

Lessons From Elijah

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together to that chapter that we read together. Taking up the reading at verse 11, 2 Kings chapter 2 and verse 11.

And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, Elijah and Elisha.

And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. The Bible tells us that the reason we die is because of sin.

The Apostle Paul made that very clear in Romans chapter 5. And when he said that it was by one man that sin came into the world and death through sin.

And that one man was Adam. When he fell, when he rebelled against God. The result was that sin came into the world, entered into the world, penetrated the human race.

[1 : 14] And accompanying sin was death. So there's absolutely no question, according to the Bible, as to the explanation about death. What God has to say about death is that he has overcome it.

The gospel is all about God overcoming death. And promising that those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ will never die.

These are his words. I am the resurrection and the life. He that follows me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And he that believes and lives in me shall never die.

There are two evidences in the Bible of those who never died, who did not experience death. And I believe that these two men are given to us as examples of God's faithfulness in keeping his promise.

In other words, we can go back to these Old Testament men. And we can be absolutely sure that God keeps his promise that those who believe in Jesus will never die.

[2 : 28] That's not to say that death will not come to them in a natural sense. Yet, as we're going to see in the case of Elijah, there is a similarity between his experience and whatever ours will be.

There were two men who didn't die. One of them was Enoch, way back in Genesis. And the other one was the man that we are reading about here. He was a prophet, one of the most well-known prophets that we read about in the Old Testament.

He was raised up by God for a particular reason. There was a notoriously wicked king who had attracted the people of Israel and turned their hearts to worship other gods.

And at times of crisis, God raises up particular individuals. And that's what he did in the case of Elijah. There are many, many chapters given over to him.

And he was given particular power to demonstrate the reality and the truth and the sovereignty of God in Israel. He was also a man like ourselves.

[3 : 35] The New Testament tells us that Elijah was a sinner. He was weak. He was frail, like ourselves, subject to temptation. There are a number of incidents which prove this to us.

And this makes him approachable. It means that we are able to know that even someone great like Elijah was full of weaknesses like we are.

But whilst his death or his passing was hugely different and unique, what I want us to see today is that there is something of the death of every believer in the passing of Elijah.

Even though Elijah never experienced death and he was taken straight to be with the Lord in a whirlwind, as we read about in this chapter.

Even though that is an entirely unique experience. Yet, what I want us to see this morning is that there is a similarity between his experience and the experience that every Christian person, every person who dies in the Lord will have or has had and that is promised to them.

[4 : 56] And I want us to see that in seven very brief ways. I want us to see seven things about the similarity between Elijah and every believer.

Firstly, I want us to see that our death is planned by God. Now, right away you might say, well, I didn't come here to think about death.

This is a Sunday morning. It's the first day of the week. I came here to be strengthened. I came here to be encouraged. And all we have is the subject of death. Why do we have to think of all things? Why do we have to think about death?

Now, that highlights to me the great difference between the way that an unbeliever thinks and the way that a Christian thinks.

Because a Christian is able to look at death straight in the face. And a Christian is able to say, oh, death, where is your sting? Oh, grave, where is your victory?

[5 : 54] And a Christian, a person who trusts in Jesus, is able to go back to the death of Jesus as the greatest event that ever took place.

Now, no one else is able to say that. No one except the Christian is able to say the greatest event that ever took place in the history of humankind was a death.

Only someone who loves and who understands what the death of Jesus produced for us is able to say the greatest event, the most precious thing that ever happened was when the Son of God himself, when he died for me and gave himself for me.

But a Christian is also able to say that because Jesus died and rose again, so I know I have his word that when I die, I too will rise again and go forever to be with the Lord.

So, we make no apology this morning on this new Sunday morning to speak on the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

[7 : 03] I make no apology for speaking about death because God has turned death from what it was into what it now is for a Christian, which is the doorway into heaven itself.

Let's look at those seven things. First of all, I want us to see our death is planned by God. If ever there was an example of how death is planned and purposed by God, it is this chapter 2 of 2 Kings. God knew exactly what was going to happen to Elijah. His work had now come to an end. His time in this world had now come to an end.

You and I know that the same is true for ourselves. God will not bring us to that point of death until our time, the time that he has allotted for us in this world.

He knows the day of our birth and he knows the day of our death. And God, he says in Hebrews, Here is an example of how God in his sovereignty has planned the beginning and the end.

