

Miracles of Elisha, Message 1

by Ed Miller

The sermon explores the life of Elisha as a model for Christians to emulate in their pursuit of a Christ-like character and ministry.

Duration: 1:13:25

Scripture: Isaiah 45:15, Matthew 11:25, Matthew 11:27-30

Topics: "Elisha Studies", "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the person and message of a man who looks like Jesus. The first two lessons explore the characteristics of this man, emphasizing that anyone can have a life that resembles his. The next two messages delve into the message of this man, highlighting the importance of hungering for God and ministering to others. The final message concludes by emphasizing the significance of both the person and message of this man, encouraging listeners to seek a life that reflects Jesus. The sermon references various Bible passages, including Matthew 11 and 2 Kings.

Transcript

Well, good morning. It's a pleasure, once again, to be with you and to share what the Lord has put on my heart for this weekend. I'm going to ask you, if you would, to turn to Matthew chapter 11, just to get the indispensable principle before our heart.

As we come to the study of God's Word, there is a principle of Bible study that's absolutely indispensable. Many principles are helpful. Many principles will aid you as you study God's Word.

But after it's all said and done and all of the academics are finished, you must come aside and you must cry out as a little child for God to disclose Himself. Now, before I look at the passage in chapter 11, I want to quote to you one passage from Isaiah 45. Isaiah chapter 45, verse 15, "Truly, you are a God who hides Himself." That's Isaiah 45, 15.

"Truly, you are a God who hides Himself." If that's a fact, and it is, then you see the need for the indispensable principle. Because without self-disclosure, we gather in vain. If He doesn't show Himself, He's a God who hides Himself.

There's no way on earth any man, there's no way on earth that I, who have been privileged to share with you this weekend, can ever force God to disclose Himself. He hides Himself. Now if you'd go to Matthew

11, I want to read these verses.

I don't know of a Bible passage more taken out of context than this. And this is taken out of context in a way that's good. What I mean by that is, it's not twisting it, because it also applies to the way that it's taken out of context.

It applies to someone coming to Jesus for the first time. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.' And so the sinner's invited to trust the Lord." That applies. But that's not what it's talking about.

It's talking about Bible study. It's talking about understanding God's Word. It's talking about self-disclosure, God showing Himself.

Glance at verse 25, if you would. "At that time Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight.

All things have been handed over to Me, says Jesus, by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son." Now, note this, please. "And anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Isn't that glorious? God hides Himself.

No one knows the Father but the Son. No one knows the Son but the Father, and anyone to whom He wills to reveal Himself. Now comes the invitation.

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me." He's the Teacher.

That's the point. He's the Discloser. He's the Revealer.

He's the One who illumines, who shows Himself. And so, though our God is a God who hides Himself, who hides His things from the wise and the prudent, He has hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in our Lord Jesus Christ. And He said if we would come to Him as little babes, He would disclose Himself.

So I'm going to ask you to bow with me as we call on the Lord for that glorious self-disclosure where God wills to reveal Himself to babes. Let's pray. Father, thank You so much for this great promise that we who come will find rest, and we'll find light and revelation, and You will disclose Yourself to us.

We ask You, Lord, to take us this weekend into Your hidden treasures. Take us, we pray, into Your presence and show us in a transforming way our Lord Jesus Christ. Deliver us, we pray, from a cold academic approach.

Completely set us free from sophistication in all its subtle form, creating us that childlike heart that receives from You. Thank You for the many times You've met us in this place. Now, once again, we ask that You would shine forth.

Let Thy face shine upon us. May we see You and then grace us to appropriate that revelation. Thank You in advance that You're going to over-answer this prayer because it's in the all-prevailing name of our Lord Jesus that we ask.

Amen. I'll ask you to turn your Bibles, please, to 1 Kings chapter 19. As many of you know, and as has been announced, we're going to look this weekend at the life and ministry of Elisha the prophet.

That begins in 1 Kings 19 and it goes all the way through 2 Kings in chapter 13. Now, there are many advantages to having announced it in advance. One of the things that thrills me about Hoshua and about family ministry is that we have the I don't know what you call it, that we have agreed together to know in advance what we're going to look at and that you have come before the Lord and prepared your hearts.

But I'm going to ask you for a moment to pretend I speak as a fool. You don't know the topic this weekend. You don't know I'm going to speak on Elisha and on 2 Kings.

You've never heard that. It's a surprise. You're sitting there saying, I wonder what he'll speak on this weekend.

All right, are you all with me? If you didn't know and we came into this room and I said, I'm not going to tell you right away where we're going to look in God's Word, but we'll play a little game. I'll give you some Bible clues. We'll play Bible trivia.

