

Elijah and Elisha—Help for Church in Dark Times

5—A Gracious God is in Control 2 Kings 3–13

Introduction

Elisha helps us to live, like him, in days when faith is weak and the world is in disarray.

- ❑ When things go wrong, we may think that chaos reigns.
- ❑ The world thinks this is so and that the only order in the world is the order we make.
- ❑ A Christian sees things differently. Jesus stands over all and says 'In the world you will have tribulation, but fear not, I have overcome the world' (John 16:33).
- ❑ The stories of Elisha illustrate that a gracious God is always in charge.

Elisha serves God and his country for 50 years.

- ❑ There's a dozen or so stories—some brief, others longer. They make a good read.
- ❑ He is used by God to intervene miraculously in both private and public life on numerous occasions.
- ❑ In many respects, we can't identify with his public and miraculous life.
- ❑ But these are the incidental things about him. God was doing something that all of us can share in—what Jesus calls 'the kingdom of God'.
- ❑ The drama of Elisha's life—of which there is plenty—highlights things that are true for all of us as God's people.

The story is a 'top down' one. God has already told Israel in Egypt and Mt Sinai that he is in control and will take Israel into their future. This is what Elisha knows.

God has already told us, his church, that Christ is in control and that he will save and lead us through this life—'not just anyhow, but gloriously'.

- ❑ God does not react to sin but is always fulfilling his covenant promises.
- ❑ It is critical that Christians get these things right. We are not to react to the tide around us—as though our mission is to correct mistakes in church and society. The church's has trended in this direction for decades and it has not done us any good.
- ❑ God is about his own agenda—the kingdom of Christ. Jesus says this is to be our agenda also. He teaches us to pray 'Your kingdom come'. So what does this look like?
- ❑ Our circumstances may be inadequate, awful, threatening, exciting or boring. No matter. God is continuing to work out his plan and calls us to have this 'top down' approach to our own life and engagement with other people.

The Lord gives freely—to his enemies (5:1-27)

- ❑ The story of Naaman the leper is one of the longer stories.
- ❑ A little girl is captured by Syria. She tells their army chief, Naaman, he can be healed of leprosy by 'the prophet in Samaria'. 'How sweet!' Rather, 'How gracious!'
- ❑ The Syrian king sends him with expensive sweeteners.
- ❑ This causes Ahab to panic, but Elisha hears of it and says, 'Send him to me.'
- ❑ Naaman agrees to plunge seven times in the Jordan, and God heals him! He vows allegiance to the Lord.
- ❑ Here is where we need to pay close attention.

- ❑ His servant—Gehazi—gets leprosy for misrepresenting the Lord by asking for a gift.
- ❑ We are saved by grace and have every reason to be liberal with the kindness God has shown us.
- ❑ Beware of littleness of heart when God has been generous to us. The starting point for the kingdom of God is amazing grace.
- ❑ We should live in God's bounty ourselves—regarding our past sins, our present needs and our future hopes. Then, we can then reveal God's bounty to the nations.

It is really important to know God is gracious—to us all (6:8–23).

- ❑ Elisha is advising Israel's army of Syrian military positions—the Lord is still protecting his land and using Elisha as a 'spy'.
- ❑ A Syrian 'great army' is sent to eliminate Elisha.
- ❑ Servant Gehazi gets to 'see' the Lord's armies that are posted around the hills!
- ❑ So Paul prays for us that our eyes would be opened (Eph. 1:18).
- ❑ Elisha strikes the hostile contingent blind and leads them into Samaria, sees that they are fed and returned home unharmed!
- ❑ We are in a battle against spiritual forces, but Christ is Lord.
- ❑ We have been transferred to the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col. 1:14). This is where we live and what we have to talk about.
- ❑ This not only tells us not to be alarmed. It also sets the agenda for dealing with enemies. If your enemy is hungry, feed him (Rom. 12:20; Prov. 5:21–22).

