

# The Bones of Elisha

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want to spend some time this evening looking at that first passage that we read together in the Old Testament, 2 Kings chapter 13. But I hope that as we do so that we'll see how it relates to the New Testament and particularly to Jesus and particularly to the life that God brings us tonight in the death of Jesus.

And so we're going to turn to 2 Kings chapter 13 and we're going to read from verse 20. So Elisha died and they buried him.

Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha.

And as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.

You're probably wondering why I'm choosing a passage like this, a peculiar passage, an obscure passage in the Old Testament to bring to you this evening.

[ 1 : 16 ] Well, there are two reasons that come to my mind before doing anything else. First of all, because it's not for us to decide what's obscure. I know that as far as our understanding and our recognition is concerned, this passage may be one of the lesser known parts of the Bible.

But that doesn't mean that it's not God's Word. And that doesn't mean that it's not relevant even to us tonight. Every part of the Bible is relevant. There is none of the Bible that cannot teach us something about God and can't teach us something about ourselves.

And in this case, cannot teach us something about the way which God has chosen for us to be saved and to be right with him. And that's where we're going to focus this evening in a few moments time.

We don't have any right to discard the Bible just according to the parts that we happen to like and we happen not to like or happen to be familiar to us or otherwise.

And for this reason, every part of the Bible is to be preached. Every part. There isn't a single chapter in the Bible that cannot be taken and cannot be explained in some way that is both instructive and challenging and life-giving.

[ 2 : 31 ] The Bible is God's living Word. Sometimes it's in these very obscure passages that we get something and that we learn something that we wouldn't have learned otherwise.

And so it's important to preach and to understand the breadth of Scripture and to try and to plumb its depths and try and appreciate what the significance of these passages.

Now, I can't help but being struck by this little story. I remember the first time I was struck by it some years ago. I remember somebody in the Free Church College, one of our professors, told us, he advised us as ministers that we were to preach what strikes you.

What strikes you. Now, that doesn't mean that we as ministers take our favorite passages of the Bible and only preach them. But as we read through the Bible, then we can expect things to strike us.

Again, it's the living Word of God. And I can't help being struck by this passage for several reasons. First reason I'm struck by this passage because it seems to sum up how God works to bring life out of death.

[ 3 : 44 ] If we can boil it all the way down to its simplest, I think I was going to make up one sentence that sums up this little story. It's God's way of bringing life out of death and destruction.

If you think about it, it's not the only place where God brings life out of death. You think about all the stories in the Bible, all the narratives and passages of the Bible in which we find the same message.

And God is doing exactly the same thing out of the flood. An event that caused death and destruction throughout the whole world. God brings Noah, life, his family, and a new beginning

altogether.

If you go on to Isaac and his sacrifice, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Isaac, we're told, was as good as dead. And yet out of that situation, God brings life.

He brings new discovery to Abraham of what and who God is. If you read the book of Judges, Once again, there seems to be little more than death and destruction and misery and war and suffering in the book of Judges.

[ 4 : 54 ] And yet all the time, God is working. All that misery was brought about by the foolishness of the men and the women we find in the book of Judges. And yet, despite all of that, God was working to bring his own life into Israel once again.

And to breathe new life into his people. There was no greater emblem of despair in the pages of the Bible than what we find at Calvary.

Is there any place in the whole of the Bible where we find death staring us in the face in all its suffering and all its horror? And yet this was the very place that God chose to bring life for us, for you and me this evening.

There can be only one way of being right with God. And that's by coming to Calvary. You have to go through Calvary, that place of misery and suffering and destruction and death.

And when you look at your own life in the light of God's word, without God's word, without God's message of salvation, the wages of sin is death. Each one of us are just simply living.

[ 6 : 02 ] We're living the living dead. That's all we are. But because of Jesus Christ, he has come into the world and said, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

And he that lives and believes in me shall never die. There is no greater message in all the world than that. He that lives and believes in me shall never die. Think about that this evening.

Especially if you're not a believer. Think about that. He that lives and believes in me shall never die.

John chapter 11. And then, of course, the final promise that's in the Bible is that when we all die, and we will all die, one day, we'll all be, our bodies will be in the grave.

And yet, out of that, God will bring life. One day, Jesus will come again. The dead in Christ shall rise. That's where we read in John chapter 5. A day will come when the dead will, and those who are in the tombs, will hear the voice of the Son of God and rise to newness of life, to eternal life, to sin-free life, to what Jesus has promised and prepared for his people.

That's the promise. God brings life out of death. Now, in this passage, we're told two things. We're told, first of all, that Elisha died, verse 20, Elisha died and they buried him.

