

A new hope

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[0:00] To turn to 1 Kings 19, which was the portion that we're going to be looking at. And your surprise is as great as mine, that this is actually a short passage.

So here's my introduction.

So here's the question. Is the Christian life beyond me? Is the Christian life about rules that I cannot keep?

Is the Christian life beyond me because it's for clever people who do a lot of study and know long words? Is it all about theology and philosophy that I can't understand?

Is it about people having extraordinary and deep experiences? Other people seem to have them, but I don't seem to have those deep experiences, at least not the way they do.

[1:20] Is that what it's all about? And I want to say that the answer to all of those is no. It's actually about something far more simple. It's about following Jesus.

So following Jesus does involve things. He does tell us to do things. But he's not saying, here's a load of rules for you to keep. And we know we can't keep it. It's not about rules.

And Jesus does teach us deep things. But fundamentally, Christianity is not an intellectual exercise about trying to understand a lot of stuff that clever people can, but I'm struggling with.

And it's not even primarily a mystical thing. Although we do have deep experiences of God. We have ordinary experiences of God and everyday experiences of God and sometimes very deep experiences of God.

But Jesus says, I don't want you to focus on that. I want you to focus on this. Following Jesus. Jesus said, he said to his disciples, follow me.

[2:24] It was as simple as that. Like Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. I won't lack. He leads me.

All sorts of places. But that idea that it boils down to, he's my shepherd. He leads me. I follow him. The Apostle Paul in Galatians will use another walking idea.

And he'll say, if you walk in the spirit, you will not fulfill the deeds of the flesh. It's another very everyday way of thinking of it.

Walking in the spirit. Following Jesus. Following the good shepherd. And this is what Mark records as Jesus' way of relating to those first disciples.

It's what I read right at the beginning. Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake.

[3:32] They were fishermen. And Jesus says, come, follow me. And I will make you fishers of men. And at once they left their nets and followed him.

They're this idea of, in order to follow Jesus, you have to leave something else behind. They left their nets and followed him.

So this is the call of Jesus. Follow me. I don't know where Jesus is going to lead. I don't know where Jesus is going to lead you. I don't know where Jesus is going to lead me.

But I do know that he says, you can boil it down as simple as this. Follow me. And in the 1 Kings, we have a little incident in which I would say this is the main idea, given an example in an Old Testament form.

So may I take you back through the story? I say story. I don't mean to say it's fictional. It's a true story. But for the sake of quickness of words, I tend to say story.

[4:40] Narrative is another word. But that's a bit of a long word. So in case you didn't know who the characters are, Elijah is a prophet in ancient Israel.

And he was a prophet in a bad time. The kingdom that God had set up, the kingdom of King David in those ancient days, had split north and south.

The northern kings had gone from bad to worse. They had gone bad by saying, we're worshipping the Lord and the Lord is these golden calves.

And without stopping to give you all the details, God thinks it's very insulting if you say he's like an animal or he's like anything in this world. He says, I am who I am.

You worship me without trying to reduce me to a golden calf. And then things had got worse because the kings had said, we don't worship the Lord anymore.

[5:50] We worship the local god, Baal. So things had gone from bad to worse in the time of Elijah. And in the story that we've been following through as a church, we got to the point where Elijah was hugely disappointed that his ministry had not changed everything.

You remember there was the big showdown on Mount Carmel where Elijah said, we'll see who's God. Is it Baal or the Lord?

And the God who will send fire to consume these sacrificial animals, that's God. And the Lord had shown that he was God and not Baal.

But it didn't seem to change very much. And Elijah was bitterly disappointed. And we got to the point last time in verse 15 where God had given Elijah three tasks.

And you can see them in verse 15 of 1 Kings 19. The Lord said to him, go back the way you came, go to the desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram, number one.

[7:03] Also anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, number two. And anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

Those are his three tasks. They're all tasks, as it says here, related to judgment because it says in verse 17, Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael.

So Hazael has a sword. He puts people to death. If they escape, Jehu has a sword. It puts people to death. Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

So it's all apparently to do with judgment. I have to say as the story unfolds, we find that there's more to it than that. And it doesn't quite work out the way it would seem to in this very simple summary at this point.

And it also says that God will reserve, verse 18, 7,000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.

[8:11] So in case anybody was worried that God couldn't manage this disastrous situation on his own, he says, oh, I've got that in hand. You don't have to worry.

God will work on his own by his sheer kindness to, it says, reserve, to keep 7,000 people who are real believers.

Now, how he does that, where they come from, how he keeps them where they are, we don't know. But it goes down as being a real example of the way God's grace operates.

God's grace, meaning the sort of kindness he just decides to show people. That is his business. He says, I'm going to show grace.

I'm going to keep 7,000 people. And that's what it says he will do. So in this bit of the story, Elijah is told to anoint.

[9:11] So I should flag up that anointing is a rather special thing in the Old Testament of the Bible. Anointing to pour oil on somebody, presumably starting with their head, but maybe quite a lot of oil.

Messiah, from which we get the word, that's the Hebrew word. Christ is the Greek, the same word in Greek. Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah, means anointed one.

So all these people that he mentions are going to be anointed, and they're going to be sort of Messiahs. So there's the oil, and there's somebody being anointed. And the three people are Hazael, who's the king of Aram.

Aram is an enemy state. And we'll find out as we go on, it's interesting that God is having a control over his enemies, and using his enemies to do his will.

God is able to do that sort of thing. And then Jehu, the king of Israel, is to replace the evil king Ahab, although it's one or two down the line.

[10:20] So what looks as though it's something that's going to happen tomorrow, is actually going to be a way in the future. And then Elisha, the son of Shaphat, is going to be the prophet to replace Elijah.

He will be, he will succeed you. Verse 16, he'll be in your place. Okay, so that's sort of setting up the story. Let's see what happens.

So now we've got to verse 19. Elijah went from there and found Elisha, son of Shaphat.

So it's interesting to know how people find people. The shepherds went into Bethlehem to find Jesus, and presumably they either went to the only place where there was accommodation, or they went to all the doors and said, has a baby been born here?

Is he in a manger? Elijah, I don't know how. Anyway, Elijah went and found Elisha. Tell you what the names mean. Elijah, the J bit is short for Yahweh.

[11:26] Sometimes people say Jehovah, but it's God's Hebrew name. And there's always a clue in the name. Elijah, Yah is God. So we know whose side he's on.

And he went to find Elisha. The L bit is God, and the sha is a sort of bit of a contraction of the shua, Yeshua, Joshua is God saves.

So here it's something like this, God is salvation. And he's the son of Shaphat, who is another aptly named person, because Shaphat is to do with judgment. He judges.

So the text just brings us into a world where children's names reflect the sort of things that people believe, the sort of world they live in, the sort of God they have, a God who is God, a God who saves, and a God who judges.

And Elisha was ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen. So you can count them. That is 12 pairs, isn't it?

[12:33] So to begin with, I thought it's 12 oxen altogether, 6 pairs. So I drew 6, 6 pairs. And then I don't think the text says that.

It says 12 pairs of oxen. And he was with the 12th. So that's a lot of oxen, isn't it? Those are pairs. Each one of those is a pair. And I think, why has he got so many of them? I don't know the answer. There are a lot of things about this text that, like all texts you don't get to the bottom of, but it's a lot, isn't it?

So you presumably go at the back with a plough. He was ploughing with 12 pairs of oxen. That's a lot of oxen.

12 is a number with suitable symbolism, isn't it? 12 is the number of tribes that there ought to be. In those days, they've been split.

[13:36] But 12 is a good number to remind us of the tribes of Israel. Maybe the writer includes this because it just happens to be an appropriate detail. Imagine trying to steer those 12 oxen.

Left. No, left. Ah, no. I don't know. Did they whistle like sheepdogs and have come by or all that sort of stuff? Steering those oxen must be quite difficult.

And the prophet is actually going to be steering the people of God. And if you think steering 12 oxen or 12 pairs of oxen is difficult, steering the people of God must have been a huge task for him to take on.

How do you get them to go in the right direction? Well, I don't know whether that's the sort of detail we're meant to just have flicked through our minds. What happens then?

So, he was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen. He himself was driving the 12th. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. I think I've got the wrong text.

[14:43] I think I've got these in the wrong order. So, close your eyes. So, I'm just going to go through this. That's where I wanted to be. I have to go back now.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. So, there he is plowing and this guy comes and throws his cloak around him. It says, Elijah passed by.

Translated, went up to him. Same word that was used of God passing by on the mountain. Elijah passed by and throws his cloak onto Elisha.

You'd do that every day, wouldn't you? Who shall I throw my coat over today?

Lady at the bus stop. Excuse me, madam. Why does he do this? Well, I think, and it doesn't explain this to us, but I think it's because the cloak is an important part, important thing, certainly for kings. [15:54] Their cloak was important. Tearing the cloak meant tearing the kingdom. Snipping a bit off the bottom of the cloak meant snipping a bit off the bottom of the kingdom. Jonathan giving his cloak to David symbolized something about potential transfer of authority.

And if you'd like to flip over to 2 Kings 2, verse 13 and 14. 2 Kings 2.

2 Kings 2, 13 and 14. When, this is so spoiler alert, Elijah goes up to heaven in a whirlwind.

And as he goes up, his cloak comes fluttering down after him, as I understand it. Verse 13. 2 Kings 2, 13.

Elijah picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. And he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it.

[17:03] Where now is the Lord? The God of Elijah, he asked. And when he struck the water, it divided to the right and the left and he crossed over. So don't get too bogged down with the details of it, but notice the cloak is important there.

It's something like a symbol of authority. It functions as a symbol of authority. A symbol of prophetic authority. So when Elijah throws his cloak over Elijah, it isn't just a prank, you know, a YouTube. Oh, look, throwing a... It's really saying the prophetic authority that I have is going to pass on to you. Come and be a prophet with me, perhaps, or like me, or alongside me, or instead of me.

And I asked the question, what was Elijah thinking when he brushed his teeth that morning? Was he thinking, do you know, I expect somebody's going to come and fling a cloak over me today? He's probably thinking, I don't know how am I going to get with those 12 oxen in a row for a start. But he was not expecting this intervention in his life. And I think it's a case in point that God's purposes can't always be foreseen.

[18:31] We don't always know how the Lord will lead us from one day to the next. We don't know what God will say. I've got a job for you. I've got a task for you.

I've got something in your life that when you brushed your teeth this morning, you had no idea of. But here it is in your life today. What was Elijah thinking when he brushed his teeth that morning? We thank God for normal days. We ought to thank God for normal days. We say, give us this day our daily bread.

Now, I am fairly sure that there will be very few people in this room who actually pray that prayer every day. Maybe you do, but most people don't. But isn't it interesting how God always answers that prayer, even though we've never prayed it, or even though we haven't necessarily prayed it today.

Give us this day our daily bread. God's faithfulness to us day by day. Every day, most days, we have food.

[19:40] Most days, we have reasonable health. Not every day for some of us. Not every day for any of us. But most days, he gives us these things.

Most days, we have security. Most days, we're not run over by a bus. Shouldn't we be glad of what God does for us most days?

Shouldn't we be grateful for ordinary, normal days? I think we should. We fail to realize it's God's fatherly goodness. He knows what we need before we ask, and he just gives us these things.

We should be thankful for normal days. But we worship a God who can change our lives according to his plan for us without notice.

So think of the time that you became a Christian, if you've become a Christian. God stepped into your life. You almost certainly had not planned that.

[20:40] You might have been pondering over it for a time, but it was something where God came into your life and changed your life. And you would not be here today if God had just followed your plans.

You're here today because God intervened at some point and did something in your life which you weren't expecting. Am I correct? And maybe that day has not yet arrived for you.

Maybe you haven't yet had that where God says, follow me, and you realize the magnitude of what he's asking, and are suddenly enabled to do that.

Anyway, there we are. So, I'm sorry, I've got to flick back. So let's go back to, now verse 20. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah.

So, as I'm getting the picture of it, Elijah flings his cloak and then in some sort of prophetic way walks on. And Elisha runs after him.

[21:51] And he says, I'm going to follow you, but first let me go home and kiss my father and mother goodbye. Then I'll come with you.

The previous people who've done kissing were kissing Baal or not kissing Baal. But he says, I want to kiss my mum and dad goodbye. And I would like you to picture that scene because I think it's a rather moving thought.

I don't know how old Elisha was. I mean, pick a number. Let's just suppose for the sake of argument he was 18 or 19. And he's out there working on the farm.

And I presume it would have been a pretty rich farm if they had all those oxen. Perhaps quite big if they needed so many oxen to do the ploughing. And suddenly, into his life has come this call from God to be a prophet or to get involved in all this prophet thing.

And off goes Elijah, presumably expecting Elisha just to drop everything and follow him. And Elisha says, I can't just do this.

[23:01] Mum and dad will wonder where I am. I am going to follow you. But I must just go back and kiss my mum and dad goodbye. And there's mum and dad thinking, you know, he'll be back home for his lunch when he's ploughed the first half of that field.

And up he comes running saying, I'm called to go and follow the prophet Elijah. Didn't want to just rush off without saying anything to you. Bye mum.

Bye dad. I'm off. Bye. And I think of poor mum and dad thinking, well, what are we going to do? We don't want to stand in the way of God. But our dear son has gone off now.

So he kisses his mum and dad goodbye. And follows Elijah. And there you have it, sort of in a nutshell.

Because, you might have noticed this, it is not physically possible to be in two places at once. Why does God make life so complicated?

[24:15] But no, you can't be in two places at once. If you're following Elijah, you can't be at home looking after mum and dad as well. And there's a choice to be made. If you like, put it in those terms.

There's something to be left to follow Jesus. It might be a life of chaos and sin and muck and muddle.

Well, that's a good thing to leave behind. It might be... Sorry. That's something which is bad stuff. Leave that behind is a good thing.

But home, family, comfort, stability. Maybe that has to be left behind. Maybe mum and dad have to be kissed goodbye.

That's the call of Jesus. When he called those fishermen, follow me, I will make you fishers of men. Then they left their nets and followed him. Jesus doesn't call everybody the same way.

[25:18] He doesn't say to everybody, you've got a job in IT. I'm calling you, you've got to leave IT. I just pick IT at random. But he does call us.

And there is something that we have to leave. We can't have both things. There's some things that we have to leave go of to have Jesus. Following Elijah meant not staying somewhere else.

And as it is with following Jesus, they left their nets and followed him. Discipleship, that's what it is. It's following Jesus. You might have thought of the examples that were read to us of Luke chapter 9. You might like to flip back to that. The little bit of Luke that Ray read to us is rather Elijah-ish, actually.

Elijah and Elisha-ish. The bit about calling fire down from heaven. You might be wondering about that. That's what happened a little bit further on in the story of Elijah and Elisha.

[26:24] So we've got that sort of thing in mind. And here is Jesus. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. Which is a great thing for him to say.

And Jesus gives this little dose of realism. It's not always an easy thing to follow Jesus.

He says, Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. So there isn't a guarantee of an easy, comfortable life.

He said to another man, follow me. This is verse 59, Luke 9, 59. But the man replied, first let me go and bury my father.

And you might think he's saying the same thing as Elisha was saying. I think he's saying a different thing. He's not saying, let me just dash back, kiss them goodbye, and come and follow you.

[27:20] I think what he's saying is, I will follow you, but not at the moment. I'll follow you when my dad has got older, and when he passes away, and all that's sorted out, then I'll follow you.

It might be a few years, it might be quite a few years, but I'm not going to do it just now. And it's to this person that Jesus says, that's not an excuse, that's not a reason.

I'm saying follow me now, and I don't want you to have, which is really an excuse, in a sense let the dead bury their own dead. You go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

And Jesus often speaks in this rather exaggeration way, exaggerated way. But he is saying, the two cases are different.

Elisha said, I'll just go back, I am coming, I'm coming now, but I need to kiss mum and dad goodbye. I think the man that Jesus is speaking to says, I'm going to postpone it until a better time.

[28:35] And Jesus says, no, you can't postpone it until a better time. The time to follow Jesus is now. And if you're thinking, I'll follow Jesus, I will follow Jesus, but first let me get my, I don't know, let my degree sorted out.

Or first let me get my, I don't know, get my employment situation sorted out. Or first let me learn better English. Or whatever it is.

And when I've done that, then I'll follow Jesus. And Jesus says, that's absolutely the wrong way around. The priority is, you follow me now. Now, the other things will fall into place, but I come first.

And if you notice, just following that thought on in Luke, in verse 61, same sort of thing here. I will follow you, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.

Jesus replied, no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. I think it's the same thing there. He's saying there's a, he's not saying it's wrong to say goodbye to your family, but if it becomes an obstacle, an excuse, you need to follow Jesus now.

[29:55] So let me try and find where we've got to. That was the bit that was in the wrong place. So here is Elisha. So let's go back to Elisha.

Elisha. He goes to kiss goodbye to mum and dad. Elijah says, go back. What have I done to you? It's another sort of enigmatic prophet thing.

I don't quite know why he says this. Perhaps it's to point up the question, what is our relationship? So, verse 21, Elisha left him and went back.

And then he takes his yoke of oxen and slaughters them. So he takes two of the oxen and slaughters them. Slaughters them for sacrifice. And he takes the ploughing equipment and burns it to cook the meat.

And he gives the meat to the people. So there is no, in this case, there is no going back. He isn't leaving the option open.

[31:14] And actually, Elijah, if by tea time, you know, cooling off period, if by tea time I've changed my mind, I'll come back and carry on ploughing.

Because he can't do that because he's burnt the plough. Killed two of the oxen as well. There is that sense in the following of Jesus that there is no going back.

It isn't an option. You can't keep your options open and follow Jesus. You know, I'll try you for a bit. If it doesn't work out, I can always try something else.

It is all or nothing. Nothing less than all or nothing will do for Jesus.

So sometimes, coming to Christian faith is put in this term of giving my heart to the Lord. I'm not sure that term ever is there in the Bible, but sometimes we use that expression.

[32:12] But what we mean is, we don't mean I'm just giving, you know, this bit of my biology to God. What we mean is, I'm giving everything to God. I'm following Jesus wholeheartedly. I'm saying to the Lord, if there is any bit of my life in which I'm saying, you can't have it, then show me

and overrule me.

Because it is all or nothing. Now, going back to Elisha, he's taken the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them for sacrifice, and gives it to the people, and they eat it.

Now, who are these people? I don't know. Are they people who work on the farm? Are they people in the village? Again, I think we've got the indications. There's quite a big concern here. So I'm sort of thinking Downton Abbey.

You know, that there's a lot of staff and a lot of things going on. Perhaps quite a bit of money. But they kill, he kills these two oxen and gives them to the people to eat.

And the text doesn't stop. It just carries straight on. But it is a feeding thing. And there's quite a, quite a number of similarities between the ministry of Jesus and the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

[33:34] Jesus had an occasion where he prepared a meal and then it was given to the people and they ate. It's a sort of feeding of the 5,000. They sat down and ate.

We'll find that same thing coming up a bit later. It's certainly an act of great generosity. I don't know how much you paid for your oxen recently or how much you sell an oxen for on eBay but I think it's a lot of money.

I think it's an important bit of the family assets here. So it's a great generosity. It's a very extravagant act to sacrifice two oxen and to give them to everybody.

They wouldn't have had a meal like that in yonks, I wouldn't have thought. And any time an animal was killed in ancient Israel, you couldn't help but think it's got to be done in a spiritual way because they had all this stuff about the blood.

It has to be let out of the animal in a certain way because blood is to do with sacrifice and sacrifice is to do with the Lord and the Lord says, I've given you blood as a means of sacrifice.

[34:53] So they couldn't help but be thinking, this is an act of sacrifice before the Lord. This thing where Elisha, dear diary, this morning brushed my teeth, got all the oxen in a straight row, was plowing.

Some guy put a cloak all over me and I left my old life and went on a new life and that change is brought before the Lord.

His instinct is, God is in on this. It's a sacrificial thing. Not just a sacrificial thing in terms of, I'm giving something up, but it's to do with the Lord's blood sacrifices and I would say that the same thing is true with the Christian faith.

when we turn to follow the Lord, it can't be disconnected from the cross of Jesus Christ.

We follow the Lord on the basis that he loved us and gave himself for us. It's not like turning over a new leaf.

[36:04] It is bringing our lives into that whole connection with a great sacrifice that was made. Give me a sight, O Savior, of your wondrous love for me, of the love that brought you down from heaven to die on Calvary.

Make me understand it. Help me take it in. What it meant for you, the Holy One, to bear away my sin. That's the basis on which this following takes place.

A decision that could not be made without sacrificial death. Okay, let's go on now to verse 21. So Elijah, Elisha left, went back, he took his yoke of ox and slaughtered them.

He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat. He gave it to the people they ate and then he set out to follow Elijah and became a prophet. Except it doesn't say that.

Do you see what it says he became? He first, he became a servant. This is an interesting point to ponder because he's had a prophet's cloak flung over him.

[37:14] You know, Facebook status today became a prophet. It's complicated. Something like that. And, you know, the little wheels in one's head when one is called to a particular form of service.

Say, right, now things are really going to get moving. Now I'm involved in it. And you could imagine him thinking, you know, old Elijah, you know, a bit unpredictable, a bit enigmatic.

now, now there's going to be a real prophet. So there's a temptation to that sort of response. But you don't detect it at all.

That isn't there. He becomes a prophet and he will become a mighty prophet. But he becomes a prophet by first becoming a servant.

If you look at 2 Kings 3, 11, it is reported of him, 2 Kings 3, 11, Jehoshaphat says, is there a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of the Lord through him?

[38:31] An officer of the king of Israel said, well, there's Elisha here. Elisha, the son of Shaphat. You know Elisha. Quote, he used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.

Unquote. What did he do? How did he begin to learn to be a prophet? Answer, by pouring water on the hands of his master. Now this will be a mystery to most of us.

When I was in Sri Lanka, I realized what this meant because I was in a place where there was no running water from a tap. So what, to you and I, if you wash your hands, you turn on the tap, put your hands underneath, soap, and you wash your hands like that.

If there's no running water, somebody has to take a jar of water, pour it for you, you put your hands underneath, and you wash them like that. So, one of the dear pastors there, Don Bosco, poured water on my hands so that I could wash my hands.

And it's a very sort of humbling thing, humbling position to be put in, and a humbling thing to do.

You know, it's just a necessity to have water poured on your hands. And this is what Elisha did for Elijah.

[39:43] He became a servant. And this, it seems to me, is a characteristic of Christian and Bible spirituality, that the way forward is the way, if you like, down.

We grow, not by becoming more puffed up, but becoming more humble, becoming better servants. Certainly the way that Jesus went, he learned obedience, he humbled himself, now to be sure, God exalted him.

But notice, he humbled himself, God exalted him. That was the order of it. It wasn't that God humbled him, but Jesus put that right by exalting himself.

Do you see what I mean? He humbled himself, and God exalted him. That was the way for Jesus. Jesus. And he says this to us. Another oxen metaphor.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am gentle, and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

[41:06] Jesus says, learn of me. And what an incredible thing, for the Lord of lords, and King of kings, to say, I am gentle, and humble in heart.

And yet it's true. And Jesus invites us to come and learn of him. So that's, what happened, and what would happen.

Where was it all going to lead? Why have I put those things? Okay, well, we start off with, let's wind it back.

We start off with the promise that people are going to be anointed. Three of them, you remember? Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. Now, actually, in the event, I don't see any anointing going on in this particular incident, but I presume it's the fulfillment of this idea.

The cloak gets thrown over him. What about the other two anointings? Now, in fact, they don't happen for several chapters.

[42:18] It's interesting that God's purposes go at different speeds. Something happens tomorrow, other things don't happen until way down the line. And in the end, actually, Elijah is not the one to do these anointings.

Elijah does, Elisha does them for him. So we have a line going well on into the future with these kings being anointed, but it's quite a long way in the future.

And a lot of things will happen in between. Elijah, spoiler alert, will be taken to heaven in a whirlwind. So Elijah's ministry will end in this rather spectacular and notable way, but it will come to an end and Elijah will take over.

But there's a lot of things to happen. There will be many lessons and although we were set up to expect judgment, there's going to be a lot of mercy in the meantime.

And Elisha doesn't know this. What shall he do? Well, if he did know all this, if he had the advantage of being able to look ahead and see it all, what should he do?

[43:29] And I think the answer is simple. He just has to do what he's told on that day, which is to follow Elijah. John Wesley, the famous

Methodist preacher of revival, was asked one morning what his plans were. And he says, my plans are, well, first of all, I'm going to walk to Northampton. I'm going to preach there at 11 o'clock. Then I'm going to walk on across the other side of the county and preach there in the afternoon.

And then I'm hoping to end up in, I don't know, I'm waking this up as I go along, Bedford and preach there in the evening. And somebody said to him, Mr. Wesley, if you knew that the Lord was coming tomorrow, what would your plans be then?

And he said, my plans then would be, first of all, to go to Northampton and preach there, then to cross the county and preach there, and then end up in Bedford in the evening. You know, God's given us something to do, and whether it's long term, short term, we don't know how it's going to end up, we do it.

Follow where God calls. That's what we're to do. And in some ways, that's extremely simple. It's not simple in every single way, but in some ways, it's very simple.

[44:45] What am I to do today? Follow where God calls. It might mean leaving. Some things will definitely have to be left. It might mean staying.

It might mean stability. It might mean change. It might mean things that you can know and predict. It might mean the unknown.

But Jesus' words are very simple and very clear. Follow me. To trust him, to obey him in a personal relationship, which is to follow him.

we're going to sing together number 850. We're going to sing together number 850.