[8 : 20] And here is how God brought it to pass. Elijah did not leave this world one moment too soon and did not leave one moment too late.

It is the same with ourselves. We talk about bad luck and good luck in the world. There is no such thing with a Christian. There is no such thing as being in the wrong time at the wrong place. Every, every event, including the day that we die, the moment that we die, is planned by God. And here is a great example of that. When the Lord, verse 1, was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind.

You see, for someone who doesn't trust in Jesus, death is something that just happens. For someone who does trust in Jesus, death is something that God does.

And he does in his mercy and in his power and in his providence to us. So that's the first thing. The second thing I want us to see from this chapter is this.

[9 : 25] We are to live every day as if it was our last. Here is an example of someone who knew that this very day that God was going to take them.

And here is an example of someone else, Elisha, who knew that this very day God was going to take Elijah. And that must have given Elisha a very solemn thought.

And I hope it gives ourselves today a solemn thought. Because how would we live if we knew that today was going to be our last?

You see, there's something within us. I don't know how much of it is just our own human nature. Or how much of it is just our own complacency. That seems to assume that we've got days and months and years ahead of us.

We plan and we make all these arrangements for the coming week and for the coming month. And of course there's some things you have to do. But isn't it true that we make these arrangements without ever giving a second thought to the possibility, I might not be here tomorrow.

[10:36] I might not be here tonight. And yet we plan and we make arrangements for all of these things. Now here's an example of a man who knew that he was going to die that very day.

Here is a man who lived not as if today was his last. But he lived in the knowledge, in the certainty that this was to be his last day.

Is it not wise for us to remember the same thing? Is it not wise for us to get up in the morning and at the very least to say, if it's God's will, I will do this and that.

That's what the Lord tells us to do. That's what James tells us to do in the New Testament. If it's God's will, I will make this arrangement or that arrangement. I will plan this or that. But it may not be God's will because today may be.

Are we ready? Are we ready? Are we waiting for God to come because he could come at an hour or a day when we least expect him? That's what the Bible tells us.

[11:42] And it's wise to be ready. I want to ask anyone this morning who isn't a follower of Jesus. Is it not time to be ready?

Is it not time here and now to become right with God? And a person can become ready to die in a moment of time.

You can walk out that door today, and I'm not exaggerating, having been made right with God by coming to trust in him in your own heart, by opening up your own heart to Jesus, by coming to confess your sin and asking him to be your savior.

And he tells us that if we call on the name of the Lord, we shall be saved. That's his promise. Third thing that this chapter teaches us is that we're to make the most of people while we have them with us in this world.

Turning our attention to Elisha, he knew that this was the last day that he was going to have Elijah. He looked up to Elijah tremendously. Elijah was his mentor.

[12:56] Elijah had been a tremendous example of godliness and goodness in the world and a person whom God had raised up for a specific purpose, as I said before.

Elisha had come to love Elijah and respect him very greatly. And now this was to be his last day with him in the world. Is it not true also that we fail to appreciate and to treasure the people that God has given to be with us in this world and we don't know what we have or who we have until they're gone?

Isn't that a solemn thought? But isn't that a true thought? The people who are with us in this world are people who, by God's providence, he has given to be with us in this world to be of friends, of family members, and don't we fall out too quickly?

Don't we get too easily annoyed? Don't we get too easily irritated and say things that we don't mean? Say things that are hurtful and harmful to them, and we don't give a second thought to the fact that in a few moments' time that person, that very person, might be taken away from us, or in a few days' time.

Is it not the case that we fail to appreciate, to treasure, and to thank God for the people that God has given to be with us in this world?

[14:23] Even those who we might, and we always find some people easier to get on with than others, but even those who we find harder to get on with in this world, they are still, and particularly in a Christian context, the Bible tells us that God has gathered his people.

You read 1 Corinthians chapter 12 or 11, and it tells us how we have no right to say of one another, I don't need you.

Because God has put us all together, as families and as a congregation, and as a fellowship of God's people. Is it not our great privilege to do everything that we can to treasure the time that we have, just like Elisha treasured the time that he had, the moments that he had left with Elijah in this world?

It would make a huge difference, isn't it? Wouldn't it if we knew that the person that we were acquainted with in this world was to be taken from us? It would make a huge difference.