Who am I? Let me give you some Bible clues and you'll guess what I'm going to speak on because you don't know yet. I'm going to speak about a man whose name means God is salvation. Who am I? I'm going to speak about a man whose character is described as the holy man of God.

Who am I? I'm going to speak about a man, according to the record, who lived in constant communication with his holy father, God. Who am I? I'm going to speak about a man who wept over Jerusalem. Who am I? I'm going to speak about a man who went unto his own and his own received him not.

Who am I? I'm going to speak about a man who, in the midst of his ministry, began to minister unto Gentiles. You know who it is yet? Well, if you didn't know by then, I'd give you these clues. It's a man who's known for his miracles.

Who is this? Here's his miracles. He read into the hearts of men. He cleansed the leper.

He multiplied loaves. He raised the dead. Through his death, he brought life to others.

Who is it? If you didn't know, what would you say? Exactly right. And that's why we're studying Elisha. Everything I mentioned is true about the prophet Elisha.

And that's the reason we're studying him, because he's the man who looks like Jesus. And I want to be the man that looks like Jesus. And you want to be the man that looks like Jesus, and the woman and the young person who looks like the Lord Jesus.

God has given us, in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, one person who looks like Jesus in an all-inclusive way. In the New Testament, that person is the Apostle Paul. Paul is the man who looks like Jesus.

He's God's illustration of the New Covenant. He's God's choice as the example of the Christian life. You want to know what a Christian looks like, you study the life of the Apostle Paul.

But in the New Testament, it's heavy. You have it in doctrine. You have it in theology.

He spells it out in the epistles. You want to look like Jesus, then predestination and election and justification and sanctification and glorification. And your life is hid with Christ in God.

You are identified with Christ in His circumcision, in His death, in His burial, in His resurrection, in His ascension, in His session. You are seated with Him in heavenly places. You got the whole thing in the Apostle Paul.

But when you're done, you go, whoa, my head hurts. It's so much to understand what it means to be like Jesus, a Christian, because He explains it in terms of theology. And you need that, and I need that.

But how refreshing it is to see the same thing in the Old Testament, in stories, in pictures. It's exactly the same thing. Elisha pictures the same thing Paul pictures.

Elisha is God's illustration of the Christian life in seed form. The Apostle Paul is God's illustration of the Christian life in fully developed form. Elisha's message is the gospel, the new covenant in seed form.

The Apostle Paul's message is the new covenant in fully developed form. Praise God for the pictures. Praise God for the full development of the truth.

We need both, and God knows we need both. We cannot neglect either. But for our purposes this weekend, I'm inviting you to look at the pictures, at the redemptive history of a man who looked like Jesus, and of a man who had a message in story form that was exactly the representation of the full gospel.

So may God help us as we look at this precious servant of the Lord. Now at this point, because this is an introduction study, we have five sessions together. And by the very nature of the material, I had to keep fighting myself when I studied this to remember that I'm studying Elisha and not 2 Kings.

It would be a whole different study if we were doing 2 Kings. But we're not. And I'm trying to pick up the heart of God in the story of Elisha, the flow of the Lord.

And what that means, very practically, is that we had to leave out a whole lot of stuff. You can understand why. There's only five sessions.

And it's not 2 Kings, it's the story of Elisha. Now those of you who have been studying for months and months, I may jump over many things that you have found precious and that you have thought important. Bear with me on that, because we are going to look just at the simplest truths, the most basic things that God illustrates in this story.

As you go through the record, you probably noticed there are many, many puzzling passages in connection with some of the stories of Elisha. I've read the commentaries and their explanations on some of those. I was satisfied with some of their explanations.

I was totally dissatisfied with some of their explanations. There are dark, dark, dark portions of 2 Kings still in my heart and in my mind. Certainly we'll jump over those and pretend we just don't have time to deal with it.

Hoshua is not the place, I don't think, to deal with difficult passages. It's just not the place to do that. We haven't come here to become Bible scholars.

If we carry on the tradition of its roots, we've come here to see Jesus. We've come here to know the Lord. And so once again, I made a deliberate effort to come before the Lord and ask Him to guide me in that direction and to set aside some of these very puzzling things.

And so with God's faithful presence and assistance, we'll just home in on the great realities of the Christian life and the Christian message. What it means to be someone like Jesus. What it means to embrace a message like the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's call to Elisha is God's call to every Christian. He's not just calling a handful of people or special people. You don't have to be a spiritual hotshot to have a life that looks like this.

I don't have to be a spiritual hotshot to have a life that looks like this. Everyone who looks like this came as Elisha came and hungered as Elisha hungered and ministered as Elisha ministered. And so God will help us, I know, as we look at this wonderful record.

Now, I handed out some sheets and I don't think I printed enough, so you might want to share those. Here's the purpose of that. For some people, it's helpful to know where you are and where you're going.

If that helps you, well, there you have it. You've got five points. There's five messages we're going to meet.

Those are the texts we're going to use in each of the times we're going to gather together, Lord willing. If that gets in your way, scrap it. Turn it over.

Use the other side. Doodle. It doesn't matter.

But don't let those notes get in the way. That's just helpful for some people. And so if that helps you, then use it.

Basically, what I'd like to do is this. Since we have five lessons, I'd like to take the first two lessons and look at the man that looks like Jesus. I'd like to focus on the person.

Then I'd like to take the next two messages and look at the message of the man that looks like Jesus. Let's look at his message. And then the last message in summary, I would like to look in a clincher way, once at the end, at the man and at the message.

For those of you that have studied the record, and if you haven't, I pray that you won't be lost. I try to make every study stand on its own two feet, in case you have to miss some. And I try to study and teach in such a way that if you never even read the record, if you know nothing, if you have no background, if you have never heard of it, you won't be lost in the record.

So those of you that are hermeneutics and theologians, bear with me. And if we go back to the simplest of things, ask God to quicken your heart to those old truths. We need to hear them again, and in a living way.

So God help us with that. But if you've gone through the record, you will notice in the story of Elisha, in all of the record, there are categories of people to whom Elisha relates. For example, in some of the chapters, there's the enemy.

And usually in the Elisha story, it's Syria. Syria is the great enemy of God's people in many of these stories. And so you have a group of people that are the enemy.

I hope they're not here this weekend. You have another group of people. They're not the enemy, but they could be called the enemy, because they're the people to whom Elisha was called the minister.

Israel. They had 19 different kings over a period of 300 years, and not one of them turned to the Lord. When I read this, I almost said to the Lord, what a waste of a good prophet.

Sending a man like Elisha to this hard people who continually said no and resisted the Lord. And so sometimes you see Elisha as he dealt with the enemy. And sometimes you see Elisha as he dealt with the people to whom he was sent, Israel, a hard and a cold and a callous and a rebellious people.

But there was another group of God's people. 1 Kings 19:18 talks about 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And so there were 7,000, just for our discussion, we'll just call them Christians.

They're believers. 7,000 that didn't bow the knee to Baal. But we don't know how far they came along in the ways of God.

And then there's another group called the sons of the prophets. And that's a group out of the group. That's a few of the few.

And so you got 7,000. You got Israel. And then out of them, you got 7,000.

And out of them, you got the sons of the prophets. These were the students. This was the seminary.

This was the Bible school. And they had more of a heart for the Lord. But they fell sadly short, these sons of the prophets.

They will represent for us this weekend those who inclined to the legal side of the Christian experience. And some of these sons of the prophets, they had a hard time seeing the grace of God. There was the enemies of God.

There was the cold people to whom God had sent His servant. There were the 7,000. There was the sons of the prophets, the smaller group.

And then there was this man Gehazi. I used to pronounce it Gehazi, but I was correct. Gehazi.

I'll try to remember that. If I forget it, so what? He was one who tried to be like Elisha. He had all the words and all the privileges and all the opportunities.

He went through all the forms, and he pulled out of the sons of the prophets and came further than them. But it was only words. And he had a leper's heart.

Here's Gehazi. Gehazi. And then there was Elisha.

I don't know if there's the enemy here. I don't know if there's hard people of God. I don't know if there are those that are just content to be the 7,000.

I don't know if there's a group that would go beyond that and become sons of the prophets. I don't know if someone's embracing all the great principles only in form and unreality. But I know that in each case when Elisha, the man who looked like Jesus, I know as you go on in your life, as I go on in mine, we'll probably meet these groups.

How am I to respond to the enemy and to those who say no? And to those who are untrained in the ways of God? And to those who hold the truth in unreality? We're going to watch Elisha as he touches these groups. 1 Kings 19, I'm going to ask you to follow along. We're going to begin.

Elijah, not Elisha, was commanded by God to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place. And so we begin in verse 19. And so he departed from there and he found Elisha, the son of Shaphat.

While he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelve. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah.

And he said, please let me kiss my father and my mother. Then I'll follow you. And he said to him, go back again, for what have I done to you? And so he returned from following him and took the pair of oxen, sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, gave it to the people and they ate.

Then he arose and followed Elijah and Elijah ministered unto him. It's always good to start at the starting point. I want to be a man like Elisha, who was a man like Jesus.