[ 7 : 27 ] I don't want to go rushing on to the next part without looking at this very simple statement. Because it seems to me that, again, you could pass it by very easily without thinking about it because you might just shrug your shoulders and say, well, of course he died.

Everyone in the Bible died. But that's the point. Everyone in the Bible didn't die. There were two people in the Bible that didn't die. Particularly his, one of them was his predecessor, Elijah.

And what's interesting about this is, if you make a comparison between this little verse and the verse way back at the beginning of 2 Kings, that tells us, that gives this long, glorious explanation about how Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind in chariots, in a chariot of fire.

What a contrast. And one's led, one may be led to conclude that because there's this stark contrast, Elijah on the one hand, and this glorious removal by God himself in the chariot of fire, and here is Elisha, and he died and they buried him.

How many words is that? Half a dozen words. He died and they buried him. That was it. Then surely does that not imply that there was something greater about Elijah than about Elisha?

[ 8 : 49 ] That he deserved something more than Elisha did. Where did Elisha get it wrong? And yet, whilst there is this stark contrast between the way in which Elijah was taken up to heaven, removed from this earth in glory, and this, the death of Elisha just died and was buried, there's a very real, in the greatest possible sense, they're both the same.

The only difference was that for some peculiar reason, God chose to remove Elijah without him dying. But everything else is the same.

And tonight, Elijah and Elisha are both in the same place. And they are both near to God, in God's presence. They are both in heaven, with Jesus Christ, which is better by far.

If God had chosen two different ways to bring them there, that's up to him. That's his choice. He's sovereign. Let him do what's good in his own sight. The real issue is, will we be there?

That's the real issue. Whether we get there by a chariot of fire, or whether we get there by the natural, normal process of death, and our souls being taken up to Jesus to be with him, then it really doesn't matter, does it?

[10:14] That's up to God. That's his choice. But what really matters is, are we ready for it? And make no mistake, Elisha was ready for that day when he died.

And they buried him. So there's this amazing contrast, isn't there, between himself and his predecessor. And whilst there is a contrast, there is yet a similarity.

But it's also strange in this way also. Very often in the Bible, when a great figure, when a great person in Israel died, we read this, And all Israel mourned for him.

Very often they would set up a period of mourning for that great man who died. A leader, a judge, or a king. All Israel mourned for him. We don't read that here, do we?

It's almost like a kind of incidental, isn't it? It's almost like a kind of, just a detail. Elisha died, and they buried him. And I wonder why there's no mention of any kind of mourning.

[11:23] Well, I believe it's because they probably didn't mourn for him. And the reason they didn't mourn for him was because they had forgotten him. Another generation had grown up.

And just like every new generation, they forgot the old. And Elisha was no exception. This is really extraordinary, isn't it? Because when you go back over the life of Elisha, he was an extraordinary man.

The waters of Jordan divided into two on his command. He had the full authority of the Lord, just as his predecessor had Elijah.

The waters of Jericho, which had been bitter, were healed and made sweet through his agency.

The wife of one of the sons of the prophets.

He raised the son of the Shunammite widow. You remember how the Shunammite widow had one son. And how he died subsequently. And how she went for him.

[12:25] She went personally for him. She took him back to our home. And he went upstairs to the room where the son was lying dead in the bed. And he laid himself on top of the boy and prayed. And the boy came back to life.

And I could mention other incidences and events that took place. Miraculous events that took place through the agency of Elisha. Elisha was a great man in the scriptures.

And did great things. And people heard about it. He didn't do it in secret. People knew who he was. So isn't it extraordinary, isn't it, that when he died, they buried him.

And there's no mention after his death. And isn't it a sad indictment on Israel? That they had turned away from him because they had turned away from the Lord.

That's the bottom line. And the reason they didn't mourn for him is because they simply had forgotten who he stood for. And who he represented in the world.

[13:27] And that's what happens when we turn our hearts away from the Lord. And yet, Elisha's death is not the last word.

It appeared that sometime afterwards, I don't know how long after Elisha died, that this happened between verse 20 and verse 21. It appeared that they were continuously being attacked by the Moabites, who were a neighboring country.

They used to invade the land in the spring of the year. And so at any given moment, the people of Israel could be attacked by the Moabites. And presumably, they could be killed. There could be bloodshed.

There could be all kinds of awful things happening. And so they had to be on their guard. And it appears that as the funeral of this particular individual, he's unnamed, was taking place, there was a marauding band.

All of a sudden, appeared out of nowhere and was seen. And the man hurriedly was thrown into another grave, a nearby grave, the closest grave that they could find.

[14:29] And what we read is quite extraordinary. As soon as the man touched, the body of the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet. He came back to life again in touching the bones of Elisha.

I'm not quite sure whether what was it that gave the bigger fright to the funeral party, whether it was the marauding bands of the Moabites, or whether it was the fact that this man rose and stood on his feet again.

I would have hoped that it would be the latter. And I would have hoped that this would be the means of them turning back to the Lord. But that's a side issue. We don't even know what happened there. I have no hesitation in believing this, by the way.

You know, there are people who read passages like this in the Bible and they try and explain it away as fable and myth. And they try and say, well, it's just something that was passed on. It arose between fathers and sons and their children as they passed stories on from one generation to another. But I have no problem in believing this at all.

[ 15 : 30 ] If I'm going to throw out something like this, well, I might as well throw out everything else that happened to Elisha as well. And if you're going to do that, you might as well throw out everything that happened with Elijah. And if you're going to do that, you might as well throw out everything miraculous that happens.

And if you're going to throw out everything miraculous that happens in the Bible, then why stop there? Why believe in Jesus? Why believe that he was the Son of God? Why believe that God created the earth? Why believe in God at all?

Why believe in God at all?

He was just walking on shallow water. Other people try and say, well, it was a vision or a dream or whatever it was. But the Bible says, the narrative says, he came to them walking on the water. Matthew's got it. Mark's got it. John's got it. Three Gospels. And even if it wasn't three Gospels, even if it was only one Gospel, it's given to us in the plain sense of the passage.

[ 16 : 47 ] He came to them walking on the water. You see, it's one or the other. You either believe the Bible or you don't. You either believe in it or you believe in the Bible, then you're not going to be very popular in a disbelieving world, an atheistic world.

You're going to be going into your work and somebody's going to ask you, do you ever read the Bible? He's going to say, well, yeah, actually I have. You don't really believe. I mean, you don't actually believe it, do you? Then you're going to have to say, well, actually I do.

Well, that's when life begins to get difficult. But that's the way it is. If the Lord suffered the ridicule of the masses in his day, if they called for his blood, if they laughed and mocked him because he said he was the Son of God, then why should they not laugh at you and me today?

Why should we not be willing to be fools for Christ's sake? I often hear the question, why is the gospel not making more of an impact on the world in which we live?

Perhaps one reason is because we're not prepared to be fools for Christ's sake. As soon as you get into a conversation, you begin to say people kind of look at you as if you had horns coming out your head, as if you had come from another planet.

[ 18 : 15 ] That's the kind of world we live. Fifty years ago, more people believed the Bible. It wasn't so strange for someone to believe like we do this evening. But it's getting more and more difficult because less and less people are prepared to stand for Jesus.

But we have to believe tonight that as we stand for the truth, that's what matters. It doesn't matter whether we're in the minority. What matters is whether we believe the truth.

And even if it sounds ridiculous to an unbelieving world, then what matters is it's the truth. And who knows but that your stand, which initially gets you into all kinds of ridiculous situations, is going to be the means that God is going to use to bring someone to know himself.

Many is a time that has happened. And many is a person who's been brought to a saving relationship to Jesus through the conversation that has started in that way. Is that not the case?

So, I didn't mean to say all that. Who knows? Who needs to hear that this evening? I think we all need to hear that this evening because that's one of the reactions that you find in people who read a story like this.

[ 19 : 31 ] I have no hesitation whatsoever because I don't... If God is able to raise the woman, the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the woman of Nain, and so on, then he's able to raise a man like this in the Old Testament.

But it's also an event in which God is teaching us. Miracles don't just happen for no reason. They're God's way of saying something.

God was saying something to Israel through the people who were burying this man who saw him coming to life again. But he's also saying something to ourselves. What is he saying?

Well, just let me say three things very, very briefly before we finish this evening. What is God saying to us? I hope through this passage as we compare it with other chapters in the Bible.

But one thing, I believe that he is stamping his seal of approval on the life of Elisha. Can you imagine what this band of men would have done as they saw the body of their dead friend being raised to life again and as they spoke to him and as he spoke to them and so on?

[ 20 : 47 ] Can you imagine what would have happened? They wouldn't have kept that secret at all. They would have gone. They would have gone back and spread the word. Of course, there was no mass media in those days. The word would have spread.

One person telling another. That other person telling the next person. And it would have gone. And then they would have discovered whose bones. They would have discovered that it was in the grave of Elisha that this man had been thrown.

