

Elisha's Call to Service

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[0 : 00] Let us stand and we will seek him in prayer. Our Heavenly Father, we bless you for the way of access you provided in your own dear Son.

We thank you for him. We thank you that he is your Messiah. We thank you that in him we have one who is our prophet, priest and king.

And we bless you, O Lord, that all over this world you have your people calling upon you in spirit and in truth.

And we bless you, O Lord, that you are building your kingdom. And we pray that your kingdom may come in all the places of the earth.

We remember tonight, O Lord, in your presence, the Jew first. And we pray that both in the land of Israel and throughout the diaspora, you will be bringing Jewish people to see in Jesus their Redeemer and friend.

[1 : 20] Bless those who work among them and seek to show them the truth of the scriptures. We pray, O Lord, for the situation in the Middle East, in the Arab world in particular.

And we pray that all these upheavals that are going on and the serious unrest across the Arab world may issue ultimately in a weakening, indeed a dismantling, of the false system they render. May their hearts be opened to listen to us, in the false prophet, may they find true freedom in him who is the Son who makes us free, indeed.

We pray, too, O Lord, for those who lead in these nations and the UN. We pray that you will put it in their hearts to act with a decisiveness that appears to be lacking, so that a minimum of damage will be done in Libya and other places, too, that are on the brink.

Lord God, you rule over all. And we pray that it may be in these upheavals that you have a purpose of mercy and grace, that your kingdom may come, and that Jesus may be glorified.

[3 : 24] We thank you, too, O Lord, this evening for your work here in this land and in this city in particular, among those who have come in.

Lord, we recognize your wisdom in moving the peoples around. Others may look on it as a negative thing, but we see your hand in these people movements.

And our hearts desire and prayer, Lord, is that you will bless the people who have come in among us with the knowledge of your salvation, that they may know what it is to worship you in and through the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of your blessed Spirit.

We look forward to Neil's talk with us later on, and we pray that he may feel at home with us this evening, though we are a few in number tonight.

May it be that you will impress us with a sense of your own presence here and purpose in our meeting. May our worship be a spiritual offering, a sweet fragrance to you through Christ our Redeemer.

[4 : 44] We come to you giving thanks for our opportunities in the way. And we thank you, O Lord, for the truth we reflected on earlier today, and we would make our testimony that we received and welcomed your word, not simply as the words of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, the gospel of God.

And we bless you for the Christ of the gospel, and we pray that he may be seen in our own lives as we are transformed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord.

Purge us from our sin. Strengthen us in your service. Remember all those connected with us, that they may be found seeking you, and better that you will seek them and draw them irresistibly to Christ, that they with us may rejoice in so great salvation.

So be with us and help us as we wait upon you, and we will give you all the praise and honor and glory in Christ. Amen.

We are going to read then, and before we turn to the scriptures, we are going to read in Matthew's Gospel, and chapter 19, that's on page 869, and we'll read at verse 16.

[6 : 36] Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19, at verse 16. Now behold, one came and said to him, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?

So he said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is God. But if you want to enter life, keep the commandments.

Bear in mind here that Jesus is using very much the rabbinical method. He's putting to them something, expecting them to respond in an intelligent and spiritual way.

So he said to him, Which ones? Jesus said, You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

The young man said to him, All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack? Jesus said to him, If you want to be perfect, that is complete, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

[8 : 00] And come, follow me. But, when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, Assuredly I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

When his disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus looked at them and said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Then Peter answered and said to him, See, we have left all and followed you. Therefore, what shall we have? So Jesus said to them, Assuredly I say to you that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life.

[9 : 38] But many who are first will be last, and the last first. We'll say Amen there and ask the Lord to add his own blessing to the reading of his word.

Now let's turn back to 1 Kings and chapter 19. And we want to look at the closing section of chapter 19, actually from verse 19.

1 Kings verses 19 to 21. And the obvious title to give this is quite simply Elisha's Call to Service. Elisha's Call to Service. But before we look at that particularly, what I want to do is simply to recap very briefly on Elijah, because it is the life of Elijah we're studying.

And Elijah himself is in the process of learning and developing. And we have seen in the previous section that he was recommissioned there at Horeb, at Mount Sinai.

[10 : 58] he was recommissioned by God. He had been taught, you remember, not to judge the work of God merely on appearance.

And he was not to judge the work of God by what we might call operations that were sensational and dramatic. He was shown that the Spirit of God doesn't simply rely on the spectacular and the dramatic on mighty displays of power.

He was taught that the Spirit of God worked in his own secret and silent and yet deliberate way. In fact, he was also taught, contrary to his view, that the Lord had a good remnant in the land of Israel. I alone am left was Elijah's cry. and I never read that but I think, wrong. Wrong. I alone am left is a morbid state for a believer to be in.

And Elijah had to learn that and he had to go forward from what the Lord taught him there at Mount Sinai. I have reserved for myself, said the Lord, seven thousand in the land.

[12 : 26] I'm looking after my remnant. I'm looking after my work. The work will be preserved. The work will progress. I, the Lord, will see to it. That's another thing Elijah had to learn.

And so the servant of the Lord was taught that he simply had to trust the word of the Lord and obey the word. and go about the Lord's service.

And so he's ready down there at Mount Sinai to go and do the tasks he's been given. And so what we come to this evening is the call of Elisha.

And it's a call that should challenge us each one in our own measure. It's a challenge our own measure of complacency. Our own measure of contentment in the things that we have around us, our teacher comforts.

But it also challenges us to think about the danger of halting, of being undecided in serving the Lord. And it urges us to a wholehearted commitment to him to have done with procrastinating.

[13:47] Whatever our position, it is a challenge to us to have done with hesitating, with procrastinating. And I want us then briefly just to think about three things that arise from the passage.

I'm not saying the only three things, but there are three useful things to say about Elisha's call to service. The first thing I want to say is that it is a sovereign call.

This is not perhaps immediately obvious, but it's important that we don't miss this point. In this whole situation, God is at work.

God was saying to Elijah at Mount Sinai, this is what I want you to do. And when he gives him the instruction, I don't think we're to understand this to mean you've got to go to anoint Hazael first, and then Jehu, and then Elisha.

I don't think that's a chronological reference. And what we find is that Elijah is given his orders by the Lord. God is sovereignly working.

[14:59] And God set Elijah the task of going to and dealing with Elisha. So, to begin with, we're thinking about a sovereign call, and we're thinking in the first place, God is at work.

He has decided, he directs, and he sends Elijah all the way up from Mount Sinai to Abel-Meholah. Usually, those who have studied these things and who have gathered together all the information, they tend to think about Abel-Meholah as about 10 miles south of a place that has been excavated in recent years, Beth-Shan, and which sits a few miles in from the Jordan, west of the Jordan.

And that was about a 160-mile journey from Mount Sinai up there to Abel-Meholah, a farming area. And that's what we are told in the opening section.

So he departed from there, Mount Sinai, and he found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. Now he had already been told, you see, in verse 16, you'll go and anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, of Abel-Meholah.

[16:28] So he's told, he knows what he's doing, God is at work. And so he arrives there and he carries out the Sovereign Lord's will.

This is important to us. It's important in a day when we're taught to plan, to plan carefully.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying there's not a place for good planning. But we can sometimes get so caught up in plans and schemes that we lose a sense of this fundamental point that in the work of God, God is at work.

He's in charge. He's directing. He's unpacking his plan. And often, if not always, it's other than we think.

It's different. It never pans out the way we think it will. Yet, he is at work. And so, we want to just remind ourselves of that.

[17:38] It's important, underscore it, in a slightly different angle on this. You remember the father of believers, Abraham got his call back there in Genesis 12.

He's told to get up and go from your own country to a land that I will show you. And God simply came to him directly and called him and sent him on his way.

And that, I'm using that simply to remind us that in God's business and God's kingdom, God is at work. People may plan and plan carefully, but the Lord directs.

And this is the case concerning the call of Elisha, son of Shaphat. God is working sovereignly.

And in a more general sense, you see, that's true of all who become true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is at work. Some of us, perhaps, who were brought up, and I've heard others who were brought up more carefully under the gospel than me, and I've heard them say that before they were converted, they were acutely away of God working, of God nudging them here and there.

[19:07] They had no intention of going in that direction, and yet that's the direction they went in, because God was at work. God was directing. And we ought to thank him for that.

