He may have had some hesitancy, for he was a mortal man and asked “*Where is now the Lord God of Elijah?*” - the only time recorded he said that, but his trust was in the Lord God and he did as Elijah had done - struck the waters and they parted, but will see more on this next time. He was faithful to his calling and to his equipping. We need to be the same and move on in faith using the gifts and ministry we have been equipped with and even asked for. We are to be faithful to Him who has called us and given us gifts to build up the church, the people of God and even pointing others who don't yet know our Saviour, so they can come to know Him.

Elisha passed the tests and went on to serve the Lord more and more. Use these tests to examine our own lives. Are our **affections** set on Christ and the things of God? Are we **sincere** in serving and following Him with **determination**? Are we willing to move on in **faith** - even from pleasing and cosy situations? Will we **persevere** in serving and doing all He calls us to do? Is following the Lord shaping our **character**, life desires and longings to do as He wants for His glory and the blessing of people of God? Do we use our God given gifts with **faithfulness**? These are searching questions, but ones we all need to answer openly and honestly to our God.