The body had been thrown. And then they would have looked back. They would have discovered who Elisha was. And they would have resurrected, if you'll pardon that word, but that's what they would have done.

They would have resurrected the memory that they all had of Elisha. And once again, they would go over his life. They would read what was written about him. They would find out what he had done and how God had used him mightily to do great things in Israel.

And they would have, hopefully, who knows, returned to the Lord. Or some of them, anyway.

[ 21 : 46 ] You know, there were times of great revival in the Old Testament. There were times of great revival, for example, in Hezekiah, the great king of Judah, where, once again, it appears that the whole land of Judah came in one voice to worship and to serve God.

But there are other times of revival in the Old Testament as well. They're maybe not so obvious. We were looking at one on Thursday night in the Gallic prayer meeting, and that was when Samuel, 20 years he spent going from town to town, village to village, street to street, preaching all the time, regularly from day to day.

And it was only after 20 years that people began to seek the Lord again. That's what we read.

The hearts of the people began to seek the Lord. And there was this great, massive gathering when they all en masse returned to the Lord.

Who knows? Maybe that's what happened as a result of this man rising from the dead and as a result of the people rediscovering what Elisha had done in the name of the Lord.

[ 22 : 59 ] The fact is that Elisha, and here's the point this evening, Elisha's work and his words did not die with him. His work was going to be remembered and was going to have a profound effect way beyond his death.

You know, the Lord says to us tonight, if we are his, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord for their works follow them.

their works. What does that mean? Their works follow them. Well, it means precisely this, that God still had something for Elisha to do even though he was dead.

Strange, isn't it? But that's a fact. God had a purpose for even the bones of Elisha. And who knows he may have a purpose for us even years after we've left this world.

It's happened before, it's happened all the time. It continues to happen today. Because in a modern world where there are all kinds of means of recording, writing, record keeping, we live in an information-laden world in which it's possible for people to discover things they would never have been able to discover in the past when that information wasn't available.

[ 24 : 27 ] Think, for example, of what used to be called tape ministries. It's now CD ministries and it's now internet ministries. There are thousands of ministries all over the world that are put, that are broadcast by way of the internet and these continue long after the preacher has died.

you think tonight of a world that is alive with cyberspace.

God is using that and God is blessing those means. I know that they can be put to all kinds of sinful means, but they can also be used by the Lord in a tremendous way.

I know people who were converted through listening to tapes of preaching where the person who was preaching had died decades before and the same happens today.

You don't know how your service in this world is going to affect the people who you come across and perhaps people in the future are going to be blessed by something that you've started or that you've done or some legacy that you have left to the glory of God.

[ 25 : 51 ] God is able to take your little contribution to this gospel, whatever that is, and he is able to bless it in a way that goes beyond whatever you expected.

Little did Elisha know if you had asked him that this kind of thing would have happened, he probably would have found it difficult to believe. Well, maybe not because he was a man of great faith, but it's not the kind of thing that he would have expected to happen, I'm sure, and yet that's what God does with a person who's faithful to him.

Many's apparent this evening is praying for their children and living a consistent life, Christian life, in front of their children in the longing that their children will come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. They may never see it, they may never see it, they might be dead for years before that child at some later point in his or her life will remember, by the grace of God, that child will remember what their parents have taught them and it will come to them in such a massive force.

Only God is able to bring that to pass, but he does, he's able to bless in ways that you and I don't expect. There are tales, stories of missionaries who have spent years on the mission field this evening and who lived and died, some of them in hopelessness, not knowing and not having seen anything of what their work achieved.

[ 27 : 33 ] I'm thinking of one man called Hans Edje who worked in Greenland and this is what he had to say, I have labored in vain, he said. I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain.

That's the way many of us feel at times and I believe people can go to their death with that on their lips, with that kind of feeling on their lips and yet it's not true that we labor in vain.

Paul tells us, be steadfast, unmovable, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the law. Whatever that labor is, whether it's preaching the gospel or whether it's witnessing by the way we live or by the way in which we talk or by the way in which we speak to others and by living consistent examples of the way a Christian ought to live.

That's the way, that's what God wants. And by our involvement and our contribution to the gospel in so many different ways. You think of our work here in terms of our young people, for example, campaigners.

Who knows what effect the role models which our young people have seen in their leaders, how they have influenced and shaped and molded their lives.

[ 28 : 50 ] And perhaps some of them are gone. They are gone. I know that. Continue to be and God continues to bless that work for years afterwards.

ones. So, we need not despair. Just because we never see, or because perhaps we see little of the fruit of what we have done.