Beware of unbelief (6:24–7:20)

- ❑ God is always waiting to do his people good.
- ❑ Israel's king blames Elisha for a seven-year siege of Samaria and a tragic famine (6:31), and sends a contingent of soldiers to assassinate him. He quickly forgets the benefits of Elisha's presence.
- ❑ This is not unlike the world blaming Christians for our present malaise.
- ❑ Elisha sends their captain back to the king in Samaria with advice that food will be cheap by morning.
- ❑ The besieging Syrian army panics when they hear the 'sound' of another vast army and evacuates at speed, leaving all their supplies behind—as the lepers discover.
- ❑ The captain who doubted this word is trampled to death. It is important to believe in God's goodness! James takes up this point (James 1:5-7).

Judgement is certain if we reject grace

- ❑ One of Elijah/Elisha's jobs is to anoint Jehu who will bring judgement on Ahab and family. It is now time, so Elisha sends a 'son of the prophets' to Jehu (9:1–10).
- ❑ Jehu fulfills this purpose of judgement on the Ahab-Jezebel family, and Baal's prophets are annihilated (9:14–10:36).
- ❑ Jehu is thorough and brutal—probably expressing his own ambitions in the process.
- ❑ But he still leads Israel in false worship at Dan and Bethel.
- ❑ God's gracious rule includes both the goodness and severity of God (Rom. 11:22).

Our life is essentially miraculous.

It stands out in the stories of Elisha that lots of miracles are happening. This appears to put the stories out of practical use because we don't see these kinds of things happening now.

- ▣ Sometimes, God raises up a person to do singular things than will never be repeated.
- ▣ We need to see, not the man, but the God who raises him up.
- ▣ Miracles are signs—not the real thing. They draw attention to God, not replace him.
- ▣ If God wants to work miracles in a particular situation, that is his business.
- ▣ His care of, and ability to intervene are constants for all the people of God.
- ▣ Being a Christian is an essentially miraculous event—and remains so.
- ▣ God knows our most practical and deepest needs in the midst of sweeping tides and other so-called ‘serious’ matters. To God, everything matters—as we shall see.

God solves the debt and maintenance problems of a widow (4:1–7).

- ▣ Life is not easy for prophets at this time, especially for this widow—no superannuation, no child protection agency, no bankruptcy court!
- ▣ She is called to act in faith—and gather pots.
- ▣ Her insolvency and maintenance issues are solved in a single stroke.
- ▣ God has many ways of meeting the practical needs of his people.

God provides, and restores, a son for a generous Shunemite woman (4:8–37).

- ▣ With her rich husband’s help, she supplies food and accommodation for the often-travelling Elisha—perhaps on his way up Esdraelon Valley to Carmel.
- ▣ As for the widow (v. 2), Elisha asks what he can do for her.
- ▣ He repeats the question to his servant.
- ▣ Well-endowed people can afford to be generous.
- ▣ He promises she will have a son.
- ▣ Her son dies. Our blessings and our loves can often be the source of our pain.
- ▣ Elisha feels the pain of this lady, and the loss of her son.
- ▣ He is fully engaged in his being raised from the dead.
- ▣ God is big and generous!

Don’t change course—ever.

- ▣ Elisha continues to represent God’s gracious presence to Jehu’s unfaithful new dynasty. Remember, Israel still belongs to God. He has not disowned them.
- ▣ When Elisha is dying, King Joash comes and says, ‘The chariots of the Lord and his horsemen’. Elisha has represented the powerful grace of God to Israel as Elijah did.
- ▣ He knows Elisha is the reason for the victories they have had.
- ▣ He is given an opportunity to show trust in the Lord to defeat the Syrian menace—and is reproved by Elisha for limiting it to three times.
- ▣ Our writer writes this summary of what Elisha believed...
‘But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them or cast them from His presence until now.’
- ▣ We are constantly tempted to be reactive—to merely correct what is going wrong.
- ▣ We certainly should make the best contribution we can anywhere we go—as Elisha has done.
- ▣ But God is not correcting. He is saving. Our testimony is not just to fix things. It is to tell people who God is and to represent his kindness wherever we find ourselves.
- ▣ The changes that arise from this come from above. And the changes that then arise in others comes from their hearts. God’s way is constraining love, not coercion.