

GO BIG OR GO HOME

2 Kings 2:1-22 (and Acts 8:14-24)

Elijah (INTRO)

He was like the Clint Eastwood character Harry Callahan in Sudden Impact. With nerves of steel he stared down the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel like Harry stared down the last robber in the coffee shop, "Go ahead. Make my day."

There are few figures in the Old Testament, and in all of history for that matter, who stood as tall as Elijah stood. Elijah was a one-man army, a force to be reckoned with, whether you agreed with him or not. Often misunderstood because of his love for solitude, the burden of God's Word that he constantly carried with him, and his unique personality and wiring, Elijah had more foes than he had friends. Yet he was clearly on God's side, and God was clearly in charge. When Elijah said, "this is what the Lord says," you better believe it, whether you were a single Mom teetering on the edge of homelessness or the king of Israel, secure in his palace. But now it was time for Elijah to go, and Elisha dreaded it.

It's not that he was caught unaware. He had been with Elijah for years, watching from a distance as well as up close and personal. The years since Elijah called Elisha into prophetic ministry seemed to fly by but all the while, Elijah was preparing him for this day, and Elisha was taking it in.

A. Elisha's Call, 1 Kings 19:19-21

1. *Elijah calls.* It was only a few short years ago – well, maybe a couple short decades ago – that Elijah threw his mantle around Elisha, announcing God's intent that Elisha succeed Elijah as Israel's leading prophet. The scene was surreal - Elisha was plowing his father's field at the time – a field so large, on a farm so prosperous, that Elisha had eleven pair of oxen lined up in yokes, and was leading them with a twelfth team which he personally drove. Elisha was a hard-working, strong, organized young man.
2. *God calls.* God spoke Elisha's name to Elijah when Elijah was at one of the lowest points in his life. It was, curiously, right after his big

victory on Mount Carmel. Running from the queen, Jezebel, who wanted retribution for the killing of her precious priests of Baal, Elijah complained to God that he – Elijah – wasn't any better than those who preceded him. He wasn't any more successful or popular than they were. ***Just take me now, God.*** [pause] How many of you know that God has mercy on us, holds us in His arms, and comforts us under His wings, but doesn't want to be invited to our pity parties? You can almost hear God saying, "Elijah get off your tush! I have work for you to do: appoint the next generations of leaders – two kings and a prophet." And he named the two kings, and then named Elisha, son of Shaphat (looks a lot like Snapchat, doesn't it? Who says the Bible isn't relevant for today? ☺)

- a. GOD KNOWS YOUR NAME.
- b. GOD HAS A FUTURE FOR YOU THAT IS UNIQUELY YOURS.

B. Elisha's RSVP (1 Kings 19:20-21)

1. To our Christian eyes, Elisha's initial response (1 Kings 19:20) is a let-down. We get Elisha mixed up with the excuse-makers who told Jesus they would follow Him after they took care of whatever (Luke 9:59-62)... Jesus knew their hearts. He knew they weren't going to follow Him and He wasn't going to hold His breath. **Elijah says:** "Why are you asking my permission, Elisha? God's the One who called you! If you don't come back, you gotta deal with Him!"
2. Elisha's response (1 Kings 19:21) is also very different from the excuse-makers. When Elisha went home to say goodbye to his folks, he also hosted a community barbecue. He cooked the oxen that were his over a fire with wood from his oxen's yoke. And then he invited the whole community to come and feast. Elisha made sure he had nothing to come back for! **He didn't just kiss his Mom and Dad goodbye, he burned all his "what-if's", too!**

As I considered this I had to ask myself an uncomfortable question: Have I ever burned crutches from my past in order to step into God's future for me? Am I willing to do the same today?

C. Elisha's Loyalty

1. *Loyalty to Elisha.* Here they stood, Elijah and Elisha, and facing them at a short distance, watching closely, a group of 50 men from the "company of the prophets" – the tight knit network of school communities that Elijah led and that Elisha would soon be leading. The two prophets stood on the banks of the Jordan. Twice before, Elijah offered Elisha an easier way. After all, they both knew that Elisha would replace Elijah. And they both knew somehow that Elijah was about to go into the wilderness never to be seen on earth again.

"Stay here in Bethel," Elijah said.

"Stay here in Jericho," Elijah said, and once more he turned to his protégé and said, "Stay here on this side of the Jordan." Elisha answered as he had the two previous times: "No! I'm staying with you, so help me God!"

a. To what extents am I willing to be inconvenienced for God's sake?

b. To what extents am I willing to face uncertainty in order to embrace the future God has for me?

3. *Loyalty in his reaction to the company of the prophets.*

At Bethel and at Jericho, the company of the prophets met with Elisha, asking him if he knew that today was the day that Elijah would be taken from him. Now these were, more or less, schools for prophets. I'll bet some in the groups were excited for Elisha to take over and may have expected him to say something like, "I feel so prepared for today, I'm sad to see Elijah go, but I am excited about the future." Instead Elisha said, "Be quiet." Here most English

translations do nothing to convey Elisha's sorrow, which was actually very great. It was more like "STOP! I'm already devastated. You're just rubbing it in." **Sometimes, genuine humility brings a genuine reluctance to take on a new role even though you know you're ready.**

So they stood on the banks for the Jordan River together. The Jordan River, though narrow in many places from bank to bank, was never to be taken for granted. Depending on the season, it could have quite a current, like the Kern River. For the children of Israel, the Jordan River signified a dividing line – when they crossed over it with Joshua as their leader, they were finally in the heart of the Promised Land, walking into their destiny.

