

Skyland Conference 1979-02 Elisha

by Robert Constable

The sermon emphasizes the importance of involvement, the power of the mantle, and the responsibility of the servant, highlighting the significance of Elisha's story in demonstrating God's presence and power in our lives.

Duration: 39:00

Scripture: 1 Kings 17:1

Topics: "Elisha"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the story of Elisha and the healing of the waters of Jericho. He emphasizes the lesson that great outcomes can result from small acts of obedience, regardless of whether we understand or agree with the instructions given. The preacher encourages the audience to be willing to obey God's word, even when it doesn't make sense, as this can lead to unexpected blessings and fruitfulness in their lives. The sermon also highlights the transformation of Elisha from a servant to a spokesman for God, and the demonstration of his appropriation of the life given to him through the miracle of walking through the Jordan River.

Transcript

Well, do you think that you're up to standing a miracle this morning? I mean, if a miracle was to happen to you this morning, how would you react to it? Are you ready for it? The reason I'm asking you this is that I'm very much afraid that when we come to meetings like this, and especially in conferences like this, we're inclined to be not participants in it, but observers of it. We're going to be talking about miracles now for a few days. And what I'm very afraid of is you are going to sit back and applaud Elisha.

You know, very nice, Elisha, you did a good trick. And that's not the idea of the meetings at all. You know, these meetings are for our involvement, for us to get involved.

The miracle has got to happen to you if it's going to be effectual. So I'm going to ask you to make a special effort this week to sort of hang in here with us and get involved in the things that we're talking about. Because this record is kept so that we can appropriate it.

We can make it our own. That's what we mean when we talk about the living Word of God. And just a story about what's happened to somebody else a long time ago.

And speaking about a long time ago, there are some people that have a little difficulty with the things that happened in the Old Testament because we seem so far removed from those things. We live in a different culture. We're all around us in different kinds of circumstances than there were then.

But the unifying thing in all the Old Testament and in our own times is this, that it is the same God, the same God that worked in the lives of these men, is working in our lives and is ready to work in our lives, and ready to do with and through and for us what He did for these other people. And we don't want to miss that. So turn this morning to 2 Kings chapter 2. And we'll get right into this business of the miracles in the life of Elisha.

Everything we're told about Elisha practically has to do with a miracle. There are 17 recorded miracles in his life, every one of them done for a reason, and the record of that miracle kept for us for a reason, because God wants to say something to us. These things are written for our learning.

Well, we're going to go back a little bit here in our reading this morning, back to Elijah again, Elisha's mentor. Elisha was his servant, his personal servant. And we come to this particular episode, and you'll see why in a moment.

Verse 7 of chapter 2 of 2 Kings. Now, let's set the setting. Elijah and Elisha are walking together toward the wilderness, and it says, 50 men of the sons of the prophet went and stood to view afar off.

And they too, that is Elijah and Elisha, stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither so that they too went over on dry ground. And 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 away from thee.

And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing. 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. And it came to pass that as they still went on and 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 clothes and 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.

All right, let's stop there now for a moment. This is introductory. This is what is leading up to the miracle that we want to consider.

Elijah has been taken away. Elisha the servant is left. And out of a deep sense of his bereavement, out of a deep impression of the responsibility that has now fallen upon him, Elisha cries, My father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.

And he took his clothes and tore them, which was the way people expressed their grief in those days, the way they expressed their bereavement. They tear the clothes, and he tore his clothes to show how overwhelming this experience was to him. It doesn't sound like much when you read it.

But if you were Elisha, it would be much. This was a tremendous thing. He had seen Elijah taken, and he had the Word of God that if he saw Elijah taken, he would be given a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

He would be made Elijah's double. He would be in the earth as Elijah was, for God. He moved from the status of a servant, a personal servant, into the status of the spokesman for God in the nation.

A tremendous change took place, but he didn't know it yet. All he knew was that he was greatly bereaved. And he stood there by the river Jordan, by the bank of the river.

Are you seeing this picture? See it as the fifty sons of the prophets saw it. They were watching these two men as they walked away. They saw them come to the river and stand there.

Then they saw them walk right through where the river had been and start walking across the wilderness. And suddenly there was only one man there. And they saw him turn around and start back the way he had come.

One man, not two. And they watched. And this one man came walking back until he came again to the river.

And he stood on the bank of the river, and this is where we left him, standing there on the bank of the river. Now, to come to the Jordan and to go across it in the company of Elijah was one thing. Elijah was the prophet of God.

He could stop the river and they'd go across on dry land. But Elijah isn't there anymore. Elijah's gone.

And Elisha comes back and here's the river, unfordable. No way to get across. What's he going to do? How's he going to get back where he came from now? And he stood there.

And he stood by the bank of the Jordan. Don't you just think of the things that went through his mind as he stood there by the bank of the Jordan and the water flowed by. And in his hands he had the mantle of Elijah that had fallen at his feet when Elijah was taken.

And he thinks what he should do. Well, when we came over, what Elijah did was that he took this mantle and he smothered the waters and they stopped. But, of course, Elijah's not here anymore.

So Elisha took the mantle and he did exactly what Elijah did with it. He smothered the waters with it. And he cried out, Where's the Lord God of Elijah? And he walked through on dry ground.

My, what volumes that spoke. Elijah was gone. But the God of Elijah was not gone.

He was still there. And Elisha proved that he was still there. He called on him, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? He smothered the waters the way Elijah did.

He got the same results. And I want to pause here to remind you that we are the servants of one who has gone before us who is in heaven. And he has had his mantle fall upon us.

We are those who are coming in his train. We are among that company that have been called to be for God in the world. And our Lord and Master has gone to heaven and his mantle has fallen upon us.

Now, one of the things that Elisha could have done was to fold this mantle up very carefully and tuck it under his arm and say, I'm going to keep this for a moment. I'm going to keep this. This was Elijah's

mantle.

And he could have revered that mantle. He could have thought, oh, I wouldn't think of using Elijah's mantle. This was the mantle of the Master.

And if he had, he'd still have been standing there at the River Jordan. But a lot of people do that. A lot of people do that.

The mantle of the Master has fallen upon them. And all that it results in is a sort of a pious keeping to themselves of what they remember about the Master. And they get it out every now and then and unfold it and look at it and say, remember the Master.

And that's not what the mantle was left for. The mantle was left to be used. And the mantle has fallen upon you and me to use it.

We are left here in the place of our Lord Jesus. In His place. To reach this world of which we are a part.

To do the things He would do if He were here. And it behooves us to do like Elijah did. And let's learn this lesson this morning that we are expected to do what the Master did in His absence.

We don't have to think up some new thing to do. Elijah just did what he had seen his Master do. And that's all that's required of you and me is to do what the Master did.

And you may say this morning, hold it. No, He was the Master. We can't do what He did.

Of course we can't in our natural strength. But He has left us here for Himself to continue His work, to continue His ministry. That's what we're here for.

And let none of us be guilty of saying, well, the Lord Jesus could do that, but you couldn't expect that of me. Because He has shared His Spirit with us. And we, in the power of that Spirit, can do what He did.

We are forever selling ourselves short. We are forever forgetting that we are the possessors of the living Spirit of God. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Right here.

Right here. Ready to work in your life and in my life the things He worked in the life of the Lord Jesus. That's what this story is here for.

To remind us that we are to use the mantle. What happened when He used the mantle? The river stopped. But there were 50 men watching.

And they said, Behold, the Spirit of Elijah is fallen upon Elisha. And he was recognized for what he was. The servant of God.

And you will be recognized for what you are as the servant of God as people see you using the mantle. As people see you doing what He did. What's the meaning of this miracle? That there is victory over death.

The Lord Jesus said, Because I live, ye shall live also. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? He indwells each of us who knows the Lord Jesus as Savior. He is here in this room.

He is just as strong, just as great as He was when Elijah called on Him. This is why James said, Elijah was a man of like passions as we are. But he prayed and the heavens stopped giving rain.

We are encouraged to walk in the train of this man. To do as he did. The miracle was done at the time when Elisha felt his very lowest.

When he had lost his master. When he was overwhelmed with a sense of his own utter weakness and inability. It would be great for Elijah to do this.

But that was the point at which God moved in and made His demonstration to Elisha. The object of the miracle was that he could get back into the activities of life. Get back across the Jordan.

That's where the need was over on the other side. Jericho was on the other side of Jordan. And there was a need there.

He needed to get back into the activities of life and into the place of need and to forget himself. Jordan speaks to us of our death with Christ. This is forgetfulness of self.

Let us get over this business of being impressed with our weakness. Let's get over this business of thinking, well, who am I? Let's forget ourselves altogether. Let's forget our losses, our failures in the past, our bereavements, whatever it has come into our lives that have limited us in the past.

Let's forget that. Elisha had to forget Elijah. He had to let go of the past.

Let's forget our weakness and use the mantle that's been given to us, the symbol of our identification with the Master. How real is our identification with Him? Let's use that. Let's use that identification.

Use it for His glory and expect the miracle to happen in our lives as it happened in His. What's the value of the miracle? The value of the miracle is that although Elijah was gone, Elijah's God was not gone. And you and I are in the same situation.

We sometimes think it would have been great to have walked the paths of Galilee and of Judea in the train of the Lord Jesus, walking around and hearing what He had to say. It would have been great. But He is no less here than He was there.

He has assured us of His presence, His continuing presence, and He wants us never to forget it. The Lord God of Elijah is still here. Well, it convinced, as I say, the prophets of the reality of Elijah's mission.

When He came back, they came running down the hill and they all fell down in front of Him and recognized that this man was now the spokesman for God and that what He said was going to be with them as though God spoke. I remember in the days long ago when Dr. Chafer of the Dallas Seminary was taken to be with the Lord and he had an assistant called Walvoord, a young man that was an able assistant. And I heard many people say that we're in a position to know, I suppose.

Well, I wonder who will be made the head of the Dallas Seminary now? Of course, everybody. Every time that was said, maybe Walvoord will be his successor. Oh no, not him.

Not him. No, he's a great second man. But he would never be able to give any leadership.

But Dr. Walvoord moved into the place that Dr. Chafer had had. And Dr. Chafer probably couldn't believe what's been accomplished at that seminary since under the leadership of a man who took the mantle and used it for the glory of God. We've all seen this time and again in the Lord's work where somebody that we think is irreplaceable is taken away.

And everybody says, what now? As though God was at an impasse. And God always has His man. He's always there ready to do His work.

So the victory over death. This miracle by which Elisha walked through dry shod through the Jordan demonstrates the reality of his appropriation of the life that had been given to him. How about you? Do the things that happen in your life demonstrate undeniably that you have been given the living spirit of the living God and that the God of Elijah is operating in your life day by day? Let's move on now to another episode.

Let's begin at verse 19 of this same chapter. We have an interesting little story here. It says, The men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord seeth.

But the water is nothing and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruz and put salt therein. And they brought it to him.

And he went forth unto the spring of the waters and cast the salt in there and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters. There shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day according to the saying of Elisha, which he spake.

That's a simple little story, isn't it? Nothing very dramatic about this. But it's an interesting situation. Elisha has now been installed as the head of the school of the prophets.

And he's the recognized theologian in the area. In those days, they had these little schools in various places. They had one of these schools of the prophet in Jericho.

They had one in Bethel. They had one in Samaria. And the prophet would itinerate among these groups of young men and teach them the word of God.

Well, for now, Elisha was staying in Jericho. And he was teaching the young men there. It says of him that he carried in Jericho.

Verse 18, And when they came again to him, for he carried at Jericho, he said, Did not I say unto thee, Go not. So he was waiting there in Jericho with these young men. And a group of the city fathers came to see him.

Now let's imagine the situation, shall we? Here in Jericho, they were having trouble with the water. The water was brackish. They couldn't drink it.

And they couldn't use it to water the gardens. It was just spoiling the whole life of the city. And they had struggled with this problem for a long time.

Nobody knew what to do about it. And in their extremity, it had to be that way, one day one of the men in the city council said, You know, they've got a new president at the Bible school. And I wonder if we could go and ask him what to do about the water.

Well, you know, I'll bet you that that was received with raucous laughter. The head of the Bible school? What are you giving us? What does he know about water? You mean that if our city engineers don't know how to change the water, how's that guy going to know how to change it? But they tried everything else. The fellow that made the suggestion probably said, Well, okay.

Somebody else come up with an idea. I admit it was silly, but do you have anything better? Nobody had any better ideas. And so finally, one young fellow on the council who didn't have sense enough to say anything else said, Look, as long as that's the only idea we've got, even though we recognize it's a crazy idea, why not do it? We've got nothing to lose.

The water won't get worse. And so they said, Well, let's appoint a committee. And they appointed a committee of a few men to go and see the head of the Bible school.

And those fellows must have felt awful silly. They started out one morning to go up to the Bible school and one said, I feel like such an ass going up to ask this man about our water supply. And the other said, Well, forget it.

They told us to do this. We'd better do it. So they went up and they came to the secretary that Elisha had and they said, Could we see Mr. Elisha, please? And she said, Yes, I think it could be arranged.

What do you men want? Well, we want to talk to him about the water supply here in town. Yes, sir. So she got up and went in and said to Elisha, There's a group of men out here.

I haven't got the faintest idea what they're up to, but they say they want to talk to you about the water supply. And if Elisha was like most of us, he just said, Kick them out. What do I know about the water supply? What do I care about the water supply? I'm too busy.

But Elisha, as I said yesterday, was a gregarious type and he liked to meet people anyhow and he didn't know this group of men. So here was an opportunity to meet a few more men in Jericho. So he said, Send them on in.

We'll listen to what they have to say. And the men came in and they said, Well, we know what they said. Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant as you can see, but the water is nothing and the ground is barren.

We've been having a lot of trouble with the water supply here. Well, about this point is the place, the cue, for Elisha to say, Well, so what? What are you coming to me for? If you had a theological problem, I'd be glad to talk to you. But this doesn't happen to me by field.

I'm not in the water business and I'm not an engineer. So it's nice to have met you, fellas. Goodbye.

And do you know, do you know that's what most of us would have said? Wouldn't we? People come to us all the time from the world and they've got their problems. And their problems don't seem to be related one bit to us or to our testimony or to the fact that we are Christians or that we know the Lord or anything. They just want to talk about their headaches and their problems.

And believe me, people have got them. And how much do we listen? How available are we to the people in the community who couldn't care less about our theology but have got a lot of problems? Well, Elisha was the kind of man who was concerned about people. And I think this record is here for us to be reminded that we have a responsibility for our communities.

God didn't call us to be theologians. He called us to be Christians. He called us to have a concern about the people around us and their problems.

And if we're going to walk in the footsteps of a man like Elisha, we're going to listen to what people have to say whether they happen to be relevant or not. And then Elisha said, bring me a new cruise and put salt in it. And as they walked out, one said to the other, you ask a silly question, you get a silly answer.

Of all the stupid things I've ever heard in my life, get a new cruise and put salt in it. And probably the young fellow that had said back in the meeting before, you might as well try it, he probably persisted and said, well, we've come this far. Maybe we better do what the man says.

And so somebody goes and gets a cruise, you know, a little bowl. He says, alright, let's put some salt in this thing, get this thing over. And another one says, hold it, hold it, wait a minute.

He said, get a new bowl. What difference does it make whether the bowl is new or whether it's old? A silly exercise in frustration. You said, as long as we were doing it, we might as well do it.

Now, the man said, get a new bowl. So let's get a new bowl. So they go and they get a new bowl.

And they bring it and they put some salt in it. And they come back and they say to the secretary, we've come back to see Mr. Elisha again and we've brought back the bowl they asked for. And she showed them right in.

And they handed it to Elisha and said, here's that bowl you wanted with some salt in it. And Elisha looked up and he saw it and he saw it was a new bowl. And he said, fine, come with me.

And he got up from his desk and he reached over and he took the bowl from the hand of the man that had it and he said, now come on out with me. And they went outside and they went to the place where the spring of waters was. And these men, you know, they just burn them up with curiosity.

What now? But they go out after him. And he takes this bowl of salt and he throws the salt like this out over the spring and he says, the Lord says, behold, I have healed these waters. See what it says here.

I have healed these waters. There shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. Now it says, so the waters were healed unto this day.

And the this day that's written down here means the day that 2 Kings was written. So that for several years by now, the waters have remained sweet. But my wife and I went down to this spring a few years ago and we watched the women of Jericho coming out and filling their cans of water and carrying them on their heads back home.

To this day, that water is still sweet. That water still waters that land and it blossoms like a rose. It's productive because of the water, the water of life that flows there.

What is the lesson in this? The lesson is this, that great issues flow from tiny obediences. It is not whether we understand the instructions that are given. It is not whether we think they make any sense or not.

It is not whether they seem relevant to the situation or not. If we listen to the Word of God and we obey the Word of God, we will be amazed how many times in your circumstances have you been in a barren place? Have you been overwhelmed with a sense of your fruitlessness? How many times have you faced circumstances with which you did not know how to deal and you have come to the Word of God and you have read here? And what you read may not seem relevant at all to your circumstances, but God says something to you out of His Word. And you, responding to what He said, find that He has done things

through you beyond all your thinking.

It happens all the time. Because when we respond with obedience, even such a little grudging, doubting obedience as these men brought, God can use that as the vehicle of blessing all over the place. Are you willing to try it? Are you willing today to say that as you turn to the Word of God and He speaks to your heart, that you will obey no matter what if you are, you will have things happening in your life that you never believed could happen.

And they will be to His glory and to the fruitfulness and productiveness and blessing of people all around. God help us to respond this way. Lord, we thank Thee that You know us all together and You know that people are more interesting to us than anybody.

And that therefore, if You want to get through to us, the way to speak to us is to speak through the lives of people and through the circumstances in which they live. So we thank Thee for these records You've given us. And this week especially, the records from the life of Elisha.

And we pray Thee that it may not just be an interesting episode. We pray Thee that that will help us to appropriate what You're saying to us in this and that this morning our hearts shall aspire as they never aspired before to do what You say and to stop quibbling about whether it seems relevant or not. But to do the thing that You have instructed us to do because we do want, Lord, our lives to be a blessing and to be fruitful for those around us.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We are dismissed.

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