I trust that's a little bit in your heart when you come to Joshua. I want to be like Jesus. Where does it start? How does it begin? What are his secrets? How does God create a person like that? A servant like Elisha? He's so unique, so different, so desirable.

If I want to be like that, then I have to start as he started. And that's why we've gone back to this chapter. What I'd like to do is give for those that like logical connection, three simple principles, three secrets, how it all begins.

The great principles that God must begin with in order to bring us to the place where we can be like this man and have a message like he had. This morning, if you were at prayer meeting, you heard Brent sharing at prayer meeting. And one of the things he shared was some of the differences.

God made you, you, and he made me, me. And he hasn't called you to be me, and he hasn't called me to be you. And so in some things in the Christian experience, it depends on how God made you.

What's your personality? What's your temperament? But the principles I'm going to share this morning don't depend on your disposition and on your temperament and on your personality. These belong to every Christian. If you're going to be like Elisha, God isn't saying, all right, here's a few that can do it, and here's some that can't.

God has called us all to be like Jesus, every one of us. And so the three principles I'm going to share from Elisha's life, they're not optional. If you're serious about being like Jesus, you go this way or you don't go.

All right? That's what we're looking at. This doesn't depend on your makeup, on your taste, on your Christian disposition. This is God's heart for every person.

The starting point in all the work of God on Elisha is this. It began with the grace of God, and then Elisha responded to that grace. That's how it always begins.

God pours out His grace, and we respond. Has to be. Elisha went out to the field in the story we just read.

And you know why he went out in the field that day? He went out in the field to plow the field. Is that too deep? That's why he went out there. He didn't go out in the field to be called by God.

He didn't say in the morning, well, today the mantle's going to fall on me. I think I better get ready for that. He went to work.

He got up, he got washed, he brushed his teeth, he had his breakfast, and he went out and he went to work. He wasn't seeking the Lord. He wasn't expecting the Lord.

He wasn't preparing for missions. He wasn't thinking, well, today's the day God's going to call me. There was none of that in his mind.

He was doing what he did faithfully every day. And in that sense, it begins with God. Because one day on an ordinary day, in an everyday day, when you get up just to do your daily things, God's going to show up.

And when He shows up, you've got to respond. That's what happened to Elisha. God began it.

God initiated. God was the first cause. God showed up.

God interrupted his life. And when he encountered that, he had to respond. And he could only respond, this is the only reasonable response when God shows up, an absolute and a total surrender to that call of God.

Chapter 19, verses 19 to 21, we have this great record of that response. Now, no doubt Elisha had known about Elijah. I think if some stranger walked in the field and threw a jacket over him or a mantle, how do you picture that mantle? I can't get away from Superman's cape.

And I know that's not right. I just pictured it with a big E on it. But Elijah had a reputation.

Elijah was a prophet of God. Elisha knew about that reputation. He knew about that man.

And when Elijah put that mantle on his shoulders, Elisha felt so privileged, so honored that this man of God would come and select him and choose him and come to him and put that mantle on him, he felt so privileged there was no other possible response than the one we read of here. Now, to break it down, let me show you three simple things from this total surrender that illustrates that great principle. I must respond to the grace of God, and the more I know it's God that is calling me, the more I will see the privilege and the easier this will be.

I need to see the Lord. Elisha's surrender, according to this text, was absolutely voluntary. It was of his own free will.

Now, look, if you would, at verse 20, when Elisha asked permission to go back and kiss his father and his mother, in one sense it looks like he's hesitating a little bit, and that there's a little bit of reservation. He looks a little bit like that man in Luke chapter 9 that wanted to go back and kiss his parents. But in that case, it's clear that there was an unhealthy attachment to home and so on.

I'm not sure that's true here with Elisha. But when Elisha, I get these mixed up, when Elijah said, go back again, I'm not dead sure when he said go back again that he was saying go kiss your parents. Because he followed it up with, for what have I done to you? And I have an idea what he's saying is this.

I'm putting my mantle on you, but don't misunderstand, I'm not calling you anywhere. Elijah's saying, what have I done? It's not me. This is the Lord.

This is God. And don't respond because of something I'm doing to you, says Elijah. This is not me.

What have I done to you? It's not what I'm doing to you. It's not me calling you. And when he said go back again in verse 20, I think it's very much like Naomi when she told her daughters-in-law, go back to your God.

She didn't really want them to go back. She was just saying, count the calls. Are you sure that you really want to come? And I think it was something like that.

Don't make a hasty decision. When? Decide not because some man has told you to do it. Not because there's some emotional response and I'm caught up in some big emotion.

