

Elijah's Last Day

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Date: 28 April 2013

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[0 : 0 0] We read 2 Kings 2.

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal and so on. Now as we were talking to the young people today, one of the things that we were really highlighting is that life, like a story, sometimes is long, sometimes it is short.

And none of us really know how long we will live in this world. The one thing the Bible presses upon us is to make preparation for living in this world, but also for leaving this world.

The Bible is very clear on that. And of course God has made all the provision for us in order that we may prepare by sending his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into this world.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. We know that, but have we believed? Have we accepted the Lord Jesus Christ? Because when you think about it, people make preparation for everything in life.

[1 : 2 3] People are always making preparation for the different things that they're going to have to do. If people are going to go somewhere, they prepare to go.

And when we know that we're going to leave this world, then it's the most illogical thing in the whole wide world, is never to make preparation for that final journey.

Well, the final journey had come for this man, Elijah, who was without doubt one of the remarkable characters that we find in the Bible, one of the most remarkable men in many ways that ever lived in this world.

And of course, when we read the life of Elijah, Elijah, we cannot help but think about the person who, in many ways, he was on a coalition course with so much of his life, and that was King Ahab.

Because you remember that King Ahab, the king of Israel, was a man who had sold himself to do wickedness. And you cannot, particularly when Israel, you've got to remember that Israel was favored land and that God had great promises attached to the people.

[2 : 3 4] And here you have somebody who was, of course, he was driven on by a wife who was so opposed to the prophet of God and to the name of God and the worship of God that she really, she was a force behind Ahab, and they were determined to obliterate the worship of God, everything from the land.

And Ahab was a man who had sold himself. It actually says that there was nobody who reigned, who did more evil or lived in a more evil way than King Ahab.

And it tells that he sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. And yet, the amazing thing, I remember we mentioned this some time back.

It's something I just find quite extraordinary, that when the Lord sent, he sent a lot of messages through Elijah to King Ahab. But when the Lord sent the message of judgment upon Ahab and his family, and God said to them, because of what you are and how you lived and of how you tried to destroy my name and the worship of my name out of this land, my judgment is to fall upon you and your family.

And when Ahab heard that message, his response was really quite extraordinary. It is not the response that I would have expected, because he was so hard against the Lord.

[4 : 10] He was so determined to exalt the worship of Baal and to destroy the worship of God that you would have expected him just to ignore the prophecy that came.

But he didn't. He actually tore his clothes. He put on sackcloth. And he humbled himself before God, which shows us that Jezebel was, we sometimes have to wonder just what he would have been like had Jezebel, who was the driving force behind him to remove the worship of God from the land.

I wonder how it would have actually been had he been married to somebody else. And the Lord said to Elijah, see how Ahab has humbled himself before me.

And he said, the Lord had said, I will not bring the disaster upon his family in his day, in Ahab's day. It's still coming, but the disaster won't come in his day.

So it's really quite remarkable. And we see how the Lord responds when people truly humble themselves, even the most wicked, even those who do not turn fully, because Ahab didn't.

[5 : 29] Although there was this period where there was a form of repentance and where he did for a period humble himself before God to such an extent that God said, the judgment is still going to come, but I will not bring it in its entirety.

I will not bring that judgment upon his family in his day. So it's really quite remarkable. But the amazing, or the, it's not so much the amazing, the great contrast, just there was a great contrast in the life of Ahab and Elijah, but there was also an incredible contrast with the death of Ahab and with Elijah.

Because remember how the message had come that when Ahab was wanting to go up and fight and he aligned himself with Jehoshaphat and going up to fight the enemy, that the prophet of the Lord said, don't go.

But the false prophet said, do go. And Ahab tried to disguise himself because the prophet of the Lord had said, if you go up, you're going to die. So he tried to disguise himself and he tried to avoid this and he says, I'm going to survive this.

But you remember how he was shot. And we find him bleeding to death in his chariot. And again, when you come to the departure of Elijah, again, it's not chariot, but it's so different.

[6 : 58] You couldn't get a greater extreme. Here's the king and he had lived defying God and he ends up dying under the judgment of God.

But here's Elijah who lived in the presence of God, serving God. And he's also, the end of his life in this world is in a chariot, but it's in a chariot of fire.

Where he is whisked away, where he is separated in a moment. It must have been one of the most extraordinary things with Elisha. And I believe it was only Elisha who saw this.

I don't think that anybody else saw it. We'll see that in a moment. That Elisha saw this because there was this incredible whirlwind. It's like a little mini tornado.

Just came. Just came. And all of a sudden, Elijah was whisked away from beside Elisha. Just like a, in a whirlwind, like a, as I say, like a wee tornado, a way up.