We ought to thank him for the people he puts in our way to share the good news. I remember years ago when I was with CWI, being down in the West country, and the folk I stayed with, the man himself was a consultant physician, and his son was a surgeon.

And that surgeon had a wonderful gift, according to his father, a wonderful gift of actually witnessing to his colleagues, witnessing to people generally in a very natural way.

And the Lord used it again and again. And one of the things that I remember talking about was how God directed him, how God put people in his way.

God's at work. God is sovereign. And he calls people, even in the general sense of calling us, into the fellowship of his son. He uses this one and that one and the other one, directing, always directing, according to his will.

[20 : 31] And that should encourage us. And when we don't have the thing working out the way we want it to, it ought to throw us back on prayer.

We ought to simply say to the Lord, Lord, what's this about? Why this blockage here? Why this hindrance here? Since he is sovereign in calling people into the fellowship of his son and into the work of his kingdom.

You remember long centuries later than the days of Elisha, in Acts 13, we're told that God said, separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them to.

That is the heart of the matter here in thinking about a sovereign call of Elisha, the prophet. And I say again, it is there to encourage us.

He knows his business, whether it is called to missionary service or ministry or just being a witness in your own community. It is a privilege to know that we are called of God to do these things.

[21 : 59] And I often think that one of the great needs in our day is that the Lord would call preachers of the gospel that would have a real hearing of the people.

We have known and know good preachers, excellent preachers, but we don't know people today who have a real hearing of the masses of people.

The day for that is not done. I know the Christian theorists say that it is the day for the small groupies and so on.

I am not against Christianity Explored, not at all, or little Bible selling groups. But the need of the hour is the fields are white and to harvest and the laborers are few.

We need the God who sovereignly called Elisha to raise up people who will be mighty in obtaining the ear of the people, so to speak, and of bringing them into the service of Christ.

[23 : 05] Obviously into the salvation of Christ in the first place, but into his service. You turned to God from idols, Paul said to the Thessalonians, you turned from idols to God, or to God rather, from idols, to serve the living and true God.

And that's what's needed. And I was thinking in preparing this about one of the great evangelists of the 19th century, and he was a man, he was in the free church, and he wasn't recognized immediately, simply that God made it so obvious that he was a man for the job of reaching the masses of people.

You know I'm thinking about Brown the North. He wasn't readily accepted, he didn't fit the particular standards and qualifications of the day.

Rabbi Duncan, who was a very scholarly man, called him an untrained theolog. But he was mighty in reaching people for Christ, because he had been sovereignly called to do that work, and eventually the church recognized him and made a place for him.

We need, knowing that God is sovereign in calling people into his service, we need to be pleading with him, to raise up those who will be mighty in his hand, to gathering the masses of people to Christ.

[24 : 58] God doesn't work, and that's encouraging. And secondly, within this point, a sovereign call.

God chose a farmer in a field. Elijah arrived, we're told, at farm Shaphat, and there Elisha was plowing with twelve pair of oxen, and he was with the twelfth, and most commentators had agreed that because he was the son of the house, he was superintending the others, he was coming behind, he was overseeing.

And we're told that Elijah makes straight for Elisha. This was the cause that he came for, under the command of God.

But think about it, don't just float over it, think about this, this is a call to the ministry, this is a call to the service of the Most High God, and it's in a field that the call is taking place, in a field by a plough, not in the temple where people were consecrated, the prophets, the priests, the kings, nor was it given indeed at one of the schools of the prophets, it could have been down there, no, it was

a field, and it was a young farmer.

He didn't have a long pedigree of folk in the ministry, no reflection, at least no adverse reflections intended on the American connection, but you read of so-and-so the first, and so-and-so the second, I'm talking about big preachers, and so-and-so the third, because they've come from a clerical stock.

[26 : 58] Elisha's not in that category, but he's called of God. He's the son of a farmer, a young ploughman in a field, and there's a reminder to us in this, you see, that God's ways are other than we think.

His thoughts are not our thoughts, and that was true in the case of Elisha, and his ways not our ways. And yet it's true, you see, that his choice was perfect, and his purpose was perfect.

did not our Lord call in the first place a few fishermen? They weren't schooled in Jerusalem Academy, but they were called by Jesus.

They were made fishers of men, something that no man could make them. And at the bidding of the Master, when he said, follow me, they followed.

not once, and again, but again at least, until they were totally committed to him, who called them to harvest the fields of the world.

[28 : 20] And so we have a setting, a very ordinary setting, where this call was given. We'll look at the call itself in a moment. but we're just setting the scene and reminding ourselves of a sovereign call, God at work, and how God chose to do things his own way, and chose a person we might even say least likely to become a prophet of God, a preacher of his word.

God. But if you think about it, our Savior himself was trained as a carpenter, and he put his own stamp of honor upon graft.

God called. And so we have a setting in which God was at work calling according to his own holy and wise purpose.

And Elijah was there to do the work of the sovereign God. The second thing I want us to think about is that it was a powerful call.

we see that in a sense we see it in a way that is unusual. It doesn't look on the face of it much like a call.

[29 : 51] And yet as you look into what is said clearly that's the way it was understood God was at work. We're told that Elijah came up to him when he was plowing verse 19b and passed by him and threw his mantle on him and he left the oxen and ran after Elijah.

This is a curious and yet powerful call. Elijah goes up to him not a word is spoken but Elijah simply goes as he was inclined to go face forward flinty as it were and straight on resolute in his manner and he simply threw his prophet's mantle over Elisha.

It was obviously symbolical and Elisha understood it. Elisha responded. The action conveyed to Elisha the authority of a servant of God in God's name doing something and Elisha recognized hence his response.

And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah. He was convinced by this powerful action.

This was the call of God. God did this thing and he left the plough and followed the prophet.

[31 : 43] And that's the way the Lord works. It's not always a straightforward word in our ear. providence nudges us along.

Sometimes the person who is used by God to give that final prompt doesn't even know it's happening. Always remember, in fact I was very surprised we had Colin McLeod with us at a communion recently and he didn't remember the thing I remembered very well for he told it to me.

I was preaching in Stornoway Free Church when I was with CWI one Sunday morning and I changed the plan and I ended up preaching from Isaiah 6 the prophet's call to service.

Who shall go for us? Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And I said here am I. And Colin McLeod had come from the back congregation and he was there in the Shornoway congregation and I had explained before I started that there was a change of plan.

shortly after that he emailed me when I got back home to tell me that God had directed him there and that that was the word he needed to convince him of the way forward.

[33 : 17] God works like that. It's not important that the messenger knows what's happening precisely. In this case Elijah knew very well.

But it's not always like that. But the fact is when God works in a sovereign call it's a powerful call from him. Each of us here who has come to know the saving power of the gospel we've heard

Jesus calling us.

We've heard Jesus saying follow me. And in our hearts we've committed ourselves to him by faith. And that's the third and final thing we want to look at.

It is an effective call. He left the oxen and ran after Elijah. but notice first on the negative side here. He says please let me kiss my father and mother and then I will follow you. And Elijah said go back again for what have I done to you.

[34 : 35] Now this is an interesting thing. It was an effective call but it didn't prevent a proper farewell to family. In fact we're told that Elijah approved Elisha's request to go and say goodbye to his family and indeed to slaughter the oxen and make a feast, a farewell feast.

Elisha knew very well you see what Elijah had done to him. And he knew that he was going to be committed as a servant of Elijah.

It's not that he was wavering he simply as a willing servant was taking leave of his loved ones.

Some interpreters have sought to find a contradiction here and they've quoted the passage in Luke 9 where Jesus says let the dead bury the dead you come and follow me.

And I think the folk who challenge that view that there's a contradiction here the folk who challenge it are right because Jesus was addressing in the Luke 9 passage waverers and he was addressing them to prioritize.

Elisha's not a waverer. Elisha simply wants to do the right thing and the honorable thing. Elisha is committed.

[36 : 18] Elisha had counted the cost the moment that mantle fell on his shoulders he knew what to do. The opportunity to increase in wealth to enjoy the quiet home comforts and developing the farm and all that were put to the side.

He saw the high calling of God that was placed upon him and he was committed. Lack? No doubt he would but he was committed.

part of serving the Lord is that we are prepared to take what the Lord gives to be content with his provision and often of course it has caused problems to family that preachers struggle financially. It's the same the world over I read enough to know that often preachers are left like that in order that they can help others.

But essentially it's part of their calling to deny themselves to leave what is attractive and desirable and cozy for the sake of Christ.

[37 : 42] they may not become wealthy but it's worth it to go and do what the Lord gives us to do.

It's the greatest privilege for a saved sinner on earth to be a servant of the Most High God and especially a preacher of the gospel of Christ.

Unconverted folk may say to us what a waste of talent. that Elisha was committed. The effective work was done in him and his proper farewell to his family had nothing to do with wavering but simply doing the honourable thing.

It seems to me that it's right for us here this evening to remind ourselves of the importance of praying for the young people that are in the church that they would be weighing their lives in the light of the service to the Lord.

Weighing in the balance, being prepared to give up the wonderful opportunities opportunities there there are nowadays for bright and intelligent people to make it in this world, to weigh these things in the balance and find them wanting and find serving the Lord in the vast spiritual harvest fields of the world, their chiefest delight.

[39 : 19] Anyways, is offered, whatever life's work may be for us, we should be consecrated holy to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brethren, said the apostle, I beseech you by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto him, which is your reasonable service, or if you like, your spiritual worship.

Elisha's committed, the call was effective in him, and the farewell was perfectly in order. My dear friends, may this be a word that is useful to us all in our service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's his kingdom, he's building it, but he uses people to build, and King Jesus will have us busy in his kingdom, and he encourages us to wholehearted commitment.

In that interesting passage we read there in Matthew 19, notice how when the disciples heard the story of the rich young ruler, and Jesus said how hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven, that is, who trust in riches.

[40 : 59] And they said, what did they say? Lord, see, we've left everything for you. And he tells them they're not the losers. He's not saying you desert your family.

he's not saying you abandon your work, he's saying you put all these things in their own place, and your commitment to me is first.

And that's the way it must be. We're not to draw back no man having put his hands to the plough of the kingdom of heaven, and looking back, is fit for that kingdom.

And Elisha takes his hands from the literal plough at farm Shaphan, and he commits to the spiritual plough in the work of the kingdom of God.

And within that final point, Elisha follows Elijah. having done the appropriate things, he arose, verse 21b, and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

[42 : 21] The call was effective, he was a willing servant in the day of the Lord's power, and he was ready to go where the Lord would send him.

He arose, and followed Elijah, and became his servant. I want just to dwell on that for a moment before we finish.

And became his servant. We ought always to remember that our service is just that, serving the Lord.

that's the real heart of following. It's the real heart of our Savior, who in the days of his flesh came not to be served, but to serve.

And bids us to be of the same mind, to be servants, to be prepared to do the little and ordinary and sometimes very basic things in the work of the kingdom.

[43 : 40] And the more we understand what the Savior did for ourselves, how he made no account of himself, how he became the servant, how he loved us and gave himself for us a ransom, the more we get the grip of that in our own souls, the more willing we are to be servants in the Lord's house.

We know that Elijah's task was a special task, and Elisha's was to be eventually a special task. It demanded sacrifice. It demanded the same sacrifice that Paul spoke of when he said, Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.

But there's a sense, you see, for all who follow Christ, that we renounce self, that we give ourselves entirely to him. what was the mark that Paul used?

Remember, he was trying to, under the Spirit's ministry, he was goading the Corinthians to get that collection completed.

[45 : 02] They had made a promise to collect resources and send them up to Jerusalem because the Jewish believers were having a hard time. They began well and then they put it on hold.

And what did Paul do? He said, he said, now look at the Thessalonians were poor and they gave out of the rock bottom poverty.

They gave not out of their wealth but of the rock bottom poverty and the reason why they did that, he says, is they gave themselves first to the Lord.

That's a jewel in the crown of any believer. We do what we do because we give ourselves first to the Lord.

And Elisha arose and left everything behind, followed Elijah and became his servant.

[46 : 18] And we hear our Saviour say, whosoever will be my disciple, let him renounce himself, let him take up his cross daily and follow me.

The world is full of people who are serving themselves, but I'm afraid the church has too many in it who profess the name of Christ to deny themselves little or nothing for the sake of Christ.

And that is patently wrong. let us deny ourselves and let us serve the Lord with a readiness of mind.

And so although this applies in the first place to the call of Elisha the prophet, it carries in its bosom the spiritual principles that apply to all who will follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

let him deny himself and follow me. Amen. me. Amen. Thank you.