

Church in Need of Repentance

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas's sermon calls Christian leaders to recognize their profound impact on the next generation and to live lives that reflect God's miraculous power through obedience and faithfulness.

Duration: 55:09

Scripture: Genesis 28:19, 1 Kings 13:11-26, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher tells the story of a man of God who was approached by a king and offered rewards and refreshment. However, the man of God refused, as he had received a specific instruction from the Lord not to eat or drink in that place. He was a man who was completely disinterested in worldly advancements and was consumed with a holy passion to be in the place of the king. Later, an old prophet heard about the man of God's actions and invited him to his house, where he ate and drank against his original instruction. The sermon emphasizes the importance of placing our lives under the supreme jurisdiction of God and being obedient to His instructions.

Transcript

Well now, I know that it's my privilege tonight, in meeting you good folks, to be speaking to those who, in various spheres of Christian activity, shoulder considerable responsibilities of Christian leadership. And so I thought that, as those who have been called by God to positions of Christian leadership, we might examine together our particular responsibilities. By virtue of the responsibilities that we have, inevitably we make an impact upon those amongst whom we minister.

It may be a Sunday school, it may be a Bible class, it may be a church congregation, it may be some business organization designed to present the claims of Christ to those in their professional capacity. But whatever it is into which God has led, inevitably, day by day, consciously or unconsciously, we make an impact upon those amongst whom we live and those to whom we minister. And in particular, we make an impact upon those who are younger than we are, quite obviously.

Boys and girls in our Sunday school classes or within our church congregations or youth clubs, these are the ones who have the right to look up to us, to get their eyes on us, to scrutiny, to scrutinize, and to draw their own conclusions. So it is a perfectly valid question to ask, what is the impact that your life in a position of Christian leadership makes upon those with whom you are principally concerned? What is the effect of your life upon the spiritual well-being of boys and girls and young people? With this in mind, I

want to tell you tonight two stories, a sad story and a glad story. The sad story, with which we'll begin, is found in the first book of Kings and the 13th chapter.

1 Kings chapter 13. I'm sure it'll be a story that's familiar to you all. Behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel.

And Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Just a very brief historical sketch to give the background. Under Rehoboam, there had taken place the revolt of the ten tribes of Israel.

And they had enthroned Jeroboam to be king. For his part, he recognized the political danger of those now under his sovereignty going to Jerusalem there to worship God. For he feared that if they were to return to Jerusalem, slowly their allegiance and their affections would be recaptured by Rehoboam.

So we're told that Jeroboam, verse 28, the king of the previous chapter 12, chapter 12 and verse 28, he made two calves of gold and said to the people, it is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy God, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he said, the one in Bethel and the other put him to death.

And this thing became a sin. So the people went to worship before the one even unto death. And he made an house of high places and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.

He introduced, in other words, a completely counterfeit form of religion, but which retained much of its inherent sentimentality. The gods he created were the gods who brought them out of Egypt, because that was still vivid in the minds of the people. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month on the 15th day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the office.

So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places, which he had made. So he offered upon the altar, which he had made in Bethel the 15th day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart.

That's the background. And it is into this background that suddenly there stepped this man of God out of Judah. And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord.

We read in the second verse of the 13th chapter, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord. Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name. And upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.

And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the Lord hath spoken. Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. And so with complete fearlessness and in utter faithfulness, this man of God out of Judah proclaims judgment upon this idolatry and blatant defiance of the God of Israel.

Unashamed, unafraid, and crystal clear in his discharge of the responsibility that God has laid upon him. Well, that's refreshing. That doesn't sound like a sad story.

Would to God that we more often heard so clear a denunciation of evil and of all defiance of God's sovereignty in the lives of men. Came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he had put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.

The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. In other words, not only was he utterly fearless and faithful in the discharge of his responsibility in delivering the whole counsel of God, but God was in action on his behalf. And the king's arm was with him.

And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again. And he became as it was before.

Obviously a man whose activity was vitally in harmony with God's mind and purpose. He was simply the human vehicle of God's will at that particular time, for this particular second. And any man who at any given moment is identified by his heart attitude of total obedience to God with the mind and will of God, has the legitimate right to call upon all the resources of God.

That's a divine principle, given to us clearly in the 11th chapter of the epistles of the Hebrew, he that cometh to God must first believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Put in a simpler way, all that God is, is fully available to the man who is fully available to all that God is. That in a nutshell of course is the Christian life.

