

Introduction: We are beginning a sermon series on the intriguing lives of Elijah and Elisha, two of the great Old Testament prophets. Our goal is urgent though simple: We long for the “days of Elijah” to again return upon our land. “God, please grant a spirit of repentance in our churches and communities! Please cause the hearts of fathers to turn back to their children; move us in our marriages to portray the love of Christ one to the other. Most of all, oh God of Elijah, send fires of judgment down to consume our idols and to remove our half-hearted commitment to you – a half-heartedness so characteristic of weak faith and a worldly, compromised way of living. Save us from such limping lukewarmness and cause us to run in the way of your commands. Amen.”

Mon/Tues: 2 Kings 2:11-14 and Exodus 34:8-9. Why do we start our study of these great prophets Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings 2? After all, the life and ministry of Elijah starts much earlier in 1 Kings 17. In answer, consider the neediness of Elisha after his mentor and father in the faith ascends to heaven in a chariot ... Why does he strike the water and call out in prayer, “Where is the God of Elijah” (2 Kings 2:14)? Surely in his grief at their parting, Elisha needed God’s mighty help to face the dangers of His day. After all, the terrible, vile reign of Ahab continues through his sons in 2 Kings 1 & 3; the wicked idolatry of Bethel mocks Elisha as God’s chosen man in 2 Kings 2:23-25 and the life-threatening poverty, famine, war and judgment, brought on the nation by their wickedness, threatens the lives of the godly. See how the wife of one of the prophets begs for her children not to be enslaved because of her family debts in 2 Kings 4:1-7!

Meditate and Pray: Elisha knew he could never meet the spiritual, economic, moral or military challenges of his day without a “double portion” of the wisdom, faith and power of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9). So he takes up the mantle of Elijah by faith, crying out to the unchanging God of salvation and judgment to accompany him as He had Elijah! This is the Holy Spirit of God enabling Elisha to know his helplessness and desperate need. This is the first step of ministry, Christian service and Gospel endeavor – to confess that if God does not go with us then we cannot be sent and cannot succeed! Compare Exodus 34:9 where Moses begs for God’s presence out of the same sense of need which Elisha knew: “And he said, ‘If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.’”

Sing about God’s commitment to face (*with us*) all the impossible challenges and trials of this life, using hymn # 94:

1 How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2 "Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed;
for I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

3 "When through the deep waters I call you to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

4 "When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my
grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

5 "E'en down to old age all my people shall prove
my sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
and when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

6 "The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Weds/Thurs/Fri: 2 Kings 2:9; 2 Kings 2:13-15; Isaiah 63:14 & 59:21. Elisha models for us how our prayers should always begin: “Lord, please send your Spirit of wisdom onto our lives so that we might serve you effectively in the midst of all the trials and problems we face. Moreover, because we need **more** of your Spirit to compensate for our greater weakness, we ask for a **double-portion** of that Spirit in our lives.”

That is how Elisha prayed in 2 Kings 2:9. We see the answer of Elisha’s prayer for a “double portion” of the Spirit when other prophets honor Elisha as Elijah’s replacement in 2 Kings 2:15. They recognize that the Spirit is resting on Elisha as He did on Elijah. Interestingly, the word translated “portion” in 2 Kings 2:9 comes from the word for one’s mouth, and seems to mean (either) that portion which can fit in one’s mouth (or) that portion of the Spirit as He is the “breath” of God. In both translations, the mouth is understood as the vessel through which the Spirit of God blows on the words of the prophet. The point is that it was by the Holy Spirit alone that God’s servants spoke for God and served Him in the Old Testament. But even more wonderfully, even the average Israelite, beset like we are with many weaknesses and trials, was also given that Spirit to lead them through the wilderness! As Isaiah 63:14 says:

Like livestock that go down into the valley,
the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.
So you led your people,
to make for yourself a glorious name.

Meditate and Pray: Thank the Lord for the basic covenant blessing of the Spirit indwelling every believer, which ties together both Old and New Testaments. God’s saints from the beginning of the world have only been able to persevere in the ways of God by that Holy Spirit’s enabling and indwelling. I love the way the Heidelberg Catechism question #54 puts it, in a statement which defines the one church of all history, as unified by the Spirit of God. (Notice especially the proof texts below the question.)

54. Q. What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church?

A. I believe that the Son of God,[1] out of the whole human race,[2] **from the beginning of the world to its end**, [3] gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, [4] by His Spirit and Word, [5] in the unity of the true faith, [6] a church chosen to everlasting life. [7] And I believe that I am [8] and forever shall remain a living member of it. [9] [1] John 10:11; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:18. [2] Gen. 26:4; Rev. 5:9. [3] **Is. 59:21**; I Cor. 11:26. [4] Ps. 129:1-5; Matt. 16:18; John 10:28-30. [5] Rom. 1:16; 10:14-17; Eph. 5:26. [6] Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:1-6. [7] Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:3-14. [8] I John 3:14, 19-21. [9] Ps. 23:6; John 10:27, 28; I Cor. 1:4-9; I Pet. 1:3-5.

This catechism question uses Isaiah 59:21 as a proof text that there is one church on earth, composed of the true elect people of God, on whom the Spirit of God is poured. What a great promise Isaiah gives us:

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

Sing about this once church militant, kept and preserved by Christ in its battles on earth through the daily provision and protection of His Spirit:

347 in our red hymnals

1 The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the Word:
from heav'n he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

2 Elect from ev'ry nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.

3 Though with a scornful wonder
men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping,
their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

4 The church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish,
is with her to the end;
though there be those that hate her,
and false sons in her pale,
against or foe or traitor
she ever shall prevail.

5 'Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

6 Yet she on earth hath union
with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.

Sat/Sun: 1 Kings 19:13-21 & Philippians 3:7-9. To properly understand the awesome prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and how God mightily used both these men, making Elijah a father in the faith to Elisha, we turn back to the beginning of their relationship. In 1 Kings 19:18-19, God answers Elijah's complaint that he is the only faithful believer left in all the land, by declaring that He has reserved for Himself 7,000 saints in Israel who have not compromised with idolatry their service to the one true God, Jehovah. As further correction, God soberly declares to Elijah that his work will draw to a close, and his successor, chosen by God, is to be Elisha the son of Shaphat (1 Kings 19:16). We turn to this dramatic call to discipleship which God laid upon Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21.

Elisha was clearly very wealthy. Plowing with twelve yolk of oxen is an amazing testament to the wealth of his family. How great the sacrifice, then, when God calls this young man to leave all behind to follow God's prophet Elijah. What a mighty call from God, this! Only God can enable us thus to count "all things as rubbish compared to the surpassing excellency of knowing our Lord" (Philippians 3:7-9).

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for His amazing power to call us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Just as Elisha could do nothing else *but obey* such a mighty call, so we who know Christ can look with thankfulness back to the day when *He called us*. And what a mighty call it is. I love the way the Westminster Shorter Catechism describes this call in Question # 31:

Q: What is effectual calling? **A:** Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Sing about the power of this call, citing some verses from hymn # 469:

1 How sweet and awesome is the place
with Christ within the doors,
while everlasting love displays
the choicest of her stores.

2 While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

3 "Why was I made to hear your voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice,
and rather starve than come?"

4 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin.