

2 Kings 2:1-6

2nd Kings Ch 2 deals with Elijah's dynamic departure, and Elisha's being prepared for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon his life as he steps into Elijah's shoes in taking the office of what we might consider as being Israel's primary prophet during this time of national spiritual deprivation and seemingly continuing deterioration in the nation's history.

You recall that back in 1st Kings Ch 19 when Elijah was struggling with the stress of the ministry, and fell into that pit of depression, that God was seeking to deal with him. Sought to speak to his heart, bring him back into the proper perspective, and Elijah was just really struggling. And the occasion more or less rounded out with God giving Elijah the out that he was looking for in that if he didn't want to continue on in this capacity than he didn't have to. And He said to him, "On your way back to the wilderness of Damascus, stop off to anoint Hazael as king over Syria, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat you shall anoint as prophet in your place." and Elijah did just that and that was pretty much the last we heard of Elijah, he surfaced on only two other occasions, once to declare the judgment of God upon Jezebel and Ahab for the way they deceived the people and put Naboth to death, and then to also pronounce judgment upon Ahaziah, Ahab's son for not seeking the Lord in his times of trouble but seeking after the gods of other lands who weren't gods at all. And according to those who've done the math, from the time that Elijah anointed Elisha until this point when God takes Elijah in the whirlwind its been in the upwards of 10 yrs. And this whole time even though we've only seen Elijah twice, we've heard of Elisha even less, but he's been there the whole time, just quietly behind the scenes. Learning the ropes, being taught the principles of ministry, not looking to bring attention to himself but faithfully being behind and supporting the man that God has called him to come under, Elijah. According to vs 11 of Ch 3 the primary thing that Elisha has been known for all this time is simply being the man who poured water on the hands of Elijah, he was just a servant, not seeking glory for himself, being content in the role that God had called him to just being behind the scenes supporting the man that God had placed before the people. And there's so much to learn from guys like this, he was a man of simple humility, content with not having the spotlight placed upon him, he was just there to serve not draw attention to himself. And tow that God is finished for the time being with Elijah on this earth, who is it that He calls into this position of prominence, Elisha, the faithful and wise servant.

Elisha serves as that picture perfect example of the principle Jesus uttered when He said, "...*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" Matt 23:12 The bible says, "*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*" 2 Chron 16:9 Which is to say that God is looking for that one person into whom He can invest His strength and His power, that He might do great and awesome things so that the hearts of people might be turned towards Him. But its difficult for God to find such a person because we're all so overcome by our flesh and riddled with pride that we like to take the credit for the things He does.

And God will share His glory with no man, or we somehow boast with in ourselves over our own spirituality as to why God would use us rather than seeing the facts for what they are in that the reason God would use the likes of us isn't because we're the most qualified, but the *least*. And God likes to use the least qualified people to do His work because then there's no mistaking the fact that it's *Him* doing the work rather than the brilliant and cunning techniques or marketing strategies of man. So when God's preparing to take Elijah, where does He look to find his replacement?

The palaces? The who's *who* of the world in that day? No, He looks to the *who's he*? He searches the servant's quarters, the non-esteemed in this world. And this is a common/consistent theme woven throughout the scriptures, that the path to greatness in God's kingdom is found in (what?) servanthood. Jesus told His disciples, "*If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.*" Mark 9:35 10 yrs have gone by since Elijah threw his mantle on Elisha, and Elisha has been content this whole time serving in obscurity and ambiguity and now God is preparing to raise him up. There's several ways in which Elisha is to Elijah as Joshua was to Moses. Fiercely loyal, Joshua was faithful to the tasks that Moses delegated to him often working longer hours than Moses did, but he never sought attention, never looked to be in the limelight, but he was devoted and dedicated to Moses as unto the Lord. And since he had a servant's heart, and never sought to take attention or glory to himself, the Lord used his life to take Moses' place after Moses' time on this earth was through. And we see the same type thing happening here, so often we're those who are looking to be served, rather than simply being servants to others. But if we want to be a Joshua whom God raises up to use to fulfill and follow through with His plans, we need to find a Moses to serve, if we want to be an Elisha, we need to be willing and content to support the Elijah's. And what I mean by that is that we need to be at a place in our hearts where we have no ulterior motives in pouring our lives out as unto the Lord. But rather we're content in serving whomever the Lord places in the arena of our lives. We're called as Jesus not to be served, but to serve and give our lives away for others, and when God sees that happening in our lives, He has this way of promoting us, and it doesn't have to be something we strive for, strategize over or anything else.

