

Gods call and a mans Mantle

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the story of Elijah and Elisha from 1 Kings 19, focusing on God's call and the significance of receiving a mantle as a symbol of divine calling. It emphasizes the mystery of God's sovereign choices and the need for wholehearted, unmeasured responses to His call. The sermon highlights the importance of individual responses to God's call, the impact on family and career, and the concept of resurrection ministry beyond the Jordan, symbolizing the cross. It concludes with a call to unswerving faithfulness and reliance on God's grace.

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:19, Acts 13:48, Luke 16:10, Jeremiah 45:5, 2 Kings 2:11, Esther 4:14, Luke 9:23, 2 Timothy 1:9, Philippians 3:13, Romans 11:29

Topics: "Divine Calling", "Faithfulness in Response"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to read first of all from the scriptures and if you want to turn with me I'm looking into 1st Kings in the Old Testament. 1st Kings chapter 19, just getting myself all sorted out here. I'm in 1st Kings chapter 19 verse 19 and the reference first of all is to Elijah.

So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father, my mother, and then I will follow thee.

And he said unto him, Go back again, for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and he took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen. And he gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Amen. I think I'd probably like to call this message God's Call and a Man's Mantle. I know and appreciate that others may wish to find other features of significance in the casting of the mantle, but I am convinced in my heart that supremely it is a symbol of the call of God.

Long before Elijah was born, somewhere in what the Apostle Peter will later call the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Elijah was ordained to a specific purpose. Of course he was utterly unaware of this, and as we find him here in the text of Scripture, he was going about his business. And as he's just doing the routine work, which I'm told would not be routine for other people, to be able to plough with twelve yoke of oxen, suggested that he was an extremely unusual and powerful man.

In any event, he's doing what he regularly has done, and a man, I have no ability to know whether he knew this man or not prior to this moment, but in any event, a man approached him in the field and threw his mantle upon him. That in itself, of course, is very strange, but I believe I can safely say that at that moment when that mantle landed on Elijah, that something was birthed within him. And you know, this is exactly how God is working today.

In the mystery, and it is a mystery, the mystery of the Godhead, choices have been made. And it's wonderful, I'll just pause here for a moment, it just comes to my mind as I'm speaking here, what an important privilege it is to be able to come to the Scriptures and read them and study them and seek the help of God to enlighten them to us. And to come, not as a Calvinist, not as an Arminian, not as, and I could go down along a list of the various categories and groupings of people, but isn't it a wonderful thing to come like a child to the Scriptures and just take from them what the Lord highlights to us and makes real and particular and personal to us.

And I trust with all my heart that that's what I'm doing here on this occasion. But you know, it is true that within the context of the Godhead, choices have been made. I could venture into other Scriptures, I mean, for example, if you're writing down, you might want to just look at the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13, and verse 48.

And this just simply among many other Scriptures, which speak of the fact that God somewhere, once again to quote Peter, in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, was choosing and designing. And that's all I can say about it, because of course, we're right out of the boundaries of our own understanding at that point. But the fact is that in the invisible and inaudible unfolding of the mystery within the eternal mind of God, mantles, as it were, have served to awaken the hearts of men and women to God.

Of course, not literally, but I trust you understanding what I'm saying here. And I'm conscious that as I speak to you this morning, as it is for me, my screen has many faces on it. But I've also got good reason to believe that there are many hundreds of others who will be listening on the internet.

And I don't know who you are. And I don't know your story. I don't know your spiritual story.

But even as you're listening to my voice, perhaps, perhaps God is casting his mantle upon you. In other words, his Spirit is awakening your heart in order to begin a new or fresh work in your life. If that's true, I encourage you to listen carefully to what the Lord gives us to share and think about this morning.

Because like Aquila and Priscilla, I just might be showing you the way of God more perfectly. Not because I'm anything, but because of the truth of the Word of God and the quickening activity or the life imparting

activity of the Holy Spirit of God who is working. I trust in my own heart and I trust also in yours.

