

**2nd Kings 2: 1-18; Message # 19 in the series - “A Chariot of Fire”, A Bible Study
conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 21st, 2018,
for those gathered at his home.**

Elijah the prophet was a faithful man in his generation. He was the most prominent of the prophets of God who delivered the truth of the word of God in the spiritually troubled times in which he lived. He boldly and faithfully proclaimed God’s word to kings and to all the people when God sent him. He was a man of like nature as we are, we are told in James 5: 17, and yet when he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, it did not rain on the land for 3 years and 6 months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced fruit. His life has held many lessons for us as we have examined the previous chapters, and it will hold great lessons for us now, when it comes his time to be translated to heaven in a chariot of fire.

But I want you to think about this fact with me; that the lessons that we will learn from this incident are primarily related to Elisha, the prophet who was left to take over Elijah’s ministry of being the most prominent prophet to Israel. These are the primary lessons that we will want to take notice of, without losing sight of the meaning of Elijah’s translation to heaven. 1st of all, we want to look at – The lesson of Elisha’s master leaving and being taken from him. (verses 1-6) 2nd – The lesson of Elisha’s request for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. (verses 7-12) And 3rd – The lesson of Elijah’s spirit resting upon Elisha. (verses 13-18)

1st of all – The lesson of Elisha’s master leaving and being taken from him.

(verses 1-6)

“And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.” “Then Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel.’ “And Elisha said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!’ “And the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, ‘Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?’ “And he said, ‘Yes, I know; keep silent!’ Now, even though it is not mentioned by way of explanation, I believe that Elijah had been responsible, over the years of his ministry, for promoting what has been called “the schools of the prophets” in his generation. And so, it appears that before he was taken to heaven that many of these younger men, “sons of the prophets” they are called, came out to hopefully see Elijah’s departure to heaven, because they had been given notice of it as well, by the Holy Spirit of God, that this event was going to happen on this particular day.

Let us understand that our most beloved Christian teachers and pastors shall one day be taken from us, and that the exact day of their going to heaven is appointed by the Lord. Psalm 31, verses 14 and 15a say– “But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ “My times are in Your hand.” And verse 19 – “Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You.” We can apply the truth of these verses in this way: It is a matter of the Lord’s goodness that the time of the departure of our beloved teachers is in His hands. He knows exactly how to order all things, even the death of our loved ones, and even the way that they are brought to heaven; all of this is ordered by God in a way which will glorify Him, and be of instruction to those around them who are closest to them. This is important for every Christian to remember.

Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 13, verses 7 and 8. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” If you are going to learn from your minister’s departure out of this life and into the next, you should study to remain with him, listening to his words, and trying to learn from him, as long as you possibly can. This Elisha did. Elijah had told him: Stay here at Gilgal, but you will notice that this was something that Elisha

refused to do. Was he being disobedient to his master? No, he loved Elijah as an obedient son loves a father. He was following him in the faith, and he knew that he could still learn from him, and so he was wanting to consider the outcome of Elijah's life. Then we must ask – Why would Elijah ask him to stay there in Gilgal? Both Elijah and Elisha were very aware of Elijah's upcoming departure that day.

Well, I think that we can say that Elijah did not want Elisha to grieve his departure, and he wanted to avoid being sentimental about it. He did not want Elisha to follow him, seeing him as his hero, but as one who ultimately was the servant of God. Great ministers are servants of God, first of all; they are servants in ministering the truth of God for the good of all around them, and especially to the one who would take over the ministry from him. Elijah did want Elisha to follow him as the servant of God according to God's purposes, not his own purposes. He knew that he had taught Elisha well in this regard, and yet he knew that God was now calling him to make this final circuit ride to Bethel, to Jericho, and on to the Jordan. What he was saying, when he said – "Stay here", was a test to Elisha to see the strength of his resolve to follow what God was calling him into, in taking over his ministry. He gently tells him to stay there in Gilgal for the Lord was sending him further on to Bethel. Well if the Lord was sending him on further, Elisha would go as far as he could go, with him.

2nd – The lesson of Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

(verses 7-12)

"And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan." "Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground." "And so it was when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask!' "What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" "And Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.'" "So he said, "You have asked a hard thing." "Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not it shall not be so." "Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." "Now Elisha saw it, and he cried out, 'My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' "So he saw him no more." "And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces."

The mantle of prophetic responsibility and power was about to be transferred from Elijah to Elisha. Elijah's ministry was coming to a wonderful climactic end, and Elisha's ministry was now about to begin. The sons of the prophets wanted to witness Elijah's departure, but they were not going to be given that privilege. What they did see was Elijah's taking his mantle, rolling it up, and his striking the water with it; and where the waters were struck, they were divided, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. God was going to hide this final act of the glory of taking Elijah up to heaven in the whirlwind, from the 50 prophets who were watching. But Elisha would see it all. Ah, the value of being allowed to stick close to the teacher who you would learn more from! If you have learned much before, you will learn much more yet, even in the way that you teacher takes leave of his ministry, and by the way that he enters heaven.

But I think that it is a wonderful thing to think about this fact, because it will be the same thing that happens at the last day when Christ returns. In 1st Corinthians 15: 51, it says – "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." And we shall be changed. Now, when it says – "We", who does that include? It includes all believers from all ages and generations. Elijah was translated to heaven, and he did not see death in the way that most people experience it. He went directly to heaven, but he did experience a death of sorts in that he had all of the remaining corruption of his heart removed. It appears also, that he was glorified out of time like Enoch before him.

So we see some amazing things that were happening. What was Elijah teaching Elisha at this point? I believe that he was teaching him that all that is done and accomplished by a minister, in preaching and ministering to the Lord's people and others, has to be done according to the calling which God has first initiated. The ministry which God Himself has given will be sustained by God and by His care it will develop into a ministry of greater fruitfulness, as time goes on. The authority and ability to succeed in glorifying God must come from God, but a minister needs to understand that all of the results are also in God's hand. The same kind of prophetic ministry that Elijah had, could only continue on in Elisha if God ordained that it should be so.

The use of the mantle by Elijah was a demonstration and exercise of that authority which had been given to him by God, to do supernatural miracles for the confirmation of his office as prophet. His gift and ministry had been given to him by God. In his God-appointed mission Elijah was given great grace to be able to confront the king and the people with the truth that they needed to hear. They needed to repent of their false worship of the Baals, and re-establish the true worship of God by exercising their exercising faith in God and in His word. In New Testament times you see this same kind of grace at work in the apostle Paul in his ministry as an apostle, a preacher, and a teacher. In 1st Corinthians 15: 10 and 11 he says: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." "Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."

What does the slapping of the waters with Elijah's mantle mean? It reminds one of the miracles of the parting of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan by Israel in the days of Joshua. It is a sign that God was in absolute control and He was making a way for His servants. It also shows that Elijah had entered into the rest of the Promised Land of heaven. It showed that God had transferred the responsibility from Elijah to Elisha in regard to his ministry. Spiritually speaking, in the slapping of the waters with his mantle, Elijah was demonstrating that the waters of unbelief and opposition to the truth would not prevail in the final analysis. There had been a slapping rebuke given, spiritually speaking, by Elijah to king Ahab and the people who had gone so deeply into idolatry and sin. Elijah's confronting them with God's word, delivered by Elijah, was telling them that God would prevail over all the wicked people of that day. Elijah slapped the waters to show the prophets looking on, that wicked people and the strategy of unbelief and error would not prevail over him and God's word speaking to Israel, and that these waters would not prevail over Elisha in his ministry either.

Turn over to Psalm 93: 1-5 – "The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength." "Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved." "Your throne is established from of old, You are from everlasting." "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves." "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, that the mighty waves of the sea." "Your testimonies are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever." In asking for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, Elisha was asking for the grace to be given to him to be able to do the work of ministering as a prophet to Israel in just as great a way as Elijah did, if not greater. He wanted that same boldness to confront evil men and their errors and sins. He wanted the same ability to minister to the prophets and people who needed encouragement and strength, in speaking and doing what was right in the face of great opposition. He was asking that real progress in righteousness and truth would come about in Israel in those days, as a result of his labors in the prophetic ministry. Elijah said to him – "You have asked a hard thing." "Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you." And Elisha did see him.