So I suppose the question that we should allow to probe our hearts for the moment is, am I seeking to make myself the *greatest*, or the *least*? Am I seeking ways to serve people, or seeking to be served *by* people? What areas of ministry am I personally plugged into? How am I giving of myself and am I content in that? I'm so glad that when God raised me up to serve in the position that I am now that I wasn't looking for it, I wasn't striving to obtain it, looking for ways to achieve it. I was content where I was at, I didn't have Sr. Pastoridis, always looking for the chance to make my break or apprehend my take, or anything else. God just did the whole thing, sure there was yrs of being prepared, and I'm still learning and have a suspicion I always will be learning what it means to be in this position for as long as God has me in this position. But I wasn't looking to be in the spotlight, or have all eyes on me, or be in a position of power, or anything like that, I was just serving the Lord, and God did the work. Elisha was just serving the Lord by serving under Elijah and God raised him up.

Now you remember how Elijah had to be prepared for what God had for him, spent some time at cutting creek, moved from there to the refinery of Zarephath, and God was taking him through deep things that he might be used in deep ways. Well, in a similar way as God is preparing Elisha for the power of His Spirit to rest upon him there's 4 areas specifically that we see the Lord lead him through that will ultimately prepare him and hopefully speak to us about what it is that God wants to work into and through us that He might cause the power of His Spirit to be at rest upon us as well. Follow along with me as I read the 1st 6 vs.

Vs1-6

Notice the resolute resolve that Elisha has to stay committed to the call that God has entrusted to him, and no doubt Elijah was seeking to prove out just that. Are you truly committed to the call God has placed on your life, and Elisha absolutely passed the test.

He had every opportunity, opportunity after opportunity to just do the more convenient thing and let Elijah go on. But Elisha wasn't about *convenience*, he was about *commitment* and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had called him to come along side Elijah and serve him that Elijah might serve His people and he refused to be dissuaded from that or persuaded in any other direction. Where do you stand tonight? Will you serve as long as that particular aspect of service stays within the parameters of convenience, or are you in it for the long haul, committed to the end. Elisha wasn't about to let Elijah out of his sight, God had called him to be by his side and till death do they part, or at least till they part in a manner that's beyond his control, Elisha will remain faithful. And it seems like everywhere they went people tried to discourage him in his calling. Apparently it was a fairly understood thing that God was going to take Elijah, perhaps it was somewhere prophesied and we don't have that, but for whatever reason it seemed to be common knowledge. So, "Hey, he's going to be taken today anyway, your duty is done, just stay here." Elisha said, "No way, I'm committed till the very end." and This is the resolve that we need, its important to know where God has called you, the people or person he's called you to serve with or alongside of, or underneath, then plant yourself there in an immovable steadfast fashion. Because there'll be times when you're challenged to sort of drift from that commitment, or look for bigger better options that *serve your agenda*, but if you know where God has called you that'll serve as an anchor point when you're feeling pulled in other directions. Even Elijah was making an easy out for him, "Hey, God is moving me on, you can stay right here and it'll be no hard feelings." "No way, As the Lord lives and your soul lives I will not leave you." Other people, "God's going to take him today, just let him go" "No way, quit trying to discourage me, just keep your mouth shut about it." and Elisha was determined to finish well. Remember when the Lord had spoken of the need to drink His blood and eat His flesh, and it wierded the people out, they didn't understand the spiritual level on which He was speaking. And so they began to take off, He looked at the 12 and said, "How about you guys, do you want to leave?" "You can stay right here and go no farther" kind of a thing, Peter said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" John 6:68-69 Sometimes its tough, we don't always understand, but we know who You are and we're not going to leave Your side, nor will we take our eyes off You.