[8 : 06] But Elisha saw more than that. He saw the chariot of fire and he saw the horses of fire. He saw the ministering spirit sent by God to be the escort to take Elijah home.

My friend, you must always remember that the angels who do the, who serve God, who are his servants, he sends them to minister to us.

And that's how we will be taken. We will be escorted with an angelic presence into the presence of the Lord. Our soul, that's what will happen.

People can't see it. We don't see it. But it's an amazing thought that, although this has been set out for us so dramatically, that we will be brought home into the presence of the Lord if we look and believe and trust and rest our life in Jesus.

Now, this man, Elijah, he was taken away in full health and strength. It's quite remarkable that probably the two, probably the most two momentous or huge characters as prophets, Moses and Elijah, that at the end of their days, they were both in full health and full strength.

[9 : 33] Moses, Moses climbed a mountain the day he died. His eyes hadn't dimmed. He was, in other words, his whole body was still vibrant and his energy was great and he was still, as it were, in full health and strength.

But the Lord said, it's time. Moses, your time is over. You've done what I wanted you to do. And, of course, Moses climbed that mountain and the Lord took him.

Moses died up there and the Lord buried him. The Lord dealt with his body but his soul was taken to glory.

And here's Elijah but he didn't go through the process of death. And it's very interesting that one man who prayed to die, Elijah asked way back, remember, he asked the Lord to take him.

He was so low. Remember that period in Elijah's life where he was so low. He was mentally and physically and emotionally and socially and probably also spiritually drained.

[10 : 42] And he said to the Lord, he asked the Lord just to take him away. It's very interesting that that prayer that we have of Elijah asking to be taken away and he's the one man along with Enoch who never actually went through death.

We often wonder why the Lord takes people away and we don't know. But it would appear that particularly for those who are involved, we often find it strange, particularly people who seem to be so active in the Lord's work.

And we say to ourselves, it doesn't make sense. I've said it so often with regard to even this congregation here. And I saw when we see people one after another taken away, people who are so useful, people who are so vital to the well-being of the whole community and to the church.

And from a human point of view, from our point of view, it doesn't make sense. But it would appear from the Lord's perspective that we're all given, all of us in life, something to do.

whether that's for a little while or whether it's for a long time. But it would appear that when we do what we've been given to do, then the Lord is going to take us home.

[12 : 11] And I suppose if we could see what homecoming was, we wouldn't want to stay one day longer here. So, on this side, it's often very confusing for us, very painful.

There's many people in here with sore hearts because loved ones have been taken away as far as we can see prematurely. And we think it's not right.

But we see, well, we try to understand that the Lord sees in a different way. He has a different timescale. And so, we find here just this little glimpse of the day for Elijah, just as for Moses had come to an end.

And I'm sure the church would have been devastated in understanding that Elijah was going to be taken away. And so, we find that Elijah lives his last day really in quite a remarkable way.

If you were told today, this is your last day in this world. How would you live it? Well, I'm sure a lot of us would be trying to sort things out.

[13 : 22] Trying to sort things out with other people. Maybe if things that we had said things or things that had gone wrong or whatever, we'd say, got to sort that out. We might be trying to sort out our affairs with regard to our home and our family.

We would be trying to sort things out above all with the Lord to make sure that we were right with God. But Elijah, who knew this is your last day, Elijah, today, the Lord is going to take you home.

How do we find him? He's wandering all over the place. He's busy visiting. He's going to the schools of the prophets. He's going from Gilgal and he's going down to Bethel.

And he's going from Bethel and he's making his way to Jericho. And then from Jericho he makes his way to the Jordan. It's a non-stop day of activity.

And you say to yourself, Elijah, I thought you'd be spending the day in prayer and meditation and trying to get yourself right with God. But you see, the thing was, Elijah was prepared long before.

[14 : 36] Elijah lived every day as if it was the last. That was a thing. So that the way that Elijah lived, knowing that today was his last, it didn't make any difference.

If the Lord had said to him the day before, Elijah, it would have been the same. He was completely prepared. He was in tune with the Lord. His life was lived in a state of readiness.

And that's where Jesus, one of the blessings that Jesus gives. Remember what Jesus said, blessed is the servant who is found watching at my return.

Blessed is the servant who is found watching. And that's how Elijah was. And so Elijah goes on this journey and begins at Gilgal.

And there were schools of prophets in these different places. And each place, all these places were significant in the Bible. Because you remember when Israel crossed the Jordan way back with Joshua, one of the things that happened in Gilgal was that the manna stopped.

[15 : 45] Remember how for 40 years they had that manna in the wilderness? Well, the manna stopped and on there they ate of the fruit of the land for the first time. It was like this was their new beginning.

