

Chariots of Fire

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2019

Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0 : 00] Our text this morning is 2 Kings chapter 2. It'd be great if you have that open with you. Because I want to talk to you about succession.

Succession. Succession is when one person takes over the office or the job of another person. And have you ever noticed that succession plans for famous historical figures never seem to be very inspiring?

They never seem to go very well. So in business, Steve Jobs was succeeded by Tim Cook. Meh. In politics, Winston Churchill was succeeded by Anthony Eden.

Meh. In music, the Beatles passed on the rock and roll baton to the Rolling Stones, so some say. Double meh. All of the latter are overshadowed by their predecessors, aren't they?

And here in our text this morning, we have a succession story. The passing of the mantle from one prophet to another. Elijah is the greatest prophet in Israel's history.

[1 : 12] So how will Elisha ever live up to those high expectations? However, succession in the kingdom of heaven is not the same as artistic, political, or business succession.

The Lord is in control and working all things for his glory and our good. And so here, the Lord confirms Elisha as the successor to Elijah's prophetic ministry in two big ways.

First of all, he grants Elisha's request for the prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit in verses 9 to 12. That's that question he says, what would you like?

And he says, I want a double portion of your spirit. A double portion isn't twice as much spirit. It's inheritance language. The firstborn son would receive a double portion. I want a full measure of the Holy Spirit, just like you had, Elijah.

And the Lord says, done. And second, the Lord equips Elisha to perform miracles, displaying God's power just as Elijah did. And we see that first in verses 13 to 14.

[2 : 23] And then if you want to read on into 2 Kings, chapter 4 to 8 unfolds all those miracles. And did you know that Elijah performs 8 miracles, but Elisha performs 16 miracles?

As if to say, I'm not done yet. Twice as many. So God, therefore, demonstrates beyond a doubt that he intends to continue his sovereign plan of salvation and judgment in Israel.

From generation to generation, the Lord God is faithful to his promises. Elisha's question in verse 14 is, where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?

And this passage gives the answer. I'm still here. I'm still the living God who withholds the rain for three years and then sends rain. I'm still the Lord who is calling, by grace, men and women and children in every generation to be my chosen people.

That righteous remnant who do not bow their knee to the false gods. But there's also another level of significance to this story.

[3 : 34] Perhaps you're still wondering why Elijah would get carried up to heaven in this whirlwind with a fiery chariot escort.

Well, it's certainly not just for theatrics. It's not a retirement gift. It's not a sort of Rolex watch from his employer for 40 years of loyalty.

Yes, it is partly for Elisha's sake that he would get to see this as confirmation of his prophetic office. But even much more than that, it is for our sake. It is for your sake. And let me explain that. To understand what I mean, we need to step back from 2 Kings.

And we need to, for a moment, look at Elijah's role as it unfolds in the rest of the Old Testament scriptures. Okay, so Elijah is a 9th century prophet.

[4 : 30] A 9th century over here. Sometime in the 5th century, the prophet Malachi wrote the last of the prophetic Old Testament books. And through Malachi, the Lord God encouraged his struggling people with an image of the great prophet Elijah.

So listen to this from Malachi chapter 4. This is the Lord speaking. See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

And he will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents. God says, get ready. Get ready. Someone like Elijah is coming soon.

And he will come to continue an Elijah-like ministry of calling you to repentance and faith. And he's also coming, even bigger than that, he is coming to prepare the way for my Messiah, the rescuer you've been waiting for.

So, what begins as a seed of anticipation in 2 Kings, it then gets watered by the prophet Malachi with the prophetic imagination. And then it finally bursts forth 400 years later, when a new Israelite prophet bursts onto the scene.

[5 : 46] What's his name? His name is John the Baptist. And how do the New Testament gospel writers describe John? Listen to Luke, writing in chapter 1, verse 17.

And he, John, will go on before the Lord in the spirit and the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

There's that Malachi language again. A people prepared for the Lord's Messiah, Jesus Christ. And for his entire adult life, John did exactly that.

He faithfully called people to prepare for the greater one who was coming. Repent, he said, for the kingdom of God is at hand. I baptize you with water, but there is one coming who will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Spirit.

And just like Elijah, John the Baptist wasn't afraid to stand up to power. So Matthew 14 tells us how John called out King Herod for sleeping with his brother's wife.

[6 : 53] And how that, in the end, it cost him his head. So is this where the legacy of Elijah's ministry abruptly ends?

Absolutely not. No. Listen to Jesus explaining the final and most significant fulfillment of Elijah's legacy. The fulfillment that young Peter already alluded to.

Matthew 17. The disciples asked Jesus, Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first before the Messiah?

And Jesus replied, To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come.

And they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way, the Son of Man, Jesus, is going to suffer at their hands. And then the disciples understood he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

[7 : 57] This is very important. Jesus says that the final and most significant fulfillment of Elijah's ministry is through his suffering.

It's through his suffering. Throughout our entire series exploring the days of Elijah, we've repeatedly seen Elijah suffer for his faithfulness to God's Word.

Elijah suffered exile, loneliness, spiritual depression. Not to mention he feared for his life almost every day. Elijah urged Israel to repent, and yet his message was ultimately rejected.

In the very same way, John the Baptist ministered in the desert on the fringes of society. He called Israel to repent and prepare for the kingdom of God.

And yet his message was ultimately rejected by the religious and the political powers. He found himself depressed and alone in prison until he was finally executed.

[8 : 57] And Jesus says in the very same way as Elijah and as John the Baptist, he will also suffer at the hands of religious and political leaders.

In other words, Elijah and John the Baptist prepare us for the suffering Messiah. Elijah is rejected. John is rejected. Jesus is rejected.

Jesus the Messiah, he suffered, he died, and he was buried. But the story doesn't end there.

And here are the Apostle Peter's words announcing Jesus' great vindication and victory on the cross. From Acts chapter 2, this is Peter preaching for the first time. He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus, God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured this out on you yourselves, what you are seeing and hearing.

[10 : 03] And then a little later on, the crowds heard this and they were cut to the heart. And they turned to Peter and they said to the rest of the apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is for you and for your children, for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself. Where have we heard that before? Malachi chapter 4.

Here at last is the true fulfillment of Elijah's humble ministry. Well, succession is a messy business. In business, in the church, even in your families, it's a messy business. But God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, he never retires.

He lovingly, patiently offers new life in Jesus' name to each fresh generation to hear and receive.

The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord, our God, calls to himself.

[11 : 26] So come and see. Come and see for yourself, friends. Amen.