We're not called, none of us are called to try to imitate the actions of Elisha when that cloak was cast upon him, when he was awakened by God. But I do know this and I believe this quite firmly that whenever the Spirit of God truly awakens the inner man, the inner heart of a man or a woman, their response will not be measured. Let me just re-emphasize what I've said only to be sure I'm making the point clearly.

I'm saying when in truth, when in reality, the Spirit of God Himself is awakening the heart of a man or a woman, then their response will not be measured. Even as I'm saying this, I'm thinking of that text which says, who can stand when he appears? And I believe that in the same way, when it is truly the work of the Spirit of God who is speaking to an individual heart, it elicits from us a response which can't possibly be a measured response. And this is certainly true when I look at Elisha in this situation.

There's no way that I can imagine that his response is somehow measured and careful. In a word, it was a stunning response. To all intents and appearances, it was a reckless response.

And I think it speaks to me of this man's unrestrained abandon to God. Somewhere, and I don't have a text to explain this, but I believe that somewhere in that moment of that cloak falling upon him, as I've already said, something was birthed, something came alive within him that I believe he sensed to be the call of God. And he responded wholeheartedly.

It was not measured. He threw himself, as it were, into the very arms of God and into the purpose of God for which he was calling him. And what a wonderful thing that really is when that actually happens to a person.

I mean, watch Elisha. I mean, Elijah's not handing to him some kind of specifications or some, I don't know, some printout, if you will, of how to respond and how to act and what to do. None of those things.

He had what we can only refer to as an inward knowing. There was just a sense deep within him, evidently, which brought about this spontaneous, wholehearted, total abandon to the purpose that God had in his heart for him. You know, thinking about responding to God, his response would inevitably impact his family.

And once again, I'm saying, we're not looking at trying to follow the pattern that we find here. We're simply reading what is stated in Scripture, which was, in fact, the response of this man. And we're expressing how that is interpreted in our understanding and how it may have an application that is equally real in each one of our lives.

And there's no doubt at all, I know this from my own life. I know it from watching the lives of a number of other people over these many years, that when the call of God comes to us, it can bring about responses from those who are nearest and dearest to us that can, if we respond to them, hinder us in the experience and in that which God has planned for us. And the people who may be impacting us at those times who do love us genuinely, they're just simply expressing their own affection for us, their care for us.

They're acting out of what might be called common sense or worldly wisdom. You know, why would you do this? How does this make sense? This is a foolish thing to do. And I'm thinking of the words of Jesus when he said that if we put our family members before him and the obeying of his leading, then we're not worthy of him.

So we're talking about something that's very serious, very important and not uncommon. And I'm certain that making a total response to the leading of God will also very possibly impact our career. And once again, this is not a pattern that everyone has to do the same thing, but it certainly made an impact on this man's career, didn't it? And I suppose I'm thinking in particular insofar as our career and our love of our career in some way hinders the divine purpose, then we're not really surprised to recognize that sometimes God breaks in on that whole area that's been so important to us.

And once again, God hadn't told Elisha what lay ahead for him. He had no idea at all. In that sense, intellectually, mentally, he's acting out of complete ignorance.

But on the other hand, he's acting according to this inner witness that has impacted him and is influencing him to make such a radical response. I know that, and this is only a very small illustration that just comes to my mind, but out of my own life journey in 1970, the Lord called me and my wife also into a dimension of Christian ministry, which I'm not going to describe just now. But one of the understandings and agreement of the brethren that I was joining was, and I heartily agreed with this, that there would be no salary involved, that we were to look to the Lord for his supply for us, and also that we would not ever make our material needs known to another man.

And at that particular time, Sheila and I had four young children. And as we launched into that ministry, there was a period where there was no provision for us at all materially, except for one lady. Her name is Jenny Meaton, dear friend.

She gave to Sheila, I maybe shouldn't be saying this over the air, but she gave to Sheila one pound, and with the statement that this is a token of how the Lord is going to provide for you. And I think she commented about that later, but I believe it was all that she had that she gave at the time. But the fact is, our own funds ran out completely.