And so I think we should take a note out of this chapter. The fourth thing I want us to notice in this chapter is this, that death for the Christian is a crossing over from one place to another.

[15:45] I want us to see particularly how this is put in the chapter. The two of them, Elisha and Elijah, they were going from one side of the Jordan to the other. And that was symbolic of what death is.

On one side, on the first side of the Jordan, was the place of life in this world, as it were. Crossing the Jordan was crossing from, as it were, from this life to the next life.

And that was always what the river Jordan symbolized to the people of Israel. If you go back to when God promised his people Israel that they would one day inherit the promised land of Canaan, the day they inherited that land was the day that they crossed, en masse, under the leadership of Joshua, from one side of the Jordan to the other.

And that's always been regarded as a symbol of what God has promised his people in this world, that one day they too will cross the Jordan River, as it were, of death, and cross from this life to another.

And what a difference it was for the people of Israel to leave behind a life full of difficulty and hardship and sorrow in the wilderness, of wandering in the wilderness, into a life where their future was secured.

[17:10] I perhaps shouldn't say that. Their future was always secured. But into a life that was completely different. Now they were able to take hold of everything God had promised in all its greatness and in all its abundance.

And God has promised the same thing for his people as well. He has promised, I have not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him. Death is a crossing over from one side to the other. I go, said Jesus, to prepare a place for you so that I may come and receive you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also.

For the apostle Paul, it was the same. To be with Christ, he said, is better by far. For him, it was a crossing over from one side to the other.

The fifth thing I want us to notice in this chapter is that death for Elijah was a separation between family and friends.

[18:14] Verse 11, as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated.

Notice this, separated the two of them. Separated the two of them. You know, once we're able to talk so confidently about God's purposes in bringing us from this life to the next life, that does not mean that for those who are left behind after someone is taken from this world, it is easy.

It isn't easy. It never is easy to cope with the loss of someone who has meant so much to you in this world and perhaps has been with you for years and decades in this world and has loved you and you have loved them and you know that that love has been created by the Lord in your heart for them.

There's a huge bond that is created in this world, particularly in the family. Mothers and fathers, children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives.

These are all bonds that have been created and the only thing that breaks that bond is death itself and the only thing that ought to break that bond is death itself.

[19:42] But it's a bond that we don't just talk about. It's a real bond in which we depend upon one another. It's amazing, isn't it, how much we depend upon people in this world, the people that God has put into this world to be our husbands or our wives or our brothers and sisters, our children.

It is a real bond. And when death comes and breaks that bond, it is absolutely tragic. It is catastrophic for the life of the person who is left behind.

And that person has to come to terms with that huge void, that huge darkness, the huge measure of emptiness that that person has to now contend with.

And the Lord knows that. I believe that the Lord himself experienced it in the life of his earthly father. We've every reason to suppose that Joseph, his earthly father, was taken from him when he was at a young age.

So there's nothing that we experience in this world that the Lord doesn't know about from his own experience. God, that Jesus has been there. He knows. And isn't it marvelous to know what the apostle tells us, that we do not have a high priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

[21:04] He knows. And the very fact that he knows means that he is a pro... We know that we can call upon him and we know that we can share these things with him.

And as one who is concerned, deeply personally concerned, for all the sorrows that we go through in this world. But they are real sorrows. Christians must never make light of it.

Christians must never say, well, because I know that my loved one has gone to be with the Lord, then I mustn't be sorry. That's not the case at all. You know, when Stephen died, you remember the deacon Stephen in Acts chapter 7, and when he was put to death by the hostile Jews, there was no question about where Stephen went.

Stephen himself, as he was being stoned, he looked up and he saw heaven opened. And Jesus standing there, waiting to receive him. And yet, the men who buried him, we read that they made great lamentation for him.

They were deeply sorry. They felt his loss so keenly as a brother and as a friend and as someone who God had used mightily in this world.

[22 : 25] So, death is a separation between one person and another, between family and friends, just like the chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them.

And that separation meant one was to be taken and the other one was left for a while because God still had a work for Elisha to do. And once that work was completed, Elisha was taken, perhaps not the same way, but he was taken to the same place so that Elisha and Elijah were reunited one day in heaven where they were forever with the Lord.

Sixth thing I want us to see in this chapter is that death is being taken by God to where God is. Verse 11, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

There is absolutely no doubt about this whatsoever. There is no doubt whatsoever. God leaves us in no doubt as to where his people will one day be.

[23 : 48] Now, we're looking at this in Revelation and we're seeing from time to time, from time after time, that heaven is not about the place or the architecture or the beauty of the place. All of that may be.

But heaven is the place where God is. The whole point about heaven is that Jesus, the Lamb of God that was slain and is now alive again, the Lamb who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, stands in the midst of the throne, ruling and reigning in his sovereignty and in his mercy over us.

So, death is being taken by God to where God is. It's impossible for any one of us to see God, the Bible tells us, this side of eternity.

But, the Bible also tells us that on the other side, we shall see him as he is. We shall see him as he is.

And believe me, there won't be a single person who sees God as he is that will want to be anywhere else or will want to look at anyone else or anything else. Lastly, the passage teaches us that we who remain, we have to live on in faith.

[25 : 10] Verse 14, after Elijah had been taken away from Elisha, and I would imagine that on a natural human level, Elisha must have felt a huge sense of emptiness and loss.

Look at what God had done through Elijah. All you have to do is read back through the chapters that precede to see what kind of a man Elijah, his courage, his power, his teaching, his readiness to stand for all that God was in a hostile land.

His courage, because the king and the queen hated him and they wanted him dead. There were very few people in the Bible who were as brave and as courageous as Elijah.

Now he was gone. Now Elisha was left with this enormous sense of his own vulnerability. How in the world was he going to do what Elijah did beforehand?

The answer is he wasn't meant to. God had a different work for Elisha to do. Too often we compare ourselves with others.

[26 : 19] Too often we compare ourselves with men and women who lived in the past. Too often we think of them and we say well I can never be like that person who lived before me.

That's correct. That's because God doesn't want you to be like that person. He wants you to be who you are. He's raised you up for your day and your generation and for the work that he's given you to do.

He doesn't want you to be anyone else and that's why we must never try and ape other people and try and do what they did and try and blindly follow what they did. God has given us a command to be the people that he has made us and he has raised us up to be.

And yet Elisha naturally felt a sense of loss and vulnerability where he said after he verse 13 and he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen and he said where is the Lord the God of Elijah and I

suppose in a natural way he associated God's work so much with Elijah he couldn't imagine how that work could carry on without him within a minute he discovered that that's exactly what was going to happen that God had not left his people God was the same God God was still going to do marvellous things God had a future for his people and he had a work and a purpose for Elisha to carry out God had great things in store for his people and God still has a purpose for this world we mustn't become so obsessed with death that we lose sight of our own usefulness in this world God has a work for us to do in this world and we must be about that work faithfully carrying it out but at the same time being ready every day for the day that God will come for us if we're following the Lord Jesus Christ we know that our future is secure in him we know that because he died and rose again he will also come one day and we will rise again and go forever to be with the Lord but meanwhile we have a glorious purpose in this world God's purpose he tells us is that one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea that's difficult for us to imagine isn't it but it means that God has a work for each one of us to do to work towards that day to work in our witness for Jesus to let others know of how great he is and what he's done for us go said

[29 : 23] Jesus to the demon possessed man after he had healed him go and tell what great things that God has done for you that's the work he had for Elisha Elisha was now to cross the Jordan back as it were into the real world there are two real worlds there's the world in which you and I live in and there is just as real a world where God has promised that one day we will be but this world is just as real and it belongs to God in the same way as heaven belongs to God this world belongs to God and God has people who he is calling right now into his kingdom he has a great purpose for this world but we are his ambassadors just like Elisha was make sure that we make the most of it let's pray our father in heaven we give thanks for every reminder we have of the mercy and the kindness and the grace of

God in the gospel we give thanks oh Lord for all the different examples that there are of men and women like ourselves who lived in weakness and who by trusting in the power of God were able to experience that power for themselves and were able to demonstrate that power to other people Lord we pray that we will be faithful in the world that you have placed us we will be faithful in letting our light so shine before men that they may see by our lives your reality your greatness and your truth Lord we pray for this poor world in which we live a world that needs to see and needs to needs to experience the truth of God a world in which people are being born and growing up never hearing the gospel never hearing the truth we pray to make a difference in that in this world even in a small way for we ask in Jesus name amen thank you