All that Jesus Christ is, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, is available to the man or the woman who is fully available to all that Jesus Christ is. And that's why if we come to the place where we're prepared to be fully available, we can know that we are complete in him. This man knew something of this.

He stepped out of the pages of the Old Testament, he was a man who had entered into this unique personal relationship with God, who in the place of obedience and in the faithful discharge of his responsibility, had a high confidence that God would be in action on his behalf. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for the man that he might show himself strong on his behalf, whose heart is perfect towards him. A heart that's perfect towards God is simply a human personality placed unreservedly at God's disposal.

That's all it means. To recognize that my life mechanism, my capacity to think and to react and to decide, is a life mechanism that I must place under the supreme jurisdiction of God himself exercising his sovereignty in and through me by his divine justice. And God says I'm looking for that man.

I don't care where I find him. I don't mind the color of his skin. I don't mind whether he's educated or ill-educated, whether he's scholarly or simple, whether he's rich or poor, whether he's naturally endowed with unusual gifts or unusually bereft.

All I'm looking for, says God, as my eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, is any man anywhere who is available and I'll show myself strong in his heart. Here was a man whom God had found. Well, that wasn't a sad story.

That was anything but a sad story. And the king said unto the man of God, come home with me and refresh thyself and I will give thee a reward. The man of God said to the king, if thou wilt give me half thine half, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place.

For so was it charged me by the word of the Lord saying, eat no bread nor drink water nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. I've received my instructions and I may not stray from them. So he went

another way and he returned not by the way that he came to bed.

He was a man refreshingly disinterested. The promise of social advancement, to be entertained in the royal palace or such monetary reward as the king might have bestowed upon him, left him completely unmoved, untouched. He was a man consumed with a holy passion to be in the place of the king.

He had an insatiable appetite to see God unhindered at work in and through his life. And that doesn't sound like a sad story. But in point of fact, this is one of the saddest stories in the Bible.

Verse 10, so he went another way and he returned not by the way that he came to bed. Verse 11, now there dwelt an all prophet in Bethel. That's where the sad story begins.

There dwelt an all prophet in Bethel. It doesn't say he was a bad man. It doesn't say that he was doing anything which might have been described at this time as specifically wrong.

But what we come to know of this all prophet in Bethel is this, that he had become acclimatized to the evil atmosphere in which he lived. He had reconciled himself to the status quo. In this place, Bethel, which means the house of God, where Jacob first met God.

In this place, Bethel, where Jeroboam was establishing idolatry in the faith and in defiance of the living God of his people Israel. There was an all prophet who knew better. There was an all prophet who knew God.

And he never raised a voice of protest. He never barred the way to King Jeroboam. Nor did he condemn his actions.

And that isn't even to say that he did not personally disapprove of them. He may have disapproved violently. But he did nothing about it.

Nothing. He'd become acclimatized. Why had he become acclimatized? Why did he do nothing about it? Because I believe he was an all prophet in Bethel who had learned to live a life less than miraculous.

He had learned to live a life which was something less than a life explicable only in terms of God. Of the man of God who came out from Judah, you couldn't say that of him. When a man speaks, a man's arm doesn't wither unless God is in action.

When a man speaks, an altar doesn't suddenly fall apart unless God is in action. The man of God who came out from Judah was a man who had become accustomed to living a quality of life that could not be explained except in terms of God. But the all prophet in Bethel had learned to live a life that could only be explained only in terms of man and certainly not in terms of God.

And that's where the sad story began. And this unfortunately is where too often, all too often, in 1962 the sad story begins. Because amongst those who carry responsibilities within the context of Christian activity, there are all too many who have learned to live lives that are less than miraculous.

Who disapprove of sin and disapprove of the atmosphere of the world around them wholeheartedly, but have become reconciled to it and do very little about it. Nor indeed expect that anything ever will be done about it. An all prophet in Bethel whose activity in Christian service, whether it be in the Bible class or from the pulpit, is so colorless and impotent that it quite obviously can only be explained in terms of man but certainly not in terms of God.

The old prophet in Bethel. But what was the impact? What was the impact of this all prophet in Bethel upon this young man, bursting with eagerness, with a holy passion within his heart, fired with a holy ambition to be only always in the place where God wanted him and only always to see God in action through him. What was the impact, the influence of the all prophet in Bethel upon a man like him? Or to bring it home to ourselves here, what is the impact of your life? What's the impact of my life upon that young man, that young woman who suddenly gets fired with a holy ambition to be nothing less than God said and whose enthusiasm may be, puts us to shame.

What's the influence of our lives upon them? What's the impact of our lives upon them? How far do we enhance that holy ambition that is within them? Or how far are we like a wet blanket calculated to smother and stifle and deaden? Have you got accustomed to living a life in Christian leadership that is less than miraculous? Have you got accustomed as a Christian leader to living a life that is explicable apart from God? In your Bible class or crusader class or Sunday school or in your church services, if you were entirely honest with yourself, is it anything less than something orthodoxly mechanical? No challenge to the fundamental issues that are at stake. Thoroughly evangelical, fundamental to the fingertips. Nothing ever happens.

Nothing ever really happens that would need God to explain it. Verse 11, Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel, the words which he had spoken unto the king. Then they told also to their father.

You can imagine the excitement with which they burst into the house and said, Dad, Dad, you ought to have been there. You ought to have heard how that young man talked to the king. And you should have seen the king's face.

Why did he go red? And he shouted at him, said lay hands on him, arrest that man. His hand withered, Dad. His hand withered.

He couldn't take it in again. Dad, you ought to have been there. And the king started praying and pleading with the man to ask God to heal his arm again.

And he did. It was healed. Dad, you ought to have been there.

We never heard you talk like that. You talk to us sometimes about God, but we never saw God do anything like that. Dad, Dad, how is it that he can talk like that to the king and you never did? Dad, how is it that God acted on his behalf and we've never seen God act on your behalf like that? How do you think the old prophet in Bethel felt? Say, how do you feel when sometimes you see God in action in the life of some young fellow or girl? You can think back maybe five, ten, fifteen, twenty years and say, I can remember the day when God acted on my behalf like that.

But nothing happened, Dad. Their father said unto them, What way went he? For his sons had seen what way the man of God went, which came from Judah. And he said unto his son, Saddle me the ass.

So they saddled him the ass and he rode there. And he went after the man of God and he found him sitting under an oak. And he said unto him, Art thou the man of God that came from Judah? And he said, I am.

Then he said unto him, Come home with me and eat bread. An old prophet in Bethel, a slimy old prophet in Bethel, he saddled his ass and he followed the young man. He found him sitting under an oak.

And with all the customary language, with the usual cliches, with what we might describe today as the evangelical jargon with which he himself was well acquainted. Are you the young man of God that came from Judah? Are you the young man about whom I've heard so much? All my boys were so impressed with what they saw this morning. I'm so glad to meet you.

And I'd be delighted if you'd come home with me and eat bread. We'd be, we'd be greatly honored to have you in our home. I'm sure you'd be a great blessing to my family.

A slimy old prophet in Bethel. You see, there's nothing that creates so much resentment in the heart of a backslidden old prophet in Bethel than seeing another man, a younger man, doing under God what he knows he should have been doing himself. And the young man of God said, I may not return with thee, nor go in with thee.

Neither will I eat bread, nor drink water with thee in this place. For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, thou shalt eat no bread, nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest. These are my instructions.

I'm sorry. I appreciate your kindness, but I cannot. But the slimy old prophet in Bethel said to him, I am a prophet also as thou art.

And an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. He said, my dear young man, I want you to know that I too am a prophet.

I love God as you love God. I serve him as you serve him. And much as I have to learn from you, and much as your presence in our home may be a blessing to my own family and to my own people, of course, maybe there's something too that you could learn from me.

And God has told me that you should come back to my house. But he lied unto you. He might well have said, I can remember when, when I was as enthusiastic as you are, and I was as keen as you are, but you know, over the years, over the years, one mellows, you know, and over the years one, one gains experience and settles down.

And, and of course, young man, you, you can't go on like this all the time, you know, you'd have another breakdown if you went on like this. I believe I have, I believe I have something from God to give you. I believe I have a message from the Lord for you.

Now you come back with me. Well, the poor kid, what was he to think? What was he to say? Did he want to look pretty, unteachable, pig-headed, stubborn, and proud, and self-willed, in the presence of an older man, and a prophet of God, who came to him with all the language of the saints? So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water. So he went which way? Back, back.

That is always the impact and influence that an all-prophet and better has upon the young man, who is foolish enough to yield to his advice. He took him back. You'll find that in this very, very sad story, this becomes the characteristic of the old prophet and better.

It came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back. And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandments the Lord thy God

commanded thee, but camest back. And who brought him back? But camest back, and hast eaten bread, and drunk water, in the place of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water, thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy father.

It came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him. And his carcass was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it.

The lion also stood by the carcass. And behold, men passed by, and saw the carcass cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcass. And they came and told it in the city, where the old, and when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard their answer, he said, It's the man of God, who is disobedient unto the word of the Lord.

Therefore the Lord has delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him according to the word of the Lord which he spake unto him. And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass, and they saddled him. And he went and found his carcass.

Listen, verse 29. And the prophet took up the carcass of the man of God, and laid it upon the ass, and brought it back. He even brought his carcass back.

And the old prophet came to the city to mourn, the slimy old prophet and beggar, and to bury him. Listen, And he laid his carcass in his own grave. And they mourned over him, saying, Alas, my brother.

Can you imagine a more horrible story than that? I think that's one of the saddest stories in the Bible. A slimy old prophet and beggar. Although there was nothing particularly wicked about him, but he had learned to live as a spiritual non-entity, a life utterly colorless, without any luster, a life without any evidence whatever, that declared a living God.

And he brought him back and buried him in his own grave. And now there was nothing left to disturb the bad conscience of a man who had become reconciled to the evil atmosphere in which he lived. And whom nothing disturbed more than anything that would alter the status quo.

Verse 33, After this thing, Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high place, whosoever would he consecrated him. And he became one of the priests of the high place. And a young man of God with all the power of God and the power of God was safely buried in his own grave.

And now he said, We can get back to normal. Isn't that a horrible story? Isn't that depressive? We're not told the story of the young man. We're not told the name of the young man.

I think God loved him too well to tell us his name. He was just a man of God and he was slain by a lion. God killed him because God loved him.

God said, I'd rather kill him than he should ever grow to become a slimy old prophet and better. I'd rather die than become a slimy old prophet and better. You see one of the problems confronting the Christian church today and not the least the evangelical church of New Zealand is this, that there are many young men and women who are hungry for God.

There's absolutely no question about it. In whose hearts there has been aroused a holy ambition to know God in action in their lives. And if in the manifestation, not always necessarily with maturity and wisdom, but if in the manifestation of that holy desire to be the best for God they disturb the status quo of the old prophets in Bethel who do nothing but pull them back to bury them in their own graves and they refuse to be buried.

Then the chances are they'll say goodbye to our formal evangelical churches and run after some extravagant way of life because they know nothing better in the places from which they've come. And that's one of the problems of the evangelical church. We have become lethargically comfortable in cherishing the fundamental faith of our fathers, but we have ceased to live miraculously and all too often genuine desire to see God in action in the lives of young people is met with nothing but the wet blanket of old prophets who to ease their own conscience would rather bury them in their own graves than see another younger man under the power of God do what they themselves should be doing.

Well that's the sad story. To end on a cheerier note let's turn to the glad story. It's found in the second book of Kings and the second chapter.

And it's such a familiar story to you that we need only almost a glance at it. It came to pass chapter two of two Kings that when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha tarry here I pray thee for the Lord has sent me to Bethel.

And Elisha said unto him as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth I will not leave thee. So they too went down to Bethel. That's our introduction to this particular faith.

Elisha in the company of a man called Elijah. A man who constantly lived in the miraculous. A man who knew this intimate relationship with God.

Who could speak and God would act. The rain would be with him or the floods would come. And it was this relationship to God that Elisha coveted it.

And constantly there was aroused within the heart of Elisha a holy ambition I want to know God this way. And I believe that I can know God the way Elijah knows God. And I believe that God will be to me what he's been to him.

And he wouldn't be satisfied with less. But Elijah was a man of God. And he knew better than to give Elisha cheap encouragement.

Elijah knew how God had called him. And he knew that a man's spiritual authority finally doesn't derive from men's ordination. It doesn't arrive from a man-made commission.

Elijah knew well enough that a man's spiritual authority derives only from the fact that God has called him. That God has ordained him. And that he's right bang in the center of God's plan for his life.

And has the right by virtue of his availability to God to expect God's availability to him. Elijah was wise enough to know this. And he knew perfectly well that Elisha would never know divine authority simply by imitating Elijah.

There was nothing that Elijah coveted more for Elisha than that Elisha should know God as Elijah knew God. But he knew there was no shortcut. It wasn't a question of technique.

It wasn't a question of teaching Elisha how to say the things Elisha said. And do the things the way Elijah did them. He knew that if ever Elisha was to know the God of Elijah in the way that Elijah knew God, then Elisha had to know God as Elijah knew God.

So he gave him no cheap encouragement. He didn't want him just to be a copyist. He didn't want him just to be a little budding Elijah.

He wanted above everything else that Elisha might still be Elisha. But with Elijah's God. But nothing delighted the heart of Elijah more than when Elisha insisted on coming.

Deep, deep down his heart he was saying thank you God. That's what I want. But I want him to come because he must.

Verse three. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha. And they said unto him, knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? These were the sons of the prophets in Bethel.

I somehow fancy there still remained the influence of that old slimy prophet in Bethel. For these were no more than conformists. They expected nothing, nothing, nothing spectacular.

They expected nothing out of the ordinary. And they resented the suggestion on Elisha's part that ever he could be an Elijah. And they tried to persuade him to take his place with them and sit in monotonous rows and be like the rest, as colorless as them all.

And they said, knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? You'll look jolly silly when Elijah's gone. You've been basking in his limelight for long enough. He said, yes, I know.

I know. I know Elijah's gone. Hold ye your peace.

Which was a polite way of saying mind you and listen. I'm not prepared to be as colorless as you are prepared to be. I don't believe I'm anything.

And I don't believe Elijah is anything. But I believe in Elijah's God. And I believe what God can be to Elijah, God can be for me.

And I believe that God could be the same to you if ever you were prepared to believe it. But you're too busy conforming to pattern. You're too busy trying to be respectable.

And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. He said, as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I'll not leave thee. I'm not staying with this man.

I'm coming with you. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho repeated the dose.

They came to Elisha and they said unto him, knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, yes, I know. Hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, tarry, I pray thee here, for the Lord has sent me to Jordan.

He said, as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And what's it say? End of verse six. And they too went back.

This is the glad story. They too went on. That's the difference between Elijah and the impact of his life upon Elijah and the old prophet in Bethlehem, the impact of his life upon the young man of God from Judah.

The old, slimy old prophet in Bethel took him back. But Elijah, without any extravagant or shallow encouragement, took him on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and they stood to view afar off, well out of harm's way.

And they too stood by Elijah. There wasn't one of those fifty sons of the prophets who could not have stood where Elijah stood. But instead they remained afar off, spectator only, in the gallery, on the touchline.

They were there to see the fun. They had become accustomed to seeing Elijah do things that were explicable only in terms of God. They didn't know the answer.

They didn't know why. It was just a fait accompli. It was just one of those strange spiritual phenomenon they thought.

But Elijah, that Elijah should know God the way Elijah knew God. That God would be prepared to be as active in and through him as God was prepared to be active in and through Elijah. This was something that they could not credit.

And so they stood, the fifty of them, afar off. And they nudged each other and they'd say, wouldn't it be fun when God has taken Elijah from Elijah, to see him trying to please the Elijah. What a fool he'll make of himself.

And Elijah took his mantle and he wrapped it together and he smoked the waters and they were divided hither and thither so that they too went over on dry land. None of the fifty sons of the prophets were surprised at that. They'd been accustomed to strange things happening when Elijah was around.

But now there was going to be the fun. It came to pass when they were gone over that Elijah said unto Elisha, ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

The double portion of course was the portion given to the firstborn in the family. That's the significance of it. Elijah simply said, I want to be treated as though I were your heir.

If God is going to take you to himself, I want to be available and as available to God as you have been available to God. And so I want the double portion. I want this wonderful spiritual inheritance which is obviously yours to be mine.

I say, is that the impact your life has upon your life? Is this the influence that you have over those fellows and girls? They may come to you and say, look here, I don't know how to explain this. I don't know quite what to say and I don't really know exactly what it is I want. I know it isn't you for what you are, but I want what you've got.

I want to be your heir. You've entered into an inheritance with Christ to which I'm still a stranger. But I want you to know that with all my heart, I want to share with you this inheritance.

Is that the compelling impact that your life has upon the men and the women and the boys and girls to whom you're responsible as the ministers of Christ? Is there something strangely compelling about the quality of your life that makes them insatiably hungry for the same thing? Let a double portion of thy spirit. He didn't want to be twice as big or twice as clever or twice as blessed as Elijah. It doesn't mean that.

He was simply asking for the portion of the firstborn. He was asking to enter into the same inheritance. And this wise man Elijah said, thou hast asked a hard thing.

Because you see, Elisha, as to whether you enter into this inheritance, as to whether you enjoy God as I enjoy God, does not depend upon your relationship to me. That's why I never encouraged you to come simply for my sake. It depends upon your relationship to God.

And you see, Elijah went on to say, as much as I love you, Elisha, as much as I personally as a man may trust you, strong and high as may be the hopes that are within me concerning you, I'm not God. And I don't know your heart. I want you to know this, that the power of God is not given to a man because he imitates somebody else.

Because he learns his techniques and uses his style. No, Elisha, you will never receive the double portion because of your relationship to me. You will only receive the double portion if there is a relationship between you and God with which God is satisfied.

So I can promise you nothing. Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee. But if not, it shall not be so.

God will be the arbiter because he knows your heart. And it came to pass as they still went, which way? Verse 11. And it came to pass as they still went on, not back, and talked, that behold there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire and parted them both asunder and Elijah went up for 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 clothes and rent them in two pieces. And he took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and he went back and stood by the bank of Jordan.

And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and he smote the waters. And you can imagine the excitement amongst the fifty sons of the prophets as they stood afar off. And they saw Elijah, this Elijah, take up the mantle of Elijah and smite the waters.

And they all nodded each other. And he cried, where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither. And Elisha went over and God answered, you want to know where the God of Elijah is? He's just waiting for an Elijah.

For God is fully available to those who are fully available to God. And you should have seen the look on the faces of the fifty sons of the prophets. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view with Jericho saw him, they said, would you believe it? The spirit of Elijah just rested on Elijah.

Extraordinary. And they came to meet him. And the poor miserable non-entities reconciled to a life utterly meaningless.

Reconciled themselves to be non-entities. Always non-entities. Because they hadn't learned this vital principle, that what God is to one man, he can be to any other.

On God's terms of reference. For all that God is, is available to the man who is fully available to all that God is. Elisha said, Elijah, I can promise you nothing.

It will depend not upon your relationship to me, but upon your relationship to God. But if God helps me, my high privilege will be to lead you on to that place when you become available to God. And then I can say goodbye to you.

Elijah, I can be caught up in a chariot of fire. God can take me another way. But you'll be in good hands.

God's hands. And I shall go into the presence of my God, at least with this satisfaction. I did not take you back, nor did I bury you in my own grave.

I took you on until God took over. And that's all I want to know. Now let's pray.

Oh God, none of us is strangers to thee. We may be strangers to each other. Strangers to each other, even among friends.

For in the presence of each other, we see only what's on the outside. Oh God, you alone have seen what's on the inside. Thou knowest the various responsibilities into which thou has called us, or man has put us.

At this very moment known to thee and precious to thee are the boys and the girls and the young men and women into whose lives thou has woven out. We recognize that the office, be what it may, is an office that we must discharge and can only discharge. As before thine all-seeing eye, just to satisfy men can never be enough, if it has never satisfied thee.

Forgive us, we pray thee, dear Lord, for those occasions when the impact of our lives upon others has been to dampen their ardor. Forgive us for those occasions when we've hindered and been a stumbling block. Forgive us, dear Lord, for those occasions when we've been tempted to resent the obedience of another that has revealed our own disobedience, their strength against which that has been silhouetted in our own weakness.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, for all those who in their day and generation have been Elijah's to us. They're precious in our memories. Some of them hardly knew it.

Maybe we never had occasion to tell them, but somehow always in their presence it was to go on and never to go back. And we cover tonight this kind of reputation. We pray unitedly for those whom thou hast lovingly committed to our charge, that leading their on, there may come the day when they won't need us anymore.

We shall have preached ourselves out of business, because they are solidly and securely in thy strong hand, and God has taken over. To this end, we dedicate ourselves afresh. In a recognition of our own utter impotence.

And before thee and in thy presence again we say, I am nothing, I have nothing, and I can do nothing, apart from Jesus Christ, who is my life, and for his his name.

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