That is, with a very small exception. Sheila and I, with our children, were driving away from my sister-in-law's home, and we were driving home, and on the way we stopped to get one half of a gallon of petrol, and we stopped at a fish and chip shop, and we got one bag of chips, or French fries, and that was for all the six of us. But from that moment, God began to look after us.

And as faithfully looked after us, well, we've practiced that for more than 50 years now, and God is faithful. And of course, Elisha wasn't thinking all this through, nor should he have, but he cast himself upon the God who was calling him, and we're resting assured that God looked after him from that point on. We're told, as we move on, we won't do it in particular, but into 2 Kings chapter 3, and I think it's verse 11, that from that time, Elisha became the servant of Elijah.

And in the Old King James version of that verse, it speaks of the fact that Elisha was the man who poured water on the hands of Elijah, indicating that he was his servant. And this man who'd been the CEO of probably a significant farming business became a servant to a man who, so far as we know, he had never met before. But it's true that symbolically, and probably in a very real way as well, Elisha put all that he was upon the fire of God's altar.

It was Jim Elliott, many, many years ago, who wrote in his journal, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He also prayed these words, he said, God, deliver me from the dread asbestos of other things, and pour upon me the oil of your spirit, that I may be a flame. But a flame, he continued to write, is transient and often short-lived.

Canst thou bear this, O my soul? In me, he said, there dwells the spirit of the great short-lived. Make me thy fuel, flame of God. Amen.

And I believe that I can safely say to you, whoever you are, wherever you're at in your journey, in the things of God, this same God expects that kind of response from each one of our hearts. The call of God is primarily individual. We hear the words of Jesus, if any man, he uses that phrase several times, if any man.

The idea is not that we sense the call of God, and, you know, well, let me put Elisha back in the picture. It doesn't say this in my Bible, but in spite of the fact that his response to this call would impact his family and his life and his business and so forth and so on, there's no suggestion that he went back to his mother and his father and put it to them, sort of had a family powwow to see if they agreed that this was a good idea, or to try to get their blessing. The call of God is individual, it comes to us individually, and we have to respond to it individually.

This is true, you know, even within the context of a marriage union, and I've collected a lot of stories in my memory over the years of the impact of this and how difficult this can be at times, but the fact remains that God is looking for a wholehearted response to him, with no reservations and no excuses at all. Amen. The sad thing is that in these days, I think the gospel and the challenge of the gospel has been and continues to be reduced to its lowest common denominator.

It's become a religion of cliches and bans and social teas and so on, but the call of God, the call that Jesus himself gave in the days of his flesh, was not some kind of picnic event, it was a strong, powerful, penetrating call, reaching into the very depths of men and women's hearts, and the Holy Spirit is bringing that same challenge to men and women today. He may be doing this to you for the very first time in your knowledge and experience of what was going on, but I speak as an older man now, and I can testify that the Holy Spirit continues to do this through the entire length of the journey of our lives, as we're seeking to live for him and live for his praise and his glory. He, the Holy Spirit, continues to challenge our hearts again and again and again.

He loves us and he's looking for the... I can't give back to him what he has given already to me, that is at Calvary, but in principle it's to be the same. He gave his all there and he's looking for me to give my little all to him, and he's looking for you to do that as well. From the moment of that initial awakening, although so much of the time we don't realize it, we're being led and we're being prepared for the consummation of his divine purpose in calling us.

I remind you that so far as God is concerned, this sovereign being, nothing of his plan and purpose for any one of us is, as I say it, is composed in an ad hoc way or on the fly. It's not like that. God's plans are never formed on the fly, but he set his mind and his heart before time was.

And in the fullness of time, all will become focused in our own lives. But obviously in a much greater way also, but in our own lives that's been encapsulated in his initial call of us. As he then works with us, as we journey through life and we pass through all kinds of circumstances and challenges and wonderful times of blessing and so on.

Through it all, he is faithful to us and his eye is upon us, his hand is upon us and then he has a time and a purpose when that which has always been in his heart for me or for you somehow finds a fresh phase of a consummation and it becomes realized in our lives. I suppose the classic passage of scripture that we

think of at that point from the story of Esther, without me talking about the circumstances that led up to this, when one said to her, who can say Esther, that you have been brought to the throne for such a time as this. In other words, for this purpose.