Elisha lived in a time when Israel was very resistant to the gospel. It wasn't quite as bad as it was in the days of Elijah.

Elijah. But they were pretty resistant to what he had to say. And that came from the top downwards, from the king downwards. And so, it must have been a very discouraging life for him to be faithful to God all the time knowing that people weren't listening.

You know, but that is the way the world is. It was the same in Isaiah's day. Who has believed our report? So, why are we surprised that people don't listen to the gospel?

[ 29 : 56 ] We shouldn't be surprised at all. That is the heart of man, heart of men and women, resistant. Because the Bible tells us the God of this world has blinded the eyes of unbelievers.

But yet, God is working. And he is taking what we do for him and he is using it and bringing life out of it.

And it may happen long after we are gone. Now, I was going to say something else, but time has gone. Let's go on to the third thing and just spend five minutes or so before we close.

I believe that there is a prophetic element in this story as well. What do I mean by that? Well, something that looked forward into the future.

That's what God was always doing in the pages of the Old Testament, in the life of the Old Testament believers. They're always looking forward into the future as to what God was going to do and particularly looking forward to the coming of Jesus Christ.

[ 31 : 01 ] Now, Elisha was a prophet and a prophet was someone who represented God in the world. He stood on behalf of God and he spoke on behalf of God.

the words that he spoke to the people of Israel were God's words. So, as people listened to the prophet, they weren't listening to him, they were listening to what God was telling them.

So, he spoke with authority. You could say that a prophet, a true prophet like Elisha, was God's word in the flesh.

You could say that, you could describe him as that. God's representative on earth to announce to the people of God what God wanted for them and to bring the Lord's word to them.

Now, look at what happened. This representative died. However, as a result of his death, a dead man came to life again.

[ 32 : 03 ] What does that remind you of? Well, let's open up the story a little bit even further. Let's put it this way. If Elisha had not died, this man, whoever he was, unnamed, stranger, who had died and who came to life again, if Elisha had not died and if his bones had not been placed in the grave, then this unknown dead man would not have come to life again.

It was only and exclusively by coming into contact with Elisha in his death that the man came to life again.

Now, what does that remind you all? Does it not remind you of the death and what the death produces? The life that Jesus produces through his death and the life that many of us in here already have and the life that we could have and will have only as we come into contact with Jesus and his death by faith.

When Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life, what did he mean? He meant, I am the eternal life. I am the new life, the new life that only God can give you in which you are restored and forgiven and raised to newness of life once again in which God gives you a new beginning, a new beginning in which you live as one of his people.

But we can only have that life by coming into contact, by looking at Jesus and his death, by trusting, by coming into that contact, by, if I can put it this way, by touching Jesus in his death because his death then becomes the payment for our sin as we come to him and as we look to him and as we trust in him and as we surrender all to him in his death.

[ 34 : 07 ] See, some people believe that a Christian is someone who follows the teaching of Jesus and that's what's important about Jesus. That's not what the Bible says.

It is the death of Jesus that brings life to a lost world, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So do we not this evening have a picture, albeit a strange and obscure picture, but nevertheless a real picture of what God can do and what God does do and what God has done and what God will do as we come and as we touch and as we trust in Jesus, the Lamb of God that was slain for us at Calvary.

I suppose the great difference is that Elisha died and his bones are still there today, but Jesus died and rose again from the grave as the final decisive proof that he is the way and the truth and the life and that as we come to God through him tonight, he will give us that life and you will be just as raised, even more so with newness of life than this unknown stranger who came back to life again. You see, that's what being a Christian is. It's not just turning over a new leaf. It's not just joining an organization. It's not just paying lip service and doing all the right things and making all the right moves.

[ 36 : 03 ] That's not what being a Christian is at all. Neither is it just trying our best to be as faithful and as diligent as we possibly can. That's not what being a Christian is at all. A Christian is a person who is new, who has been born again, who has been raised.

As Jesus says, an hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear, those who hear, will live.

Are you hearing tonight? Are you listening to the voice of God drawing you and speaking to you and inviting you and taking you to himself?

I hope so this evening, and may God's word speak to all of us and challenge us as we listen to it. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, once again, we rejoice at the gospel, and we rejoice in which the gospel is made clear to us, even in the Old Testament, and even in places in the Old Testament where we least expect to find it.

We ask, Lord, that you will come to us in great blessing this evening and speak to us and show us Jesus as never before. Reveal him to us in all his glory and in your own power, draw us, each one of us, to trust and to obey.

[ 37 : 33 ] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.