For us the Jordan River may represent a barrier, a challenge, something to cross so that we can find God's best for our lives. Elijah knew he had to cross it in order to finally arrive at his destiny. So, without comment, Elijah rolled up his mantle, struck the water, the river waters parted, and he and Elisha crossed the Jordan on dry ground, just as the children of Israel did with Joshua hundreds of years before.

D. ELISHA'S REQUEST

1. Now that Elisha had proven his loyalty and commitment – for the last time – to Elijah, the great prophet asks his protégé if there is anything he can do for him. Like he was asking him, **"Elisha, what do you want most?"** What does Elisha ask for?
2. *"Double Portion of your spirit"*
 - a. Inheritance.
 - i. This week on Facebook I asked a question about this, asking what people thought it meant. Duane Spickler is great with Google! 😊 The consensus was that it was ancient custom in those days to split up an inheritance in such a way that the firstborn in the family – the heir, the one who was most responsible for carrying on the family legacy – received a double share of the inheritance. It could very well be that.

- ii. HOWEVER, Elisha and Elijah already knew the plan of succession. Some 25ish years ago, Elijah threw his mantle around Elisha... the company of prophets knew it was Elisha – no one was jockeying for position against him.
- b. Commitment to God’s Future For Elisha.
- i. Elisha knew why he was there with Elijah.
 - ii. Elisha knew that the future would have incredible challenges. God had done so much through Elijah, yet there was so much left to do to bring the hearts of all his countrymen back to God. And in his humility, Elisha felt that he was only half the man Elijah was!
 - iii. But Elisha knew Elijah’s God. Elisha knew God gave Elijah power. Say, “God gave the power.” (like you mean it 😊)
 1. When a widow’s food was multiplied in a famine... God gave the power.
 2. When an only son was brought back from the dead... God gave the power.
 3. When Elijah stood on Mount Carmel to challenge his people’s idolatry... God gave the power.
 4. When the fire of God fell and consumed the sacrifice... God gave the power.
 5. When the fire of God consumed not only the sacrifice on the altar but the stone altar itself... God gave the power.
 6. When that same fire of God consumed not only the sacrifice on the altar and the stone altar itself, but also the water that had been poured over the sacrifice so much that it drenched the ground and filled up a trench... God gave the power.
 7. When Elijah saw a whirlwind and an earthquake before him... God gave the power.

8. When Elijah was finally calmed by a still, small voice... God gave the power.
 9. When fire consumed soldiers sent by a hostile king ... God gave the power.
 10. When Elijah struck the Jordan with his mantle and the water parted so they crossed on dry ground ... God gave the power.
- iv. Elisha knew his calling scared him to death! Elisha knew he needed the power of God that he saw in his mentor! So he asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit because he knew he had to depend on God's strength and not his own.
 - v. He knew that one day, just like Elijah, he would be going home. **He wanted to go BIG before he went home.**

And there, before his very eyes, Elijah was taken up by God. First, chariots of fire and fiery horses and horsemen appeared, then from the midst of them there was a whirlwind. See, the chariots and horses... they were just the entourage. They weren't even security. Cause the whirlwind... that was the presence of God... this is the Presence of God by which He led His people through the wilderness – the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of [cloud] by day, constantly in motion.

As Elijah was caught up by the whirlwind, Elisha was caught up by his own emotions, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" I discovered something this week I had never known: when Elisha said this, he wasn't actually speaking of the scene in front of him, except for one part of the scene: Elijah himself. In one of the Psalms, David says, "some trust in chariots, some trust in the strength of man but we trust in the Name of the Lord our God." (Psalm 20:7) Elisha was giving credit where credit was due: King Joram may have trusted in his chariots and horses and soldiers, but Elisha and the prophets knew that the greatest defense a nation could ever have – a leader who spoke the word of God – was being taken away. What would they do now?

E. ELISHA'S FAITH IN ACTION

The first test was crossing the Jordan River again... but this time alone. Elijah's mantle had fallen into Elisha's arms as he was being taken, and now Elisha stood before the Jordan River. The muddy, cold water that hid the river's depth, the ripples of current that he knew meant danger.

I wonder if you're facing something like the Jordan River? Maybe you started to wade into it already. Whether you're stuck on the banks, or stopped in the swirling water, even though you're afraid, you are not alone.

The same God who delivered Israel out of Egypt with Moses is the same God who brought His people into the Promised Land with Joshua. He's the same God who delivered His people time and again from their enemies... the God of Samuel, David, Solomon, and Elijah. He's the same God that was there with Elisha as he stood physically alone on the banks of the Jordan, and He is with you on the banks of the river you need to cross.

Gathering his courage, Elisha rolled up his mentor's mantle and, holding it toward the muddy, cold water, yelled, "Where is the God of Elijah?" There before his eyes, and before the eyes of the prophets on the other side of the River, the waters parted again, and Elisha walked across not on mud, but again on dry ground.

This God... this amazing God... He never changes. He did it before. He will do it again!

The greatest tests of Elisha lie ahead. We will explore a few of them in the next three weeks.

I know – I never mentioned Simon the magician interacting with the apostles Philip and Peter in Acts chapter 8. Simon wanted to go big for his own selfish gains, and he was sent home by the apostle. Not so with Elisha.

As I wrap up I want to challenge you with something: Elisha knew he had a purpose for his life. And he knew it was too big for him to do alone. So what he desired most but couldn't quite articulate was that He wanted more of God in his life. He NEEDED all the power of his predecessor and welcomed it not for his own material gain, but for the glory of God and the good of the people God called him to serve.

How big is your vision and your purpose for your life? If it's not so big that you don't need the presence and power of God in your life, then let me suggest that maybe your vision and your purpose is too small. May God grant us hearts of Elisha... to admit that **we need God...** to **desire** and **ask for a double portion of the Lord's Spirit** in our lives... and to **believe** that He truly is working in us. Amen.