He was suggesting, in my words now, he was suggesting that the fullness of time for Esther had come about. Here was the moment. She was born of God, or that is she was brought into the line of God's heart and God's purposes for this very moment, for this thing.

What a wonderful thought that is. We have every reason, I think, to believe that in those long years, because there were now 10 years from the point of Elisha's call when the cloak was cast upon him, for 10 years of service to Elijah, I believe that they were days of joy and fulfillment for Elisha. He was doing what he believed that God had called him to do.

And I believe that's true. But I'm wanting to emphasize that he was settled in that. He was settled in pouring water on the hands of Elijah, the great prophet of God.

And I believe it would be true to say that he handled the privilege that had been allotted to him as a sacred trust. But even as he did that and performed his duties, or the bidding of Elijah, or whatever it was that was happening, through 10 years' period of time, I believe he was finding fulfillment all the way along because that's how it is when we're in the will of God. But he was utterly ignorant of the fact that God had designed for him an even yet greater purpose he would not have been able to conceive in his mind.

The man who 10 years earlier turned his back on his huge business to play second fiddle to a prophet of God was about to be launched into the staggering new height of service that God had planned for him. And note this, that every feature of Elisha's ministry that is recorded in the scriptures is marked by resurrection. You might want to read through the stories again and you'll see that.

There's always this feature of resurrection. His whole ministry was marked as a sort of resurrection ministry. Amen.

You know, Jesus taught, didn't he, when it's recorded in Luke's Gospel, chapter 16, that the one who is, and I'm paraphrasing, the one who is found faithful with little will be entrusted with more. There was an occasion when Jesus was talking about material, if you like finances. And in the language of the old King James, Jesus says, if a man has not been faithful with unrighteous mammon, who shall entrust to him the true riches? Well, as I read the story of Elisha and his connection with Elisha, I've every reason to believe that for 10 years, this man was faithful.

He lived faithfully. He served faithfully, not knowing what God had ahead for him. You know, this could be so true for you.

I can't make promises for you. I don't know what the Lord has in his heart for you. But let's be careful, particularly as we get older, that we don't shelve all possibilities of, even yet, being involved in something of a work of God that is very significant.

Even perhaps our bodies are failing and are physically weak. And we would wonder, well, what can I do? There's a lot more that could be said about that. I think I must move on.

I will say this, though. We do well to heed the caution that we find in Jeremiah 45, where we're instructed with these words, Seekest thou great things for thyself, seek them not. It's one thing to be open to God for

whatever, but if we're trying to bring about or we're constantly pursuing something that we think is going to be our ministry or our calling and so on, the advice of Scripture is don't do that.

Just cast yourself on the leading and the will of God. Frankly, I believe that the moment we start to seek things for ourselves, try to put some kind of ministry together, that the anointing lifts away from us. That's my opinion.

We may be very busy in what seems like a good Christian activity. We may win the applause of many people, but we will nevertheless miss the divine purpose that he has in his heart for you. And my encouragement to you in speaking to you today is that you will do what Peter describes in the second epistle.

And be sure to make or give every effort to make your calling and your election sure. And whether that's pouring water on someone's hands for many, many years, whether it's to have some more prominent activity, let's leave everything with God. We're his and we must be available to him in everything.

Amen. And let us also, I think, remember that we as, I mean, on the one hand, we can speak with great joy about being called as sons of God, but we're not inventing a new category when we side up with the Apostle Paul, who continually refers to himself as a servant, or a better translation, a slave of Jesus Christ, as he starts a couple of his epistles. So in all of this, let's remember that we're servant slaves and we possess nothing of our own, nothing of our own making.

I possess nothing of my own making or my own gaining. Everything that we handle in this realm is an entrustment of God to us. And when all is done, we find Jesus talking, and his words, it's as though he takes the words out of our mouths.

Do you remember this passage? When all's been said and done, we are but unprofitable servants, and we've done that which was our duty to do. This was Jesus speaking of those who serve faithfully. There's no room for credit, there's no room for patting ourselves on the back, there's no room for thinking we've made it, we've got some ministry together.