What have I done to you? I'm going to be calling you to trust the Lord this weekend. And to put your faith in Him and to look to Jesus. And then when I'm done, I'll say, what have I done to you? That's not me.

That's the Lord calling you to those things. And so it was a free will thing. Of course, the question comes, did Elijah actually go back and say goodbye to his parents? It's not clear.

Some people say he did go back. Some people say he didn't go back. Whether he went back or not is not the point.

Did he say goodbye? And the answer to that is yes. He said goodbye by saying yes, I'll follow. That was his goodbye.

When you start identifying with the Lord, people say, you know, if I really lay hold of the Lord, will I have to give up my friends? The answer is no, they'll give you up. They'll know. You don't have to say goodbye.

Your identification with the Lord is your goodbye. And for the next eight or ten years in Elisha's life, he followed and served and ministered unto Elijah. All of his friends knew he had said goodbye.

And all of his neighbors knew and all of his relatives knew because of his identification. But it was his own free will. And it was not only his own choice, not because of Elijah and not because of some emotional experience.

I choose to do this with my own free will. But did you notice how complete his surrender was? How total, how absolutely full it was? Now, this is magnified when you understand from all outward appearances, Elisha on the level of earth was quite a wealthy man. He had a lot of this world's goods.

We're told by those who are supposed to know that those twelve yoke of oxen represented a very well-to-do family. He had servants. They had great fields.

And evidently, Elisha was the heir apparent to this great estate. He was a wealthy man. It's almost comical if you consider the call of Elijah just on the level of earth.

This with these eyes. Now, let's say Elijah came with words like these. Elisha, God has called me to appoint you a prophet in my place.

And Elisha says, oh, that's exciting. Where do you live? I live in the wilderness. I just came out of the cave.

Oh, that's great. What do you eat? Locusts. Wild honey.

Whatever the ravens drop out of the sky, that's what I eat. Hard to turn down. How do you spend your time? Well, lately, running.

See, there's a death sentence on my head. Old Jezebel, she's trying to kill me. You have a wife? No, no wife.

No family? No, no family. How's your ministry received? Oh, they hate it. On the level of earth, what's he offered them? Man, give me a double portion of that.

On the level of earth, he wasn't offered anything. Except to give up his fortune and his house and his family and his job and his future and his inheritance. You got to see what was happening here.

You know, there's a way to surrender something to the Lord because God looks at the heart where you can surrender something and still have it. Peter did that. Remember, he surrendered his nets and his boats unto the Lord.

Next thing you know, he's in his boat fishing. Say, hey, I thought you surrendered that to the Lord. He surrendered his family to the Lord, but in such a way that he kept his family.

He traveled with his wife. He lived with his mother-in-law. He still had his nets and his boats after he gave them to Jesus because surrender is a matter of the heart.

But this surrender is magnified in that it was so overt. He not only surrendered with his heart, but he did it outwardly. He took everything that represented his old life.

He took the pair of oxen that he was plowing with and he killed the oxen as a sacrifice. And then he took all of the implements of the oxen. He took the plow and he took the harness and he took the yoke and he took the tools and that became the firewood for the altar.

And it all went up in smoke. Everything. In a moment of time.

What a complete surrender this was. His old occupation had become the offering. Everything that was reduced to ashes.

Now, you've got to remember the record we have of Elisha. He was a nice guy. It's not like some sinners come to the Lord and say, I'm going to give up my old life.

I'm going to give up all of the drinking and all of the drugs and all of the women and all the running around. That's not what he was giving up. That's not what he set on fire.

We have no record that he lived that way. He set on fire that which was legitimate and that which was good and that which was wholesome and right and represented his own faithfulness on the level of earth to his own human father. But in his mind, because God had called, not Elijah, God had called him because it was such a great privilege.

That which was legitimate would not stand in the way of a full and complete obedience. And so he surrendered it all. It had to go up in smoke.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there's no other legitimate response. When God comes and interrupts your day and interrupts your life, God puts his mantle on you. He's not going to force you.

He's not going to strong arm you. He's just going to invite you. And when you realize who it is that has called you, then you'll follow.

See, it was not only a free will surrender, and it was not only a total and absolute surrender, but it was happy. It was a joyful surrender. Did you notice that? Saying goodbye to the parents he loved, saying goodbye to his wealth, saying goodbye to his future, his own ambitions.

That wasn't a chore for him. That wasn't a struggle. He didn't have to agonize over that.

He didn't have to work at that, say, oh, God's calling me, let me think about, oh, I don't know what to do. Oh, my goodness. You wouldn't hear Elijah get up in a testimony meeting and say something like this.

I want to give a testimony. I want to praise God. The other day he threw his mantle on me, and I gave up my job, and I gave up the oxen, and I gave up my future, and I gave up the inheritance.

I could have had a soft life, but I decided to identify with Elijah and take his place. You wouldn't hear a testimony like that. He gave up nothing.

1 Kings 19.21, when he burned the oxen, he wasn't burning it. He was cooking it. He had a party.

It was a celebration. He didn't say, oh, what a terrible thing, I've got to give all this up. He threw a party.

Now, there's a question as to whether that party took place right there in the field, and all the workers gathered around and ate what he was cooking up, or if he went home, actually, to kiss his parents, and gathered everybody around. But either way, it was a celebration. It was a party.

You say, oh, I'm so nervous about surrendering to the Lord, to give everything up for the Lord. I don't know if I can do that. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, it's not a burden.

I love what Paul said in Philippians 3.8, I've suffered the loss of all things, and count it but rubbish that I might win Christ. I've never heard anybody struggle giving up rubbish. That's easy to give up.

The only reason it's a struggle to give something up is you don't have the right value on it. Once you see the Lord, once you see the privilege, well, that's how it begins. You know, we come here and say, here's a man that looked like Jesus.

You want to look like Jesus? That's where it starts. That's where it starts. Where you respond to the grace of God, where you come willfully, totally, unreservedly, joyfully, and lay it all down.

You don't start there. You're just playing a game, talking about being like Jesus. That's where it begins.

For the next eight or ten years of Elisha's life, we have only one sentence of him. It's in 2 Kings 3.11, and it says, Elisha used to pour water on the hands of Elijah. And so for the next eight or ten years, he just became a servant.

He might have wondered from time to time, I thought five years ago, seven years ago, ten years ago, I thought I was called to be a prophet. I thought I was called to take Elijah's place. How come I don't do prophet things? How come I don't call down fire from heaven and burn up some idolaters? How come I don't do miracles? He just poured water.

That's one of the great evidences that you've really surrendered. You just pour yourself out in loving service to your brothers and sisters. No doubt before Elisha's surrender, after a day's work, he'd go home, some servant would greet him, pour water on his hands, on his feet.

He's become a servant. God called him. Nothing else matters.

I choose it. Everything. Gone.

And I'm happy about it. And he goes into this evidence of serving the Lord. Well, I told you there were three initial, three preparation principles that are not optional, that belong to everyone who's serious about being like Jesus.

Not only must I respond to His grace in a free will, total, joyful offering of everything to Him. The second principle can be summarized in any of these words, or you choose your own word. I've got to want it.

Desire. Thirst. Hunger.

Longing. Passion. Yearning.

Verse 9 of chapter 2, 2nd Kings. You've seen we've jumped over a lot, but here we are now. And when they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, ask what I shall do for you before I'm taken from you.

And without a moment's hesitation, Elisha said, please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me. He didn't just come up with that. He'd been thinking about that for 10 years.

Double portion. Elijah, the prophet of God, who had worked so many miracles, comes in and he stands before him and he says, I'm about to be taken. Before I'm taken.

And he writes him a blank check. Before I'm taken. Here, fill it in.

What can I do? He knew about his miracles. He could have asked for anything. Riches and honor and position and success.

Anything he wanted. And he didn't even think about it. I want a double portion of your spirit.

No hesitation. Now, everything depends on understanding this double portion. What is this glorious double portion that he had a longing for and a desire for and a passion for that he didn't even have to think about? You give me a blank check, I'll tell you what to write on it.

A double portion of your spirit. Write that on it. Many think and they try to prove it.

They count the miracles Elijah did. This miracle and this miracle and this miracle. Now, let's see how many Elisha did.

All right, Elisha did this many and this many and this many. And let's see if it's double. Two times as much.

It depends on how you break up the miracles and how. You see, if you're going to try to reason that way, you've got to consider the extent of the miracle as well as the number of the miracles. Elijah's first miracle was withholding rain and dew from the earth for a period of three years.

How many miracles are included in that one? When you think about it that way, how do you double that unless you have seven years of famine or something like that? Elijah wasn't asking for the ability to do twice as much as Elijah did. He was talking about what the Bible talks about as the law of the firstborn. The privileges of the firstborn.

The double portion is an idiom in the Bible. It has to do with the firstborn. The firstborn was set aside by God as unique.

Sanctified. God said, I want you to take the firstborn and I want you to put on the firstborn. You find this in Deuteronomy.

The most, the best, the highest. They had all the privileges, the firstborn. Why? Because Dad loved the firstborn more than the secondborn? No, it was God's picture.

It was an illustration. God said, I love all my children. I want somebody to represent the group.