God is preparing Elisha for the task of carrying on where Elijah left off, and there are 4 areas mentioned specifically in these vs that seem to give us a bit of insight as to how God wants to prepare us as well, to be those vessels through whom He can flow by His Spirit. If you're a note taker or underliner in your bible, draw attention to the 1st area mentioned there in vs 1, notice it was Gilgal. What was Gilgal? It was the place of purification.

40 yrs had gone by since the children of Israel had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. And having refused to enter into the Promised Land initially because of unbelief God said, "Fine, then wander in the desert for 40 yrs until you all die off, and the next generation, your children whom you claim to be afraid for will claim the land in victory." So began the longest death march in world history, finally 40 yrs went by and the next generation prepared to enter into the land. And when they crossed over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, the 1st place they came to was Gilgal. And there God halted them and said, "Before you do any battling, before you are going to assume any victory in this land, every male among you must be circumcised." That generation that had grown up in the desert had never been circumcised, so Joshua faithfully fulfilled God's Word and every male among them was circumcised, and we read.

"So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day." Josh 5:8-9 and As you know circumcision speaks very clearly to you and me of a cutting off and doing away with the life of the flesh. It speaks of purification, or sanctification you might say. And when it comes to the spiritual reality of circumcision for you and me today there are 3 areas specifically that the bible calls us to be circumcised in. In Jer ch 6 and Acts Ch 7 we're told of the circumcision of the *ear*, that we might have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying, being careful what we take in and give heed to. Ex Ch 4, and again in Ch 6 we read of the circumcision of the *lips*, that we might speak the things that are of the Lord, from the Lord, building up and edifying one another speaking the truth in love. And finally the bible speaks of the circumcision of the heart, *"Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts,"* Jer 4:4 and Again, *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter;"* Rom 2:28-29 The idea there being the fact that my heart isn't attached to the things of the flesh, being careful to love the Lord my God 1st and foremost above all else, it speaks of the things I love, and how I love them. Is hearing the Word of God a bore to you? The things of the Lord no longer really of interest to you, the things you say aren't really encouraging anyone, or challenging people to walk uprightly, but they're cynical, full of criticism, tearing people down, and wounding. Your heart really isn't tender and full of love, but rather its hard, calloused, and indifferent towards the things of God. The journey towards the Spirit filled life starts at Gilgal, circumcise those areas of your life, crucify the things of the flesh, renew your 1st love. God wants us to lead purified, sanctified lives, set apart exclusively to Him and His plans for our lives.

And I'm not going to say that it's not painful to circumcise the heart, or the ears, or the lips, but if I'm to be filled with the Spirit, its essential that I be emptied of myself.

Next Elijah moved on from Gilgal, the place of *purification*, to Bethel, the place of *realization*. You're familiar with the scenario; Jacob, younger brother to Esau by a few minutes, the heel snatcher, the deceiver, had connived and deceived his way into gaining the birthright from his brother and the patriarchal blessing of his father Isaac. As you might imagine none of that made Esau too happy and the bible tells us that Esau comforted himself with the fact that he would kill Jacob after their father had died. Well mom caught wind of this and said, "Jacob you better get out of here and go to my brother Laban's place and I'll send for you in a few days when he settles down." So Jacob took off, and on his way as night was approaching and fatigue was setting in he took camp in this barren area of seemingly God forsaken no man's land. And he grabbed a rock, used it for a pillow, and that night Jacob had a dream. And God came to him and said, "*I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.*" Gen 28:13-15 Translation, "Jacob, follow Me and I'll bless your life." Jacob woke up, freaked out a bit in a good way and said, "Surely God is in this place and I knew it not." and He called the place, "Bethel" which means, "House of God." Maybe you're in a place tonight that seems God forsaken, barren, circumstances are hard, it's like beating your head on a rock. But God would have you to *realize* that He is for you, not against you and wants to bless *your* life.