Just as he entered into the land of promise. It was the time, it was the place of the new beginning. We're talking here about the story of our lives.

Can you go back in the story of your life to a point where there was a new beginning? Where things changed for you?

Now I know that it might be if I was to ask 40 people in here today to give their testimony everybody would be different. Some would have a very dramatic testimony with regard to the dealings of the Lord in their soul and the way that they came to faith.

Others would have a very gentle story to tell. There might be some of you here who might not be able to pinpoint any given time when you say, well I know that on such and such a day I came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 00] You couldn't do that because it's possible that some of you came to faith in the Lord when you were very young and as time went on it came to a place and a point where something happened, some crisis in your life or something where you came into, as it were, there was this sense of commitment and an assurance that you belonged to the Lord but as you reflect back, as you put your mind back you say to yourself I think the Lord was working in my life.

I think the Lord came into my life even as a young child. That happens quite often with people as they go on. Maybe as they go on they realize the Lord was actually there but you went through some experience.

Some people of course lived a life that was far away from the Lord. Some of you in here can put a clear demarcation line and you know as clear as a bell that there was a life you lived before and there was a life you lived after.

There was this dividing time where Christ came clearly into your life. Everything changed and it was like that for Israel where they were eating of the fruit of the land for the first time.

The manna had ceased. But it's good for us to think back, to put our minds back, to think about God's working in our heart, in our life.

[18 : 25] When the Lord gave us that little bit of assurance, when we took our first steps of faith, maybe for some of you you took ages to take your first steps of faith.

I shouldn't say that. Maybe for some of you you took ages to understand that you were taking your first steps of faith. Everybody else around you could see that you had already taken your first steps of faith.

And maybe you were taking these steps of faith for ages. And you were saying you were kept seeking and seeking and seeking the Lord. And then you came to realize, I have the Lord.

It's like the Lord took you into this persuasion, this assurance, Jesus is mine. And then, of course, they moved then to Bethel, and Bethel and other schools of the prophets.

And again, when we think of Bethel, we think of prayer. We think of Abraham who pitched his tent beside Bethel and he built an altar there to the Lord and he worshipped to the Lord.

[19 : 27] We think of Jacob at Bethel and we think of God revealing himself to him. We think of Jacob's struggles in prayer. And maybe tonight or today I should say you look back over your life and you can remember these times.

Something came into your life and, oh my word, what an urgency in your prayer. Your prayer life changed. Everything became real and urgent.

Your whole heart was engaged in wrestling with the Lord. It wasn't going through motions. And you know when you're like that, you realize and you look back and you say, oh my, I thought I was having a prayer life, but this is different.

And I think it's true for believers that you will look back over your life and you'll see times where there were these real, real wrestlings with prayer.

Then they moved on and they came to Jericho. Again, when you think of Jericho, Jericho was the first place, the first city, remember, that Israel, when they were entering the promised land that they had to deal with, of course, God broke down the walls.

[20 : 39] Remember that? Of course, it was by faith, as they encircled and were obedient to what the Lord required. But remember what happened at Jericho. Jericho, again, was a kind of a dividing place in the experience because remember what the Lord had made a particular command in Jericho.

And he said, nobody is to take anything from Jericho. It is all devoted for me. It is all the sort of the gold and the silver and all these things was to be devoted to the Lord.

And then the city was to be burnt. Everything was to be burnt up with fire. Remember how Achan, he took stuff. He took a wedge of gold. He took silver. He took some clothing and he buried it in his tent.

Israel, remember, couldn't progress until that was dealt with. Remember when they went to the next place, Ai, quite a lot of soldiers were killed and Joshua was in, oh, he was saying, Lord, what's happened?

The Lord said, Israel hath sinned. You've taken what I forbade. And of course, remember how eventually Achan was discovered. And until Israel dealt with their sin, dealt with their disobedience, they couldn't progress.

[22 : 01] And you know, the Lord does that with us as well. he takes takes us to places and points and he says, right, you have to face up to life. You have to face up to where you are.

Things are not right. He says that to us, to his people. Yes, you're a believer. Yes, things are going at one level all right. but if you want to know the full joy of the Lord, if you want to know that close, intimate fellowship with me, then there are things in your life you're going to have to deal with.

And sometimes these are very sore and difficult times. But for our future good, for our spiritual progression, we've got to hold our hands up and say, Lord, help me to deal with these things.

And then finally we find they come to Jordan. And again, we often think of Jordan with regard to what separates this world to the next world.

Now, of course, when Israel entered the land of Canaan, remember, they crossed the Jordan. That crossing of the Jordan there wasn't a picture of leaving this world into the next, because we know that in the land of Canaan there were many battles to be fought, so we cannot follow through that analogy.