It happened as they continued on and talked, that the chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them. Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. The main symbols of Elijah's life had been fire and wind. The chariot of fire was a picture of Elijah's zeal for the Lord

of Hosts. In calling down fire from heaven, he demonstrated the fact that God was the only true and living God, and that His judgment was upon all sin and sinners. And so the fire consumed the sacrifice. This zeal of Elijah's was turned to fear, however, when Jezebel threatened to kill him. And so he went to Mt. Horeb where God showed him that it was not zeal alone that would change men's hearts. There was fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. There was even wind which broke up the rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. And then God came and spoke to Elijah in the still small voice. Elijah had become discouraged, not seeing the results that he looked for. But God would appoint Elisha to succeed him, and he would have the double portion of Elijah's spirit. He would learn from Elijah's mistakes, and by the grace of God he would not become discouraged when the opposition was great. He would pray and teach in such a way that even Gentile people would have their eyes open, and the Old Testament gospel of Christ would be preached to them by the prophet as we shall see in chapters 5-7 of 2nd Kings. But all of this would be something that could only be accomplished if he had a double portion of Elijah's spirit. This, he would have. He saw his spiritual father go up to heaven in the chariot of fire in a whirlwind. "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and their horsemen."

3rd – The lesson of Elisha picking up the mantle of Elijah. (verses 13-18)

"He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan." "Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, 'Where is the LORD God of Elijah?' "And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over." "Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.'" "And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him." Now, you will notice that when Elisha took up the mantle, that he did not trust to the power of having that garment with him, but he sought for the divine power of the God who had given spiritual power to Elijah. To take up the ministry in a local church, taking the place of the former pastor does not mean that you will inherit his spiritual power. The new man who comes to preach and to lead must seek for the power of God for himself, in relation to his own ministry.

The ministry of the word is given to a called men of God whose job it is to convince others of the truth of what he himself has seen in the Scriptures. It is the truth which has been revealed to that man by God in relation to His word. Remember that these other prophets who came to Elisha, asked him to allow them to go and search for Elijah because they did not believe that he had been translated to heaven. "How blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." But these guys did not believe. They believed that the Spirit of the Lord had taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley. They could not believe that he had been taken directly to heaven. Elisha, instead of getting upset with them, was gentle, and he let them have their way. They went and they searched, but they came back empty handed. And Elisha said to them – "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go?'" This shows us the wisdom and grace which was given to Elisha that he could say this. It is the indication that he had been given a double portion, not only in relation to Elijah's zeal, but also that He also had the gentleness of Christ.

I like what Alexander MacLaren says on this: "The search after Elijah, insisted on by the sons of the prophets, is of importance only as showing their low thoughts and Elisha's gentle spirit." "He is their head, but he holds the reins loosely." "Fancy anybody 'urging' Elijah 'till he was ashamed!'" "The shame would very soon have mantled the cheek of the urger." "But though, no doubt, Elisha would tell what had happened, these "prophets" only think that Elijah has been miraculously borne somewhere, as he had been before, and they seem to have no notion of what has really happened." "How hard it is to heave heavy men up to any height of spiritual vision!" "How vulgar minds always take refuge in the most commonplace explanations that they can find of high truths!" "Gone up to heaven!" "Not he!" "He is lying, living or dead, in some gorge or on some hillside." "Let us go and look for him!" "There is nothing on which some people pride themselves more than

upon being practical – which generally means prosaic, and often means blind to God’s greatest deeds.” “To go scouring wady and mountain for a man who had been taken up into heaven was practical common sense indeed!” “But Elisha’s gentleness is to be noted.” “He let them have their own way.” “Often that is the only plan for convincing people of their errors.” “And, when the fifty scouts come back empty-handed, all he says is a quiet, “Did I no say unto you, Go not?”

In closing, listen to 2nd Timothy 2: 24-26 – “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” Let us ask God to give us more of the Spirit of Christ, that we might be able to have zeal for the cause of truth and righteousness that we need to convince others of the right way, and the gentleness of Christ in relation to understanding how to truly help believers, and others around us, come to a right understanding.