

Skyland Conference 1979-05 Elisha

by Robert Constable

The sermon teaches us about the importance of living a life that represents the Word of God and the power of obedience to experience God's blessing and provision in our lives.

Duration: 37:35

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:20-22, 2 Kings 6:6, 2 Kings 13:14-17

Topics: "Elisha"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about Elisha, a man who lived a life that had a lasting impact even after his death. The preacher emphasizes the importance of living a life that brings life to others and highlights the potential within each individual. The message is that our lives are significant to God and that we have untapped potentials that can bless others. The preacher also emphasizes the need for obedience to God's word in order to be used by Him for the blessing of others.

Transcript

Well, it would be too bad if I was to just start speaking now and not express our deep appreciation to the people here, all of you, for your kindness. It's been great to talk to you during this week and to have you respond to the word of God. We appreciate very much the attention and the concern that's been expressed.

We want to express our appreciation to the conveners who have been most kind in the provision of everything that we could think of while we've been here with you. It's been a privilege for me to be a team together with Bob Ramey. I don't always think of people like Bob Ramey as being so much younger than I, although of course he is a great deal younger than I am, but it is one of the great joys of getting along in years to see young men coming on that are competent ministers of the word of God.

And so as we sit here and listen to his ministry this week, our hearts have been blessed and we have thanked God many times for the fact that Bob is able to do what he is doing and is doing it. We thank God for his ministry at Emmaus. It was our privilege at River Forest from time to time to hear him minister in the chapel there because it was nearby, and for that reason we were delighted to be teamed up with him this week.

And for all the others of you that have been helpful, we are grateful. We've been considering this week the general ministry of a man called Elisha, whose story is preserved for us in the Old Testament. His life was

a life of miracles.

Seventeen miracles are recorded in that man's life. In fact, very little is said about the man apart from miracles. His life was a miracle.

And of course it's been impossible to touch on all of them. We've had to select from among the 17, and we, I think, have had some interesting episodes to think about together. Tonight I'd like you to turn to 2 Kings chapter 6 for an episode in his life.

This is a simple story, a short story, and it doesn't make a lot of points. One of the things that I'm glad about is that the record the Word of God keeps for us of the lives of other people deliver us from the necessity of being theologians. All we have to be is people with a measure of sense, and we look at the record of these other lives and we find a very practical lesson taught.

And I think it's valuable for us to keep simple in our reading of the Word of God ourselves, not try to make more of it than is there on the surface. The Lord speaks to us simply, and he doesn't try to make it difficult to understand what he has to say. Now, the life of Elisha was given over very largely to the ministry of training young men, training young men to minister the Word of God.

And let me say I don't think there is any ministry on the earth then or now that is more important or more significant than the ministry of training young men and women in the Word of God. There's an increasing need for this, and I thank God for the fact that the other evening Bob could tell us that there are 250 Bible schools across this country alone where young men and young women are being taught the Word of God and how to minister that Word. It's a great blessing to have this going on amongst us.

Well, this is what was true in Elisha's day too. Beginning at chapter 6 in the first verse, and the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too straight for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make a place there where we may dwell.

And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.

So he went with them, and when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, an axe, the axe head fell into the water. And he cried and said, Alas, master, for it was borrowed.

And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and the axe did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee.

And he put out his hand and took it. Well, that's a simple little story. It doesn't seem to be a very complex or complicated episode that took place.

You wonder when you look at it, why did the Spirit of God think it was important to keep alive for thousands of years in the Word of God, this little episode that happened on the banks of the Jordan in the life of Elisha? But the Lord did feel it was that important. And one of the reasons I think he felt it was that important was because of the little lesson that there is in this episode. Now, we go back over the story a little, and we find that Elisha had the happy privilege of having to get more space for his Bible school.

They ran out of space, and it says, This place is too straight for us. This means it's too small. We haven't got room to do anything.

And so they came to him and said, Let's build a bigger dormitory where we can do a few things. And he said, I think that's a good idea. Go and do it.

And one of them said, Oh, look, come on, don't just tell us to go and do it. Come along and help us and be with us. He said it's a great idea.

You know, right at the beginning, I told you that he was a gregarious type. He was the kind of man that liked to be with people, and he loved to be with the students. He liked to be mixing it with them.

So he went along and pitched in, in cutting down the wood and getting ready and building this new dormitory. Well, in the process, of course, we read that an axe head fell off, and the student is very greatly distressed. And he's particularly distressed because the axe head was borrowed from somebody else.

And Elisha, who is always very simple in his approach to things and very practical, said, Oh, we're to fall. And he showed him. And he cut down a stick and cast it in scissor, and the iron did swim.

Therefore, said he, take it up to thee. And he put out his hand and took it. Now, what do you suppose the lesson in that episode is? Now, John Newton once wrote a little verse about this, and it goes this way.

Not one concern of ours is small if we belong to him. To teach us this, the Lord of all once made the iron to swim. So John Newton thought that the lesson in this little episode was that God was concerned about the little things in our lives.

Because I don't suppose you could think of the loss of this axe head as any major catastrophe, you know. It was a relatively simple thing. I think there's more to it than that.

That is that the lesson goes farther than that. Not only does it illustrate to us the concern of the Lord about small things in our lives, but he is concerned about our reaction to those things. This student was greatly distressed.

You can tell that from the way the story is told. Alas, he said, he was distressed. He borrowed this and now he'd lost it.

And so far as the student was concerned, that axe head was gone. And so often this is the attitude that we take, which as I say is one of the reasons I think the story is here. We are apt to take the attitude that in the service of the Lord, when we get involved in it and then we flub the dust, you know, the thing doesn't work out.

We get all discouraged and we sit down and we say, alas, there's no use my trying to cut wood. My axe head falls off. That sounds funny, but that's what a lot of people do.

When they get involved in the Lord's work and everything doesn't go just right, then right away they want to drop it. They want to back off from it. And they stop with the word, alas.

And what Elijah is trying to say here, I believe, is that lost opportunities are not gone for good. We may have an experience like this student had. We might get involved in some project in the Lord's work and it just doesn't gel.

It just doesn't work out. And we are not to sit down and mope and say, I tried to serve the Lord once, but this is what happened. My axe head fell off.

Is there anybody here that's had that experience? That is not actively busy for the Lord today because of an experience in the past that was disappointing and it didn't happen to work out just the way you thought it ought to work out? If there is, maybe that's why the Lord has brought to our attention tonight this episode in the life of Elisha. He would say to you tonight, don't be that way. Lost opportunities are not gone for good because a thing doesn't work out the first time just the way we think it ought to work out is no reason for stopping our service for the Lord.

So, hang in there. Take it to the Lord. Take the problem to the Lord the way this man did.

He went to Elisha and he told him what the problem was. And Elisha said to him, get back to work. He said, take it to thee again.

Get up, reach out, get hold of this again and get back to work. That's what God wants us to do. He doesn't want us frustrated in our service for him.

He wants us up and at it. So, take this word from Elisha tonight. Take it up to thee.

Whatever opportunity there is for you to serve the Lord, take it up to thee and get on with it. Don't worry about the past. Don't worry about lost opportunities.

Trust God to do a miracle as he did in this case and to help you on with the job he wants you to do. Now, I'd like you to turn to 2 Kings chapter 13. With the 17 miracles that are recorded in the life of Elisha, I have had something of a task to select those items out of his life that we ought to talk about.

And some of them are a little bit complex. Mr. Thompson said to me last night, as soon as the meeting was over, he said, we're going to have to say goodbye to you tonight, my brother, because we're not going to be able to stay tomorrow. And I'm sure, sorry, I'm going to miss that sermon on Nahum and the leper.

Well, I had no notion to talk about Nahum and the leper, and I still don't. But you see, there are different things. There is like the battle that Jehoshaphat was involved in where he needed the help of Elisha in the battle.

There was the time when they found those toadstools and put them in the meal, and they had to call on Elisha to take the poison out of the pot. Oh, there are, you know, 17 of them. But we've selected the ones that we thought might be most appropriate for us here on this occasion.

But now the miracles are about over. They're about over. And we come to chapter 13 of 2 Kings, and in verse 14 it says, Now Elisha was falling sick of his sickness, whereof he died.

And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. Isn't this interesting? This is the very thing that was said about Elijah when the Lord took him away. He had been the strength and the defense of Israel.

And Elisha had asked that he might have a double portion of the spirit of Elijah and become the man who would fill in the gap when Elijah was taken. And God granted that to him. And for years now, Elisha has been ministering to the people in the name of Jehovah, the God of Elijah.

And now he is about to be taken. And the king comes to see him when he is sick at home. And he weeps when he sees that the end is approaching, when this man is to be taken away from him.

This man who, according to his own testimony here, is the strength and the defense of the nation. The same thing said of Elisha as was said of Elijah. Now, let's read in chapter 13, verse, well, we've read verse 14.

Now go to verse 20 and 21. And Elijah, Elisha died and they buried him. Not quite as dramatic as it was with Elijah, is it? He was more like us.

He just died and was buried. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. Now, Elisha is dead when these Moabites came in.

And it speaks of it here that it was at the coming in of the year that the Moabites came. It's probably some time after Elisha had gone. And it came to pass as they were burying a man that, behold, they spied a band of men and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha.

And when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet. Now, you know, there are so many things in our Bibles that we get so used to reading them and all, but this is really a story here. One time I was riding from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in a bus.

And we were highballing along the road when all of a sudden, everybody in the bus hit the floor. And I'm the only one sitting up. I wondered, what is going on here? And the noise in the bus was frightful.

And I just sat there and I looked around. I said to one man when he put his head out from under the seat, I said, what's going on here? And he said, there's some Arabs over there. And I looked out of the bus and here on the rise of the ground, just like that one there and about that far away, there was a group of men with turbans on.

They were obviously Arabs. Well, this was the time when Jews and Arabs were very free about taking potshots at each other, you know. And this bus going along the highway met a beautiful target.

And the fellas and the women in the bus couldn't think that there'd be a group of Arabs on the hill there with this bus going along, that the Arabs weren't going to shoot up the bus. And so they hit the floor. Didn't say anything to me, of course.

I was only an American. I was expendable. But it gave me a little bit of an insight into this situation we're reading about right now.

Here are a group of Jewish men who are taking a friend out to bury him. I want you to get the picture. Probably there's a man got hold of each arm and a man got hold of each foot, you know.

And they're walking along with this man. They're going to bury him. When all of a sudden, they look up and there's a group of Moabites.

And what more natural than for them to think that the Moabites are going to shoot them up. And so they take their friend, who they were taking out to bury, and they just take him like this. And into the nearest sepulcher, they could find any hole in the ground will do now.

And they start running. But the man, he's thrown into this hole. And of course, he tumbles down into the hole until he comes up against the bones of Elisha.

And the moment he touched those bones, he was alive again. And you got the picture? He kind of gathers himself together. He pulls himself up and he crawls out of this hole and he looks around and one of his friends turns around about that time.

And if they had been running before, you know, they took off like a rocket. Doesn't the Lord have some interesting stories? Why did he tell us this? Well, I'll tell you why I think he told us this. This man, Elisha, had so lived before God that even after he was dead, his influence was such that it would bring life to men who came in touch with it.

Now, isn't that great? I heard August van Rijn once tell a story about a grocery clerk in some country store. And he was drafted into the army, it seems to me. And so one of the neighborhood boys decided, I'd like to have that job that fell ahead.

And he came to the grocery store owner. Maybe you've heard August tell this story. And he said, I'd like to fill the vacancy.

And the grocery store man said, there isn't any vacancy. You know, we can live our lives either the one way or the other. That when we are gone, nobody knows the difference.

Do you ever come home after a three-month trip and have people say, you've been away? Well, we can live our lives that way. We can live our lives going to conferences, being at the meetings, associating with our friends, having a great time. And when we're gone, there's a very little ripple.

Or we can live our lives like Elisha lived his life, so that he represented the Word of God to everybody with whom he came in touch. And as a consequence, months after he was gone from the scene, people were still finding life from their contact with him. God grant that we'll live our lives that way.

That as people remember us in their contacts with us, that it will be the source of life, new life to those people. And when that happens, everybody's going to sit up and take notice. Well, now, what have we learned from the life of this man? The various episodes that we've considered.

One of the things happened in Jericho, you remember, when he said to a group of men from the city council, bring a new vessel full of salt. And they didn't know why, and they did. They finally got around to bringing him a new vessel full of salt.

And our lesson then was that there are great issues come from little obedience. What difference does it make whether you or I are precise in our response to the Word of God? It makes great difference. And if you want to try that, I invite you to try it.

As you read the Word of God, and you ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart out of the Word of God, and you respond with obedience. If you want the shock of your life, try it. Because God is so ready to respond if we will respond.

And to do great and mighty things which we know not. And then there was the matter of the water there at Jericho. That was the place of the curse.

That was the place where everybody had given up on. There was no life there. It was barren and unfruitful.

But God was ready when there was an obedient response to His Word to bring in blessings beyond what they had ever asked for. Blessings which, although that episode took place about 4,000 years ago, is still benefiting the Jericho Valley. We do not know how greatly God is prepared to bless us if we respond to Him.

Then we considered the episode of the young widow, the girl who had lost her husband and was about to lose her son. And as we thought about that, we saw the importance of making room in our lives for the blessing of God to come in. This girl was asked to borrow many vessels, make lots of room for what God was about to do.

And when she did that, and she responded with obedience to the Word of God, all her problems were solved, her needs were met, and she was able to live gloriously on what God had provided. Just a little thing in the life of a simple girl, the wife of a Bible school student. Not a great woman in this instance.

A very ordinary person. And I hope you have identified with her. Most of us are pretty ordinary people.

We're no great shakes. And God couldn't care less. God is ready to move in with blessing into the most ordinary kind of life.

And in proportion, as we make room for His blessing to flow through our lives, He will bless us. Well, then we had the episode this evening of the axe head and the lost opportunities and the fact that God says to you and me, don't give up. And then last time I was with you on this, yesterday morning, we were thinking about that great woman of Shunem.

She was a great woman. God called her a great woman. I don't know what made her great, but she was great in the eyes of God.

And we saw how she was not going to be satisfied with any secondhand blessing. She wasn't going to get her blessing through Gehazi. She was going to get it through the Word of God.

And we saw in her life how God appreciates what is done for Him. Here was a woman who, out of the largeness of her heart, prepared a prophet's chamber and invited him to meals when he was in the neighborhood. And that doesn't sound like it's so much, does it? No, but the result to her was that she had a son.

And she saw, worked in the life of her son, one of the greatest miracles that ever was done in the world. A great experience, because this woman trusted God. And then we were at Bethel, the place, the house of God, where they had become so formal about their worship of the Lord, where they were so careless about His Word, where they laughed about the supernatural, where they put a lot of, made it count a lot what men thought rather than what God thought.

And God says to you and me in that episode, there is no power in playing church. You can go to meeting every time there's a meeting called in the chapel, but if you have forgotten the supernatural and God's readiness to move into your own life, going to church, going to meeting, won't do you any good. The place of the house of God becomes barren and unsuitable.

We've got to learn from that episode that we must not allow our gatherings together in the house of God to become a formality or a ritual, but that we must remember that it is the place where God lives and dwells. Now I'll take all these things together. What do they say to you and me? What is the message to you and

me for this week out of the things that we have considered? I hope the message to you is that your life is important to God, and that there are potentials in you and in your personality and in the time God has given you to live on this earth that are beyond anything you've thought of yet.

And I'm saying that to people, I suppose, all the way from 10 years old to 70, maybe to 80. And it is just as true in the one case as it is in the other case. God waits to bless.

His eyes go to and fro over the whole earth, seeking those whom He may use who are ready to respond with obedience to His word for the blessing of multitudes. There are billions of people in the world, billions who need Christ. You and I have the happy privilege of being the called of God in this generation, through whom God would work amongst these people, this place of need, this place of the curse.

And He would work through us for blessing beyond our dreams. Now, don't throw this over your shoulder. The trouble is when you speak of these things in a place like this, everybody listens and says, oh, I enjoyed that, oh, wasn't that great, and goes out and forgets it.

You couldn't do that tonight. Let me say this, in closing my remarks. There may be some people here who have never come face to face in a personal encounter with God in Jesus Christ.

And you have no idea, because you have never touched it, how great this thing can be. How ready God is to change your life from its frustration, from its failure, from its agony, and make your life an outshining, beautiful, fruitful thing. God wants to do this for everybody here.

This is what the Word of God teaches us, and this is what God Himself has proved to us in the gift of His only begotten Son. He is concerned enough about each person so that He gave His only begotten Son that we might live through Him. This is the cry of the heart of God.

And the Lord Jesus said as He represented His Father on the earth, I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. If you've never touched this, you've never entered into this, I invite you this evening to ask the Lord Jesus to come into your life and to prove to you what can happen. Now, most of you here, I am sure, have invited the Lord Jesus into your lives.

Most of you here have lived for years with the indwelling Spirit of God within you. And I would say to you that it is very easy to become so accustomed to this that you forget its potential, that you forget all that God would like to continue to do in and through your life. And I would like to invite each of you who knows the Lord Jesus to call upon Him tonight with me to come into your life anew as He came, as the Spirit of God came into the life of Elisha, and make your life the fulfilling, fruitful thing that the life of Elisha was.

And He'll do it. Gracious God, our Father, we would not say these words lightly. We would not be gathered together in a meeting like this just to enjoy a vacation.

We would like to recognize your presence here, for the Lord Jesus said, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst. And so we recognize thy presence. We recognize, too, our own deceitful hearts.

We know you have said, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? We pray thee, Lord, that thou wilt overcome this disposition in our hearts to trust in ourselves and to put our trust in thee. And we pray thee for those who know thee, that each of us might come to a new dedication of self to thee, so that as we go down from this mountain into the world in which we live, our

lives might be such that people will say, as the woman of Shunem said of Elisha, I know this man of God passes us by day by day.

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