We so often think that God wants to bless the life of the people next to me or in front of me, but not me, not after who I've been and what I've done. But what did Jesus say in regards to the blessing of the Holy Spirit? "*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*" Luke 11:13 If your heart goes out to your children when you see them hurting and in need, how much more will the heart of your heavenly Father go out to you as you cry out to Him, and want to be right with Him. Realize that God is with you, and wants to empower you with His Holy Spirit. Coming to Gilgal, crucifying the flesh, making that willful decision to cut away the flesh life, realize that God doesn't want to *penalize* you, He wants to *empower* you, to lead a life set apart to Him.

Which brings us to Jericho, the city of what? *Confrontation*, after the children of Israel were purified at Gilgal, they were faced with what seemed to be the impossible task of overcoming the walled city of Jericho. But the Lord had said that they were to walk around that city once a day for 6 days. On day #7 they were to march around it 6 times, and then they were to march around it a 7th time, the priest were to blow the trumpets, the people were to shout and you know what happened.

Those walls came down and God granted them a great victory. Why does God give us the Holy Spirit, not for warm fuzzies, not for personal satisfaction, but that we might serve Him adequately in victory. It's by the power of the Holy Spirit that we wage the good war, and fight the good fight, God gives us the Holy Spirit that we might break through to those people who are walled up, that lives might be changed and people might be saved, and the enemy defeated. We aren't adequate in and of ourselves to do the work of the Lord, we'll just go in circles, but when the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, God gives us the ability to confront and overcome the most impossible of situations. When's the last time that you really were in a situation whereby you were witnessing to an individual regarding the person of Jesus Christ Honestly, has it been a week, perhaps a month or two, maybe even a year, or perhaps 10? God doesn't give us the Holy Spirit for personal rest and *relaxation*, but for the purpose of *Confrontation*, that we might be His witnesses even to the outer extremities of your world.

Finally, the 4th area, the Jordan river, the place of *expectation*. That place whereby when the children of Israel were preparing to enter into the Promised Land the priest were instructed to step out into the Jordan and that they could expect that as they stepped out by faith that God would move miraculously on their behalf. If they just stood there reluctantly, refusing to step out, the waters would've never parted. The bible says, "... *without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*" Heb 11:6 and Again, "... *for whatever is not from faith is sin.*" Rom 14:23 God would have us come to that place of expectation whereby we step out and trust Him to empower us by His Spirit for the task that He places before us. I'm not going to stand by idle, Lord you've granted me purification, I've come to the realization that you want to bless me with your Spirit, I know its for the purpose of confrontation and service, and I've come to the place of expectation where I'm willing to step out and trust that as you've led me in this particular way, you'll empower me to complete, to follow through and fulfill the task.

Elisha persevered through each phase of preparation and now he's about to receive the affirmation of the Holy Spirit upon His life. Where are you at tonight, at each step Elisha was tempted to just stop right where he was at. But he wanted all that God had for him, what about you, are you satisfied with where you're at with the Lord, or do you want all God has for you?

There's a difference in being content in your calling, and desiring the fullness of what God has for you by the power of His Holy Spirit. If you're where God has called you to be, praise the Lord, but that in no way interferes with continually pressing on for the prize of the upward call that's in Christ Jesus. God wants us to move in the power of His Holy Spirit, not just occasionally but continually. He's always wanting to take us deeper. Maybe you had a real neat experience when Jim Hesterly was here a number of yrs ago, that's neat, how's God moving in your life today. Perhaps you need a fresh filling, allow God to purify you, realize He wants to do the work, avail yourself to be the witness He desires you to be, and step out in faith, let Him overflow you tonight.

Next week we'll see how God honored Elisha's commitment in raising him up, and passing on to him that position of prominence in the nation. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up, and use you, to turn men's hearts towards Him.