

A Divinely Appointed Journey

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Date: 05 December 2018

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, 2 Kings 2. I'm reading again at the beginning of the chapter, 2 Kings 2 and at verse 1.

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.

The Apostle James comes to what might regard it as a startling conclusion about the life and ministry of the great prophet Elijah.

The Apostle James writes he was a man like us, he says. He writes in his letter, The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

[1 : 15] A man like us. And I'm quite sure if you are familiar with the life story of Elijah, that you might wish to question what James states.

How many with hand on heart this evening can say that they are indeed like Elijah? Everyone can answer in the secrecy of their own heart.

But I think people would be reluctant to state that they could compare themselves to this man of God.

For the picture that is painted for us in the Bible is of a bold, fearless individual who confronted the power of authority, power of government, as represented by King Ahab.

A man who stood alone. He wasn't afraid of standing alone. Against the prophets of Baal. In a great face-off as he demonstrated who the true and living God is.

[2 : 27] A man capable of outrunning. A horse-driven chariot. Over 17 miles from Carmel to Jezreel.

Let's say something about the physical stamina of this man. Yes, admittedly there were low points in his experience.

But overall he was a spiritual giant. How could he possibly be like us? Well, if we think of it this way. If I say that he lived through a turbulent period in the history of the world. Would you agree? By turbulent I mean that it was a time when the credibility of faith in the living and true God was being severely tested and challenged.

And in my view there are many similarities with the days of Elijah and the days in which we live. Many teachings of the word of God are denied.

[3 : 42] Many are being tested. Many are being challenged. This was a man who put his trust in the living and the true God. He was a man of prayer.

Again, believers are depicted in the Bible as people of prayer. It is one of the distinguishing marks in the life of the believer.

Prayer. So you might say, even if you may feel that your prayers are very inadequate, if you have prayer, then you are like this man.

A man who displayed obedience to the revealed will of God. A real man with human passions and human needs with real failings.

And in these ways you might say that he was like us. But he was a great prophet. One who appears suddenly on the world stage and who is removed from that stage just as suddenly.

[4 : 57] The effect of his witness and testimony may even be seen after his removal from life.

By that I do not just mean that what is taught in these chapters that record for us his life and ministry and which has so much to teach us.

But the reason that I say that, or even his appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, as he discussed, or as Jesus discussed his exodus with Moses and Elijah.

But the reason that I say that is in the second book of Chronicles, in chapter 21, you will find this reference to King Jehoram. He was 32 years old when he became king. He reigned eight years in Jerusalem, we are told. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He introduced the worship of idols, led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into Hordom and made Judah go astray.

[6 : 06] And then you find this, and a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet. That's how it's written in the Bible. The letter foretold how the Lord was going to deal judgmentally with this king.

One other thing that I wish to say by way of introduction is the similarities between the first book of Kings and the second book of Kings.

Both books begin with real and deep concern. In the first book of Kings, it is the promise who will succeed David to the throne of Israel.

Will the covenantal promises be kept or will they fail? And of course, the answer is that God's covenantal promises never fail.

But it wasn't for want of trying on the part of man. In the second book of Kings, it's not so much who will reign, but who will be the next prophet in succession to Elijah.

[7 : 17] And the same concerns arise. Will God's promises be kept? Well, Elijah represents the prophets. And what he states is fulfilled again and again.

A true prophet, a giant, a colossus on the world stage. Will the word of God be spoken with authority after his removal?

Who will take his place? And I want to set before you just this evening three thoughts. First, a divinely ordered journey.

Secondly, a demonstration of divine empowerment. And thirdly, a declaration of true divinity.

A divinely appointed journey. Now you might say that the whole of your life is a divinely appointed journey. In some ways, if you believe in the foreordination of God.

[8 : 20] But how do we know that this man's journey with Elisha was a divinely appointed journey? Well, we read it several times in the early verses of chapter, of the chapter that we read.

Please stay here. And then you'll find these words, for the Lord has sent me. Three times you'll find that written down in these early verses in the chapter, the Lord has sent me.

It's comforting to know when you are on a journey that you are going because God has sent you.

Particularly if you are in the ministry, to know that the Lord has sent you on a particular journey or to a particular place.

So three times it's mentioned here in these early verses. It's not written down, please stay here. I've decided to go to these various places.

That's not what Elijah is saying. But he is telling us that this is done at the direct instigation of the Lord.

[9 : 34] He doesn't tell us how the Lord tells him this. Perhaps you might like to know how the Lord told him this, but that's not revealed in the word.

All that is revealed is that the Lord has sent him. And we're also told when this divinely ordained journey took place, it's when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven.

And so the question arises then, why did the Lord send him to these various places? It's evident from the chapter that both in Bethel and Jericho, there was located a school of the prophets.

They are spoken of as the sons of the prophets, those who were being instructed, if you like, in divinity. And you might say an answer to the question, why is he being sent to these places?

Well, here is the prophet among prophets bidding farewell to those being taught in divinity. And it is very clear that they were aware that this was to be his last place, his last visit.

[10 : 52] For in both places they come with the same question to Elijah, do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?

But what I also understand from their question to Elisha is that there was concern in the church about the removal of this fearless warrior.

who will succeed him? What will happen to the cause of God in our midst if he is taken?

Now I know that not all take or share my view on this, but that is my understanding of it. And as I already stated, Elijah is doing this at the behest of the Lord.

It may be that among the sons of the prophets there were those who wished to be like Elijah, wished to be like this man of God. I cannot be sure about that.

[12 : 02] I can't even be, I can't be dogmatic about it, but I consider it likely that there were those who looked up to this man of God. He was their role model, if you like.

and I am sure there are some here tonight and you met people in your Christian life to whom you looked up and you desired to be like them because you saw Christ shining through them and you perhaps said to yourself, you maybe never mentioned it publicly in any way, I wish I was like that person or that other person and so on because of what you saw, but you were only seen partial, you weren't seen the whole person and perhaps if you had disclosed that to the whole person, they might have been horrified that you wanted to be like them, see, because they were seeing another side to their personality that you were not.

Well, be that as it may, it's as if he is saying to them, this is the last time you will see my face.

Remember the example we have in the New Testament where Paul tells those in the church at Ephesus, now behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

And it leads to an intensely emotional parting. there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all, because of the word he had spoken that they would not see his face again.

Well, we don't find the same level of emotion expressed here. it. And I just today I happened to be reading a piece of Bardock that was written by my late uncle by marriage, Reverend K.J.

[14 : 17] Nicholson. And he was speaking of Christina Stewart, who was known in Stornoway way back before my time, although I knew the daughter very well, and she was an elderly lady when I was a young Christian.

But this Christina Stewart was known as Kalloch Willon. Now, Alma Willon was the daughter whom I knew very well, but I never knew the mother.

But obviously the mother, and he composed this piece of Bardock because the mother was so highly esteemed in Christian circles, and he was mourning the fact that she had been removed from the scene of time.

Well, we don't find that, we don't find any compositions here, or any level of emotion expressed. You get the impression that Elisha at this particular stage is not overly keen to discuss the issue. Yes, I know, he says, in response to their voice concern, keep quiet. So, is there more to this divinely ordained journey, or ordered journey, than just bidding farewell to the school of the prophets?

[15 : 38] And I believe that there is, and I'm going to expand on that. Three times I said, Elijah says to Elisha, please stay here.

He said it to him in Gilgal, he said it to him in Bethel, and again in Jericho. It's almost as if he's trying to shake Elisha off. As if he were saying to Elisha, I don't need you, just stay here.

And that leads me to believe that this divinely ordered journey has a deeper purpose, and that that purpose particularly is to test the commitment of this man, Elisha.

Would he be a true successor of Elijah? As if to say, would he persevere with the work once Elijah is removed from the sin of time?

You'll remember when Elijah informed by the Lord to anoint a successor, the instruction he received was, you shall anoint Elisha, the son of Shapheth, of Abel Mechola, to be prophet in your place.

[16 : 49] And when he went to obey the instruction, he found this man, Elisha, plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him. Here was, and what the scripture conveys to us is a picture of a rich farmer, or at least one who belonged to a rich farming family.

Twelve yoke of oxen would be the equivalent today of twelve tractors. And you were told that Elijah passed by and cast his cloak upon him.

Elisha's reaction was to run after Elijah and request, let me kiss my father and my mother, and then he says, I will follow you.

To which you remember Elijah responded, go back, for what have I done to you? And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed, then boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people and they ate.

Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. Now, what is that telling us? Is it not telling us by these actions?

[18 : 06] Elisha was intimating that he was turning his back on his former way of life and all of that entailed by sacrificing the oxen and the yokes and all of that.

And he was declaring that he was going into full time service for the Lord. In the New Testament you remember one who came to Christ and who says, I will follow you Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.

And you remember the response of Jesus. No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Therefore it seems to me that Elijah is stating three times please, please stay here.

He is saying to Elisha, are you really committed to serving the Lord? Are you ready to take on this commitment and witness for the Lord?

And I believe that the response of Elisha each time demonstrates his commitment as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.

[19 : 23] That's I believe the first purpose of this triple test on Elisha. But there's a further test in this divinely ordered journey.

Would Elisha make a right request? test. In some ways it's similar to the test that was given to Solomon.

You remember how the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, ask what I shall give you.

And you remember the response. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people that I may discern between good and evil.

And God was pleased with the response of Solomon and then acted accordingly. you remember how his wisdom became proverbial.

In this context the question is asked, ask what I shall do for you. And the response that Elisha gives, please let there be a double portion of your spirit upon me.

[20 : 25] Now, without getting bogged down in the detail, what I understand from this request is that he was seeking the portion or the right of the first born.

You know how the Bible speaks of the right of the first born. And you find it, if a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and I always have difficulty with that part of that sentence.

Why on earth would any man have two wives, one loved and one unloved? It's beyond my understanding. But anyway, and both the loved and the unloved are born and children, and if the first born son belongs to the unloved, then on the day that he assigns his possessions as an inheritance to his sons, he may not treat the son of the loved as the first born in preference to the son of the unloved, who is the first born.

But he shall acknowledge the first born, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the first fruits of his strength.

The right of the first born is his. And it seems to me, Elisha is saying, I claim the right of the first born among the prophets, so that if it please God, I am not just serving with you, but desirous of serving after you as the servant of the Lord.

[21 : 53] I wish the word of God to be fulfilled in my life. What did the word of God state? I have already quoted it. Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abel, you will anoint to be prophet in your place.

And in deciding the double portion or the right of the first born, you could say that he was seeking what God had spoken, that he would indeed be prophet after Elijah.

In other words, his desire was that God's word be fulfilled in him as the anointed prophet, whatever the future might hold, whatever the cost that would be involved, the right of the firstborn, that he would be confirmed as the true successor and heir of Elijah.

Israel as a chosen nation, remember, enjoyed that right. Thus says the Lord of Israel, thus says the Lord Israel is my firstborn son. He sought the right of the eldest and he was given it.

How do we know that he was given it? Well, remember we read he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan and then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him, struck the water saying where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?

[23 : 23] And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other and Elisha went over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw opposite them, they said the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha and they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

So that's the second test of the journey. That brings me to the third test that I see in the journey.

And the third test is this. Elijah is saying to him, if you see the glory of the Lord.

Where do we find that? Well, if you notice we read, if you see me as I have been taken from you, it shall be for you.

But if you do not see me, it shall not be so. Now, there were fifty sons of the prophets in the vicinity, but they did not see the glory of God.

They did not share in the experience of Elisha. God came down in fiery chariots. It was a marvelous demonstration of the power and the glory of the Almighty.

[24 : 40] Elijah said this was the day. He knew God's glory would be revealed. And the question is, not will God reveal his glory, but will Elisha see God's glory?

Because God's glory is not visible to natural vision. It is only discerned by spiritual vision. It is seen by the eye of faith.

It is revealed to those to whom it pleases God to reveal it. You remember the servant of Elisha at a later date when they were in Dothan.

And when that servant arose early in the morning, the sight that met him filled him with fear and apprehension.

Behold, the anarchy with horses and chariots was all around the city. and the servant said, Alas, my master, what shall we do?

[25 : 51] He could see no way of escape. They were encircled by the enemy. And his master saying to him, do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

Where were they? Was there something wrong with the eyes of this man that he couldn't see? Well, there was nothing wrong with his vision, naturally.

But he was lacking in spiritual vision. Because when the Lord opened his eyes, what was true?

Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

See, the Lord gave him vision that he didn't have. And that's what has happened to everyone who has seen the glory of Christ as the Lord and Savior. They have been given new vision that enables them to see the glory of God in Christ.

How often we are like that servant. We fail to see the glory of God.

[27 : 02] The disciples could say we have seen his glory. And they saw it because they were given spiritually vision from on high. Again, the promise is given to those who are pure in heart.

And the promise is that they shall see God. And so often our hearts are full of other things detracting from our vision, leaving us with an inability to see his glory.

Well, this then was the test. Would he truly be a successor to Elijah? Would he have the commitment?

Would he make the right choice? Would he see the glory of God? God? And we too have been asked these questions with regard to our commitment.

Is that true? I'm not asking, did we begin to follow? Or did we say, at one stage in our lives, I have begun to follow the Lord.

[28 : 22] But are we persevering in following the Lord? Are we demonstrating a commitment in our service to the King of Kings?

So that God's will is done in my life and in yours. Are we desirous of seeing his glory? A divinely ordered journey, a journey that involved several tests for Elisha.

Secondly, a demonstration of divine empowerment. Where do we see that? Remember, these two men had come to the bank of the river Jordan. And Elijah does something very strange.

As they were both standing by the Jordan, then Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up, struck the water, and the water was parted on the one side and to the other, till the two of them could come over and die ground.

Now, standing by the Jordan, for all I know, it could be the very same place where the river divided on another occasion. You remember, yeah, ah, but it was from the opposite bank when the twelve tribes of Israel passed over Dryshad as they followed the priests bearing the ark and crossed into the promised land.

[29 : 46] water. And the impression created in my mind is this, that he struck the water with some considerable force. Why did Elijah do this?

It wasn't a regular occurrence. Did he do it because there was no bridge or other means to cross? In other words, did he do it for personal convenience? convenience. I don't believe he did.

Whatever the reason, I do not believe that this man did anything for the sake of personal convenience. Why then did he do it?

Well, remember, Elijah closely identified with the teaching of Moses. He is in his ministry calling up people back to the God of the covenant.

And in parting the river, he is reminding, in my view, reminding Elisha and we the readership of what this great God of covenant faithfulness had done in the past.

[30 : 54] He had delivered a people from the bondage of Egypt. Israel were a people who had passed to safety through the Red Sea. And you remember how that took place.

God instructed Moses, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.

And we are told Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord drove the sea back and so on. And you remember the story. Israel were a delivered people.

A people delivered by the sheer power of omnipotence in a marvelous miracle of free grace. And Elijah now demonstrates that the same power that Moses knew, the power that Elijah knows, resides with him.

The God of yesterday is the God of today, possessing the same power. And it seems, this is as it were, the last word from Elijah to Elijah.

[32 : 05] We serve a great God, the Savior God, the God of almighty power, the God of infinite mercy, the God of redeeming grace, who unites a people to himself with bands that cannot be broken.

And I think there's something else here that is worth mentioning. Notice in crossing the Jordan from Jericho. They're going out of the promised land.

Or on one side there is Pisgah, where Moses was given the opportunity to view the promised land, and where he died in solitude.

In accord with the word of God, he never entered physically the promised land. And Elijah now is exiting the promised land, in crossing the Jordan to meet with God.

You know, we speak metaphorically of crossing the Jordan of death, and we use the term symbolically as being the dividing line between this life and the eternal well.

[33 : 17] Sometimes even use it as symbolizing death itself. John Bunyan uses it in that way. Dr. MacDonald of Ferenthus used it in that way. I'm on the brink of Jordan.

Backward shrinks this mortal frame. Well, it were now for me to have the hope that air shall put to shame. And there's no sign of fear or apprehension on the part of Elijah as he goes to meet the Lord.

Because here is a man who was the assurance of faith and of grace. And in exiting Canaan what message is that for Elisha?

God promised this land to Abraham. But Canaan is but symbolic of the real land of promise.

This is not the dwelling place of the believer. This world is not your home. And in crossing over Elijah stating I'm going to a better place.

[34 : 23] He is going as one who in the language of Paul can say for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

How can Paul say that? And Elijah too. Because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Their vision was not confined to the narrow parameters of this present transient world. Elijah is looking forward to a world that is much better where his once one soul surrounds heaven's throne with endless praise.

He is exiting the land because he has learned that glorious things are spoken of Zion the city of the Lord.

An enduring unshakable world and stable foundation awaits. It is true of all in Christ. Oh don't you wish you had the same assurance as Elijah.

[35 : 44] Demonstration of divine empowerment divinely ordered journey a declaration of true divinity. Where do we find the declaration of true divinity in the chapter? We are told that as they went on and talked behold chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

The word behold in the Bible frequently is used to draw attention to something important. Here it draws attention to this unusual phenomenon but also to the abrupt suddenness of parting.

You know although we think we see death approaching in the lives of others who are close to us members of family and so on and if we have been around them frequently in their final days yet the actual moment of death often comes with startling suddenness and here it came with startling

suddenness right in the middle of conversation the moment of parting had come no more opportunity to prolong conversation did Elisha wish to have more time Bible doesn't say but maybe you can look back to episodes in your own life where you wish there had been more opportunities for discussion or perhaps where you regret that you did not avail yourself of the opportunities when you could chariots of fire and horses of fire are will would you not say that these are fitting in the removal of such a warrior in the service of the king of kings

God himself coming to gather his faithful servant to the heavenly residence chariots of fire horses of fire symbols of the majesty the power and the greatness of God this was a day given over to Baal worship remember and Baal the god Baal was known as the rider of the clouds he was regarded as a warlike weather deity the dark heavy clouds of a storm viewed as the battle chariots in which Baal the god Baal rode but this revelation demonstrating if proof is required that it is indeed that this is indeed the god who rides on the clouds of him the psalmist states in the psalms he makes the clouds his chariot he rides on the wings of the wind this is the great creator god who has authority over life and death and in the case of his servant

Elijah he blots out death and takes him to himself in a demonstration of his glorious majestic power error dies hard but in this way god is demonstrating the fraudulence of the claims of Baal he is in control of the firmament and not this imposter god Baal and by this dramatic intervention of removal he is strengthening and not weakening his church you know sometimes we think that the church is weakened when such a colossus is removed we see the effect on Elisha he is not placing his confidence in Elijah no matter how great a witness Elijah had been but he is placing his confidence in the glorious powerful majestic god of

[39 : 56] Elijah where is the lord the god of Elijah and that is where you and I have to trust to the god of Elijah the one of whom the psalmist speaks sent he upon a charred robe and thereon he did fly yea on the swift wings of the wind his flight was from on high Elisha became a true successor of Elijah like Paul he could say one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus oh is that a we are spending our lives too are we this same commitment are we desirous of seeing the power and the majesty and the glory of this great

God desirous ultimately of being born into his immediate presence let us pray let us pray too oh oh come ad oh