I want a firstborn. Somebody I could put the most, the best, the highest on so that people can look at him and say, wow, God loves me that much? He'd like to do that for me? And so after God laid down the principle of the firstborn, He said to Israel, the nation, you are my firstborn. And that's what He said to Pharaoh, don't touch my firstborn or I'm coming after your firstborn because I'm going to pour on Israel the most, the best, the highest.

Not because I love Israel more than anybody in the world, but I need an object lesson. I need somebody to represent my heart to the world so the whole world can look at Israel and say, wow. Does God in heaven love us that much? Does He want to honor us that much? Does He want to bless us that much? Exodus chapter 4, verse 22, Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus says the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn.

But you know the Bible record, Israel was not a faithful firstborn. And so God said, listen as I read it, Numbers 3, verse 41, Thou shalt take the Levites from me, for I am the Lord, instead of the firstborn among the children of Israel. Numbers 8, verse 18, I've taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.

Israel, you have failed to be my representative. I wanted to pour my most, my best, my highest on you. You failed.

And so God took Israel, set them aside and said, the priests, the Levites, they will be my firstborn. And so God began to dump on the priests, on Levi, his most, his best, his highest. Why? Because he loved the priests more? No, because he wanted a representative people to show the world how much he loves everybody.

And then the Levites failed. We come to the New Testament. Matthew 1.25, And she brought forth her firstborn son.

Romans 8.29, He's the firstborn among many brethren. Colossians 1.15, The firstborn of every creature. Colossians 1.18, The firstborn from the dead.

And God said, finally, I have my representative man, the Lord Jesus, my firstborn. Look at him and you'll see me. And you'll see my heart, the most, the best, the highest.

That's my plan for you. And then Jesus went up to heaven, sent back His Holy Spirit. Listen to this, brothers, sisters, Hebrews 12.23, to the General Assembly, to the church of the firstborn.

Who's his firstborn now? Say it, say it again, say it. We are now his firstborn. He's carried that all the way through the Bible.

He said, I need a people. I need a people on which I can pour the most, the best, the highest. I need a representative people who only care that they have my life poured into them.

So the world can know my heart toward them. Luke 1.17 describes the spirit of Elijah. Luke 1.17, the spirit and power of Elijah is the spirit that makes a people prepared for the Lord.

That's what it says. That's the New Testament explanation of that. That was Elisha's thirst.

That's why he didn't have to think about it. Here's a blank check, Elisha, what do you want? He said, I only want one thing. I want to be God's representative.

I want everything God has to give me. That's the firstborn. That's what he cried out for.

I want to have the power of God to pour out his life so that my life can cause a people to be prepared for the Lord. That's what Elisha prayed for. That's what he desired.

I say that's not optional. If you're serious about being like Jesus, don't play around with surrender. It's got to be done.

You've got to do it. And it's a joy if you understand the privilege. At the beginning, you've got to do it.

You've got to want everything the Lord has for you. It's not hard. You've got to want it.

Elisha wanted it enough to pray for it. Have you ever prayed that you'd be the firstborn? That God would pour out on you his everything so the world could know? That's what he wants. One more thing, and then we'll wrap up the introduction lesson.

I can't miss this. You can't miss this. Or you miss it all.

Second Kings 2.10. He said, you've asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I'm taken from you, it shall be so for you. If not, it shall not be so.

When Elijah said, you've asked a hard thing, it wasn't hard for Elijah. It was impossible for him to give what he asked anyway. But he was talking about Elisha.

You've asked a hard thing for you to desire such a life, to be like Jesus. That's costly. It's going to mean the death to self.

The principle is contained in the words, if you see me when I'm taken, it shall be for you. If not, it shall not be. Third principle has to do with focus.

Has to do with vision. If you see me when I'm taken. Has to do with focus.

Not with these eyes, of course. With these eyes. Elisha was told that he had to keep focused on a spiritual world.

He had to become aware of two worlds at the same time. And he had to ignore and not be distracted in this world. And he had to keep focused on the level of earth.

I don't think that sounded too hard for Elisha. Keep your eye on me. If you see me when I'm taken, then everything you have asked is going to happen.

And so he said, all right, I'm going to watch you. He doesn't want to lose it. Of course, I'm sure at that point that Elisha expected him to die, not to be raptured.

He thought he'd be walking along and he'd go, ah, grab his heart, fall down, and he'd watch it. I guess. Try to picture it from Elisha's point of view.

If you see me when I'm taken. And then you know the test that's in chapter two. Stay here.

And he said, I'm not staying, I'm walking. And then he says, stay over here. And some people think that those names of those places are instructive.

And probably they are. Jericho and Gilgal and Bethel and so on. And he's watching and he's watching and he's watching.

The Bible says that there were 50 sons of the prophets standing on the shore. They're watching, too. From a distance.

They're not walking with Elijah. There's a difference. And we won't get into that difference now, but they were watching.

Anybody here ever see a tornado? I mean, in person, not on TV. You saw one? I never have, but I have an idea. This whirlwind, this tornado.

If a black funnel started coming out of some sky under which I'm watching, I would look away and say, whoa, look at that. Hey, Elijah, don't miss the point here. If you stay focused and all of a sudden there's a tornado that comes out of the sky, he can't look at it.

He's got to look at Elijah. So he keeps looking at Elijah. And this thing sounds like a train, they say.

He can't look at that, and that thing's coming. They're watching it, the sons of the prophets. That'd be bad enough.

But then the Bible says that in between Elijah and Elisha, he saw fiery chariots and fiery horses. Now, if you can't look at something throwing the furniture around, and you have a spiritual vision of fiery horses and chariots, are you going to look at those? This is all distraction. All distraction.

And he's focused, and he's focused. And all of a sudden, he sees Elijah caught up, and he says, I see it, my father, my father. Last week, I had a funeral up in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

A dear lady, she's with the Lord. Some folks just saw the tornado. They just saw the storm that comes in and turns the house upside down and takes their loved one away.

They didn't see the reality inside the tornado. Some of those saints saw the reality. And what a difference for those who saw the reality.

Focus. I felt so bad for those sons of the prophets, because later they asked Elisha if they could go hunt out the body. Remember? You know how frustrating it is to try to find on earth what's only found in heaven? I've been there, looking on the earth for what's only found in heaven.

And they came back so defeated, so broken. You've got to be surrendered. You've got to want it.

And you've got to be determined. No matter what comes, I am going to keep my eye on the Lord. You might be satisfied to be one of the 7,000 that never bowed the knee to Baal.

Praise God that one day he put his mantle on you. You might be satisfied to be the sons of the prophets who stand at a distance, and all they see is the physical and the tornado. But if you want to be Elisha, you see, when the story began, the mantle was on his shoulder.

When the story ended, the mantle was in his hand. And I'll tell you, brothers and sisters in Christ, there's a difference between the mantle on the shoulder and the mantle in the hand. 1958, by God's grace, he put the mantle on my shoulder.

But I didn't know anything about surrender. And I didn't know anything about just wanting God's everything. And I didn't know anything about focus.

But in those years of pouring out water, God taught me and began to teach me. 1965, he enabled me to pick up the mantle. You know, when we talk about these things, we're not playing games.

And as I get older and older, and my ticker gets weaker and weaker, I'm not going to mince words with you. I'm going to say things as they are. You might think that these things, total surrender, a desire for everything God wants to give me as a representative of His grace to the world.

Looking to Jesus alone, you might think, what a great goal. Someday, I pray, God, I'll be totally surrendered. Someday, I pray, God, I'll want everything that He wants to give me.

Someday, praise God, I will be focused, and I'll look to the Lord, and I won't be distracted by physical or spiritual things. It's not a goal. It's a starting point.

Elisha's life began here. This is not where we're heading. This is the beginning.

This is the starting point. And I'm convinced in my heart that God wants... I don't have any doubt, and I don't know your heart. I'm not trying to read your heart.

But I have every assurance that God has put His mantle on probably everybody here, or almost everybody here. You've been called. You've been saved.

You've been... Your sins have been washed away. You haven't bowed the knee to Baal. Some of you have perhaps come even further.

But I believe God wants us to pick up the mantle this weekend. And the starting point... Now, we're going to go from there and look at His life. That's why I call these preliminary.

That's why I call this preparation. This is the beginning. Let's start HaShuah with that willful, total, joyful surrender unto Him.

Let's begin HaShuah with that desire in our heart, I want the double portion. Lord, I want to be Your representative. Whatever You want to put in my life to show them Your heart, do it.

I want everything You have, and I will not be distracted. By Your grace, I'll focus no matter what comes down the pike. No matter how loud it is.

No matter how destructive it is. No matter how spiritual it seems, I will focus. That's the beginning.

That's the starting point. And from there, God begins to make the man of God. So let's all begin on the same page.

Let's begin so God can teach us what it means to be a man like this with a message like this. Father, thank You so much for Your Word. Not the little bit we think we know it means, but everything You've inspired it to mean, will You work it in our hearts.

We pray this year at HaShuah that we would respond to Your grace. That we would pick up the mantle and become men and women like Jesus. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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