

Passing the Mantle

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[0 : 00] What have we learned about Elijah? We have slide two, please. He was a man of God.

! He heard God and obeyed him. He performed miracles, endless oil and flour, and bringing the boy back from the dead. And we learned, last week, he could run fast, faster than a chariot.

But as Emily underlined last week, he was a person, in some ways, just like us. Despite having defeated the prophets of Baal and Asherah by calling fire down from heaven, he ran away.

He was afraid. Once he heard that Jezebel was out to get him, Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. But, despite him being in fear, he continued to hear God and to obey him.

He obeyed God and travelled 40 days from one mountain to another, where, still afraid, he hid in a cave where God met him, not with wind, not with an earthquake, not with fire, as at Mount Carmel, but in a whisper, at Mount Horeb.

[1 : 20] Elijah heard God, despite all the noise going on around him. Sometimes it's difficult to hear what God is saying. There's a lot of noise in the world at the moment going around us.

And sometimes it's difficult to hear that still, small voice of God. When we read the prophets, we hear often the word of the God came, the word of the Lord came.

And we wonder, how did Elijah hear from God? We first heard of Elijah when he confronts Ahab and tells him there's going to be a drought. We're not told how he heard about this drought.

He just came and told Elijah. But then we read that the word of the Lord came to Elijah and directed him to carry a raven where it would be water and he would be fed by ravens.

He then heard the word of the Lord tell him to go to the widow of Seraphath and supply her with flour. And when the boy died, we hear Elijah praying to God for the life of the widow's son.

[2 : 28] Then Elijah's not here directly, but God hears his prayer and the boy is saved. We don't really know how Elijah heard from God.

It might be, in some cases, in a vision. It might just be in his heart, in his spirit. It might be an angel, as we read in other parts of the Bible. An angel of the Lord comes.

But on Mount Carmel, the Lord spoke with fire. And on Mount Horeb, God spoke in a whisper. So God can speak to us in many ways, in ways we may not expect.

And these events prove that God can speak with fire, with noise, but that God can also speak in the quiet.

God is not always at work in ways which are visible and dramatic. I'll speak for an example about God speaking from mine and Sylvia's life.

[3 : 39] Now, we weren't great and aren't great and never were great watchers of soaps. But for some reason, we were watching an episode of Dallas.

Okay, you can, if you like. But anyway, in the episode, one of the women went for a mammogram and she discovered she had breast cancer.

This prompted Sylvia to go for a mammogram and we discovered that she had breast cancer. This was discovered in time and it was treated and it never came back.

So I believe God spoke through that program of Dallas. Otherwise, Sylvia wouldn't have gone to have a mammogram. Sylvia might have got worse breast cancer.

So God can speak to us in many and various ways. Although we read in Hebrews, in the last days, he spoke to us through Jesus Christ. Elijah had been a prophet for 20 to 30 years.

[4 : 40] Don't know exactly how long. During the reigns of Ahab and Ahasiah. And in this passage, we are looking at this morning, Elijah is coming to the end of his ministry.

And towards the end of 1 Kings, we read of God telling Elijah to anoint Elisha to succeed him as a prophet to Israel. The Lord said to him, go back the way you came and go to the desert of Damascus.

Going backwards and forwards. It's Elijah. And he's going there, going here, going... He was very fit. When you get there, anoint Haziël, king over Aram. Also anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king over Israel.

And anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abel Mahala, to succeed you as prophet. Now some people find it difficult to hand over responsibility to others.

They want to hold tightly to what they have and what they are. Not Elijah. Again, he obeyed God. So Yahweh had a plan for ensuring his prophetic word to not die out in Israel.

[5 : 44] Elijah was to anoint a new prophet to succeed him and to continue with telling forth the word of the Lord. And this is what he did. Next slide, please, Janine.

Elisha. Elisha. Meaning God will save me. I'll protect it. God is salvation. Oh my God is salvation. So there's sort of a clue there what Elisha was going to be about. He was going to somehow proclaim that God is salvation. And we immediately know more about Elisha than we ever did about Elijah.

For instance, he was the son of Shaphat from Abel Mahala, although we do not know how old he was. What we do know is that it was someone like Elijah who was a man of God and wanted to obey God.

And when Elijah chose him to follow him, he slaughtered his only means of livelihood, his oxen, and cooked them by burning his plow. So that is really with all your eggs in one basket to follow Elijah.

[6 : 48] And he became Elijah's servant. It sort of reminds me when disciples came to Jesus and said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.

Jesus replied, no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. Well, Elijah did not only not put his hand to the plow, he burnt it to make sure he could never put his hand to that plow again.

So how did Elijah physically choose Elisha? We don't read, actually, although God said anoint him, that he'd anointed him, but rather he threw through his cloak, mantle around him.

So he set out from there, this is Elijah, and found Elisha, son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were 12 oxen ahead of him, and he was with the 12.

Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. Can we have slide four, please? It's interesting. Threw his mantle.

[8 : 02] I mean, up there, it looks like he's placing it, but what we read is he sort of flung it on him, which is just interesting. But why was handing the mantle over significant?

Significant. The word mantle in Hebrew is *aderet*. Can we have slide five, please? And this means glory. It can mean a cloak, representing a sheepskin or thick cloak, signifying authority, splendor, or a prophetic office.

office. So in some way, this cloak, this mantle, which Elijah had, was a sign of his authority as a prophet, and he was passing his authority as a prophet to Elijah.

We have slide six, please. And this just shows us verses where it's clear that the mantle or the cloak was something that was associated with prophets.

So when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. On that day, the prophets will be ashamed every one of their visions when they prophesy. They will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive.

[9 : 20] But each of them will say, I am no prophet. I am a tiller of the soil for the land has seen my possession since my youth. And in Israel, I tore my garment and my mantle. So it suggests it says hairy mantle.

Mantles could be made with sheepskin, so it could have been sheepskin. Can we have slide seven, please? All right. Crowning the new monarch.

When Charles was crowned Charles I, he received an orb, swords, and a crown, but he also received vestments that he was clothed with, one of which was the imperial mantle, which is shown there.

This was made in 1821 for George IV and worn by King George V, King George VI, Queen Elizabeth II, and now Charles III. Symbolizes the passing of authority from one person to another, handing over the mantle.

passing the responsibility from Queen Elizabeth II now to King Charles III, passing the responsibility of being a prophet from Elijah to Elisha.

[10 : 34] And Elisha then followed Elijah. He followed him and it was clear that God was going to take Elijah from this earth. Now, Elijah, I don't know why, but Elijah didn't want Elisha to follow him to stay where he was.

But in an echo of Ruth telling Naomi, don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.

And Elisha said, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you. And so they traveled together to Bethel. Elijah then asked Elisha to stay at Bethel.

But Elisha made the same reply and they traveled together to Jericho. Elijah then asked Elisha to stay at Jericho. I'm not sure why he didn't want Elisha to go with him, but he didn't. But Elisha gave the same reply.

And so they traveled to Jordan. Having come to the river Jordan, Elijah rolled his mantle up and struck the river with it and it parted to Elijah and Elisha to cross it on the dry ground.

[11 : 43] Again, echoes of Moses and the Red Sea. Having got to the other side, Elijah asked Elisha, what can I do for you? Now, Elijah didn't hold back.

He said, I want a double portion of your spirit. I want double what you've got. Now, what Elijah had, that's quite a lot. We've seen people from the dead.

He fed people for weeks. He could run fast. He could bring fire down. So what Elijah was saying, I want some of that. I want a bit more of that, please. And Elijah said he would get that if he saw Elijah taken from him.

As they were walking, slide eight, please, a chariot of fire and horses separated them. But, despite what many people think, the chariot and horses didn't take Elijah to heaven.

Next slide, it was a whirlwind that took Elijah to heaven.

[12 : 47] so Elijah did not suffer death.

So, you lot are deep in biblical knowledge, aren't you? So, who was the only other person in the Bible who did not die? Right, yes, you're right.

Enoch walked faithfully with God and he was no more because God took him away. That's Genesis 5.24. But, specifically on that passage, it doesn't necessarily mean he didn't die.

It was no more. It can mean a lot of things. But, when we read in Hebrews, by faith, Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death.

So, Enoch apart from, Enoch was the only one apart from Elisha who didn't go through the gates of death. I just want to turn now to something that's sort of in a bit of a theme about Elijah, about this being an upside down world but we need to look at it in a different way.

[14 : 04] Can I have slide 10, please? We've seen this upside down world in Elijah Elijah, an unknown man from a village we now cannot find on the map.

God used ravens known as scavengers but became providers and the widow and her son would expect to be recipients of charity of those who gave it initially to Elijah.

We read in Acts 17, 6, these men talking about disciples who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here. The Greek here literally means these people have turned inhabitants upside down.

Not the upside down world up there of stranger things which is dark, ugly, inhabited by monsters and evil but the upside down world in a way which God looks at us.

why did God choose the Israelites? The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples for you were the fewest of all peoples but it was because the Lord loved you.

[15 : 23] It wasn't for anything that the Israelites had done, it was because the Lord loved them. And when Paul spoke to the Corinthians about the disciples there, brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.

Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many influential, not many were noble birth, but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may base before him. Slide 11 please.

Turning the world upside down is not a physical thing, although Jesus did turn the money lenders tables over. But it's a different way of looking at this world of ours.

Now I like crime mysteries. One of my current favourites is called Astrid Murder in Paris. It's a French series so it is subtitled.

[16:24] I was hoping to improve my O-level French but all I can understand is we may see civil play. However, I have learnt two words.

One of which is a swear word which I won't bother with you. But the other is decor which means okay.

I think decor is more finesse than okay isn't it? Decor. Now the heroine of this series is Astrid who is autistic. She cannot bear noise, crowds or anyone touching her.

However, she has an amazing ability to consider things from a different angle, to see things through different eyes which helps her to solve the mysteries. Now turning the world upside down for Christians is to look at the world through different eyes, with a different perspective.

For us who are Christians, we should see through the eyes of Jesus, look at the world with his perspective, how does Jesus see this world of ours? He sees it where love and compassion beat greed and power, where what is thought of as weak in this world is strong, where the wisdom of this world is not the wisdom of God, looking at things from a different perspective.

[17:50] In some ways, Elijah not only passed the mantle to Elijah, he also passed it to Jesus. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, he was to come.

It was prophesied that Elijah would come before the Messiah. And having had the mantle passed to Jesus, he then passed the mantle to us, his disciples.

my prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jesus has given us the mantle of being those who proclaim the love of God. Elijah in the sort of central part of his ministry put a choice to the Israelites how long will you waver between two opinions if the Lord is God follow him but if Baal is God follow him as today's people of God we need to put the choice to the world around us between Jesus and his salvation brought on the cross and the idols of this world that so many people follow Jesus appeared in heaven after his ascension and has given a progress report on all that has happened when he was on earth Moses is there and asks him well Jesus did you leave things in capable hands Jesus responds I did I left behind Mary and Martha and Peter and the other disciples Moses said what if they fail

Jesus said well I've established a church and filled it with the Holy Spirit and they will carry on and Moses said what if they fail Jesus replied I have no other plan Jesus left his church to further his work in this kingdom we are plan A there is no plan B so we all have and it's interesting that Anne spoke about community you know what I was going to say but that's exactly what I'm saying now we all have this part to play as a community goal someone said the church is not just a gathered community but a scattered community not just people who come together on a Sunday which is great it's people who go out into where we live where we work where our families are into the community and there we bring something of Jesus G.K. Chesterton said we do not want a church that will move with the world we want a church that will move the world slides 12 please and 13 so we are scattered like salt whether we are or as light bring a glimmer of Jesus where we work where we live with our families in the community when Jesus came to live on earth in all his godliness and all his humanity it was said that he cannot keep his presence secret so let us be a people upon whom the gracious hand of God rests in our lives with our family at our work in our community places like welcome space moonbeams knit and natter blue youth people where we are in the community and the community comes to us let us be people there that show something of the love of Christ and as we seek a new pastor as in some ways we are going to pass the mantle from this church from one pastor to another let us when he comes to us be a people who do not keep the presence of Jesus secret

[21:59] Amen