Not at all. And I could talk a lot more about that from my own life, but I must move on. One more huge thing that Elisha must discover, and all of us must never forget, and that is that the resurrection ministry, which is the Christian gospel of course, the resurrection ministry, where the Holy Spirit is anointing us and moving through us and ministering to us, will always exist on the other side of Jordan.

Let me just turn your attention to 2 Kings. I need to read there, please. And if you come with me to chapter 2, perhaps I'll read several verses here.

Verse 12, And Elisha saw it. Oh, I need to read earlier than that. Let me read verse 11.

And it came to pass as they went on, this is Elijah and Elisha, and as they talked that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more, and he took hold of his own garments, and he rent them in two pieces.

And he took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan, and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Word is the Lord God

of Elijah. And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.

And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said to him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men. Let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest peradventure of the spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain in some other valley.

And he said, You shall not send. He knew exactly what had happened. Amen.

The two men crossed the Jordan, and it was on the other side of Jordan where this great miracle enactment took place, and where Elisha was launched into that fuller purpose of God's plan for his life. And that Jordan, as we read about it and think about it there, of course, is speaking to us of the cross of the Lord Jesus. That the full blessing, the anointing of God upon our lives and our actions and our ministering is always going to be on the, as it were, the other side of the death of the cross.

And this, frankly, is why so many, or so few, perhaps I'll put it this way, so few really discover it. And that is because the cost is too high. To embrace the Jordan crossing is to accept the stripping of self.

You noted there, didn't you, in verse 12, that before he was able to take on the, as it were, and get hold of the cloak of Elijah, he first of all, and again, very spontaneously, no instructions were given to him to this effect, but he ripped his clothes off. He stripped himself there. That act was clearly profoundly symbolic of the fact that what he had been was coming to an end.

This would be a new beginning altogether. And Elijah was ready for that. And I think the fact that he strips his clothes as he does is a token of his full and complete commitment to that.

He was ready for whatever God had ahead from him. Are you? I wonder. Whoever you are.

Elijah saw an opportunity as it all was unfolding before him, and he grasped it with all that he was. Symbolically, he grasped the abundant life. Will you grasp it? I ask him.

It's interesting. Elijah didn't ask Elijah for a double portion of his power, but of his spirit. And you know, the men and women on the other side of the Jordan, they saw what happened and they recognised what was involved in this act.

And that which Elijah received, it's interesting that it doesn't say that he put it on. I'm not saying he didn't, but it doesn't say that he put it on, but he used it. It was the anointing of God is not something for me to wear or for you to wear.

It's not a badge. It's not a title, but rather it is an enabling for the ministry unto which God has called us. Amen.

In the fullness of time, God got Elijah exactly where he wanted him. And the faithful servant is now truly a powerful instrument in the hand of God. Amen.

You know, in as far as the mantle symbolises the call of God, we've noted both the initiative and the timing of the call of God are equally in his divine hand, that all of the glory and all of the praise will be his and his alone. You know, today, in my today, in your today, the call is for an unswerving faithfulness as a trusted

servant is to his calling. And God's looking for me to rest in that, just as I referred to Elijah early in this message as finding fulfilment and joy and a sense of being in the will of God in what he was doing.

And yet he was doing such a minimal thing compared with what he would yet do that he was unaware of. And God is speaking to me today and to you, I believe, that we must come to this place of what I've called an unswerving faithfulness to that which God has given into our hands to do today. Amen.

And should he cause a second mantle to fall, it will be of his grace alone. May we see in each provision of God for us and his grace as something to be grasped, no matter what the cost. Amen.

Well, I've taken a sort of a skip through a great story, great stories. But I trust that God has been able to say something to your heart today. Can I just say this as I finish here? If you're watching on our YouTube channel, Turn to the Scriptures with Fred Tomlinson, can I encourage you please to just press the subscribe button? That is purely to assure us that you are out there and that you're identifying with us and praying for us, that you will not be contacted unless you request it.

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