[23 : 25] But the church has often seen Jordan, the swellings of Jordan. How will you do in the swellings of Jordan as the idea of the believer crossing from this world into the next?

And so here they come, and at this point, Elijah said to Elisha, you ask what you want. Ask what you want, or ask what I shall do for you.

And Elisha asked him, what Elijah said was a hard thing. He said, I would like a double portion of your spirit. A double portion of your spirit.

Elijah said to him, you've asked a hard thing, but he said, if you see, this is what he said, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you.

What does he mean by that? I think very simply this. The sign that you have a double portion of my spirit will be that as I'm taken up from you, you will be able to see everything that's happening.

[24 : 39] In other words, the Lord will so come into you with the power of his spirit that you will see spiritual things that nobody else will see.

And that's exactly what happened in Elisha's experience. That's why he saw and others didn't see the horses and the chariots of fire.

The others didn't see the angelic presence. Elisha did. And Elisha had that double portion of spirit. Remember on the other occasion when we mentioned this very recently in the city and they were surrounded with the soldiers and Elisha's servant was beside himself with worry and he says, oh, we're finished.

And Elisha said, Lord, open the young man's eyes. You see, Elisha had been able to see. The Lord was giving Elisha spiritual insight to see what the human eye couldn't see.

And at that moment the young man saw. the whole place surrounded like again were the chariots, horsemen of fire, the great angelic presence.

[25 : 55] So you see, this was what Elisha was asking for. And Elisha was, this is what I love about Elisha, Elisha was aware as the two of them walked along that the person who had the greatest need was not Elijah but he himself, Elisha.

Elijah was ready. Elijah had done his work. Elijah was going home but Elisha was the one who was left behind. It was him who had to do. You know, my friend, as we journey through this world, may we ask for the portion of God's spirit to be in us and upon us to equip us to work.

You know, our days are short and that's what our life is about. What are we doing for the Lord? What are we doing? Because at the end of the day, the only things that matter are the things of faith.

The rest doesn't really count. In the great, when the books are opened and everything's worked out and balanced out, it's what is done by faith. And we don't have long.

We've only got a short time. The worst thing that we can do, remember, the Lord has so often preached against it. The worst way that we can live through this world is to live selfishly to and for ourselves, not to be bothered about the Lord and not to be bothered about anybody else.

[27 : 26] It's my life and I'm just going to live my life all to myself. In the Lord's estimation, that's the saddest way to live.

It is the Lord is seeking that we live in him, to him, for him, and for others. And that's how both Elijah and Elisha lived.

So we must seek to live to and for the Lord. And so as they walked along, they were talking to one another. As they still went on and talked, I would love to have been part of that conversation.

There's some great conversations going on in the Bible, like the two on Emmaus Road, talking with Jesus. I would love to have been part of that company, that walking. And then just as they walked along, all of a sudden, this, as we say, this little mini-tornado came from nowhere, this whirlwind, and it's like it sucked Elijah up.

Because we've got to remember that the others, if we had carried on reading, remember that the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw them opposite him, and they saw, you see, they were aware other people would have seen Elijah go up, but they didn't see the horses and the chariots of fire.

[28 : 52] That's where they went looking for him. They were searching. They thought he had been lifted up and gone somewhere else. But Elisha knew. Elisha was there. Elisha saw the spiritual, the whole spiritual picture.

Well, you know, there's so much more that we could look at in there. But you know, our time is going to come, whether it's long or short.

None of us know how long we have left in this world. May it be our prayer that we will live every day to and for the Lord. May we live like Elijah lived so that we'll be ready.

If the Lord says, right, this is it, it's today, that you're ready to go. You've got to ask yourself that question. Am I ready?

And you'll only be ready if you're ready in Jesus. Jesus. I hope that every one of you are ready today in Jesus.

[29 : 58] Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we pray that we may use our time wisely, as the word says, to redeem the time. Help us to remember that life is fragile.

Life in many ways is wonderful. It can be cruel, it can be harsh, it can be great. But help us, Lord, in all the different experiences that we go through, to our eyes fixed upon yourself.

Bless us in body, in mind, and in soul. Deliver us from all the temptations that so often overcome us. Help us, Lord, in our battles with who we are and what we are.

Deliver us, oh, Lord, from all the subtle things that go on where there can be resentment and bitterness and anger and pride and lovelessness and jealousies and a lot of things that can eat away in people's hearts.

We pray, oh, Lord, that we might focus upon Jesus. Help us to think upon the things that are good, the things that are right, the things that are of a good report, the things that are lovely.

[31 : 09] Help us, Lord, as we journey through this world to believe in you with all our heart. Watch over us, we pray, and take away from us, our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen.