

Skyland Conference 1979-01 Elisha

by Robert Constable

Robert Constable's sermon explores the life and ministry of Elisha, emphasizing the themes of grace, calling, and the significance of miracles in his prophetic work.

Duration: 40:51

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:9

Topics: "Elisha"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the different responses people have to the call to serve the Lord. He emphasizes that although serving God may come with challenges and unpopularity, it is important to respond with joy and enter into the purpose God has for us. The preacher uses the examples of Elijah and Elisha to illustrate this point, highlighting their willingness to stand up and speak for God despite the opposition they faced. The sermon also mentions the call of Ezekiel, who initially resisted God's call but eventually accepted it. The preacher encourages the audience to aspire to be like these faithful servants of God and to respond to God's call with joy and dedication.

Transcript

We're in good shape. We've been working on that, you know. And it has been great to arrive here and see all you people.

I don't know, there's something about you people that live down in this part of the world, you know, that's special. And you've warmed our hearts already. This morning as I came out at seven o'clock, I surprised even myself to get out that early.

But what a welcome we received as we came down for a cup of coffee. And we're assured of your concern about our getting here last night. Well, we are grateful for your prayers and your concern.

And we know that we're going to enjoy the presence of the Lord with us this week. I know that because I have been at conferences before with Bob Ramey. And I happen to know that the Lord blesses his ministry.

And I'm counting on that. I'm so glad to be here with him this week. It gives me the opportunity of listening and learning something from him.

So far as what we have before us is concerned, I have in mind that we share something, some of the lessons that come to us out of the life of God's servant Elisha during this week. Now, Elisha was quite a person. There were more miracles recorded, I do believe, in the life of Elisha than of any other man of whom a record is left to us in the word of God except the Lord Jesus.

This man was living in a time when there was a call for some manifestation of the power of God. And so his life is marked by the miracles in his life. In fact, every mention of him in the Old Testament has to do with one of the 17 miracles that God did through him.

17 different miracles. And every one of them has got a wonderful lesson for us. We're not going to get to all 17, but we'll get to those that we can and see what God has to say to us.

But, you know, Elisha, somehow he lives in the shadow of Elijah. When we think of the Old Testament prophets, the one we think of right away is Elijah, isn't it? Elijah was the prophet of God that came before Elisha. It's very interesting how this is in the word of God, how God seems to use men and women in pairs.

There was Elijah and Elisha. There was Cain and Abel. There was Abraham and Lot.

There was Ishmael and Isaac. There was Jacob and Esau. There was Enoch and Noah.

There was Moses and Aaron. Caleb and Joshua. Naomi and Ruth.

Ezra and Nehemiah. And the Lord sent the apostles out by two, and we're told that in a future day, he will send his witnesses, two witnesses, to the people. So God often uses people in pairs, and he seems to have used this pair of men.

And one of the things I want us to notice about them this morning is the kind of men they were. Because their ministries dovetail so closely together, I want us to move from the one into the other, and not just start with Elisha, but to start with some remembrance of this man, Elijah. Now, we read in the word of God that when the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall raise up a standard against him.

And this is what God does. There was a time in the history of Israel when things had gone right to the wall. Things were in a deplorable condition.

You couldn't find anybody around that had any testimony or any witness to God. In fact, Elijah thought he was the only one. Now, the Lord said to him, boy, I've got 7,000 people in the nation that have been loyal to me.

But so far as the evidence was concerned, Elijah must have said to the Lord, where are they? You know, they weren't in sight. They were like Obadiah. We read about him.

He was one of them, and he stayed real low-key in those days so that they wouldn't stand out too much and get into trouble. And that's the kind of day in which Elijah and Elisha both ministered. It's the kind of day in which you and I live.

And therefore, there are lessons, I believe, in the lives of these men. Now, there were some things about these men that resembled one another. They were both prophets, for example.

They were both sent by God to speak to the nation, and they were sent to speak to the nation of Israel. That is, their ministry was centered around Samaria. And they were sent into similar situations, this situation of godlessness and of a noncommittal, if I can put it that way, to the Lord.

People didn't care about the Lord in those days. Then they both had interesting first miracles. You remember the first miracle of Elijah? He said, until I say so, it won't rain.

And he stopped the water. And the first miracle of Elisha was that he sweetened the waters of Jericho. Just exactly the opposite.

The one shut off the abundance, and the other turned it on. Another thing was that Elijah went to Ahab, that wicked king of Israel. Elisha went to Ahab's son, Jehoram, who was also a wicked king of Israel.

Elijah was sent to be supported by a widow at Zarephath. And Elisha was sent to be cared for by a woman in Shuman. So there were things about these two men that were very much alike.

And I think this grows out of the fact that the one wanted to be so much like the other. On the other hand, there were contrasts as well. Elijah, he comes on the scene in the 17th chapter of 1 Kings, the first verse, all of a sudden, just like that.

And Elijah the Tishbite, you'd think you knew all about him, the way he is introduced. It's the first mention of him. And Elijah the Tishbite went into the presence of Ahab, and he said, there'll be no rain until I say so.

A dramatic, tremendous introduction. It isn't that way with Elisha. Elisha came on very casually without plowing in the field.

And we'll be looking at that, but he was just going about his day's work when Elijah comes along and throws his mantle on him and signifies that he's to be his successor. There was nothing very dramatic about that situation. And then Elijah was a loner.

That is to say, he was one of these men that he was irascible, you know, he didn't like people. He wanted to be left alone. Elisha wasn't that way at all.

He was a gregarious person. He liked to be with people. He liked to do things for people.

On the other hand, Elijah's ministry was always dramatic and right out front in front of everybody. Elisha's ministry wasn't that way. It was a quiet ministry.

He did his thing among his disciples and among one or two people, a few folk around. He was nothing dramatic about what Elisha did. He was entirely different from Elijah on that score.

Elijah, so typically, was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. Elisha got sick and went to bed and died, just like most people do. Entirely different kind of person.

There was a difference in the kind of miracles they did, too. When Elijah did a miracle, it involved death and destruction, and it was a big deal. When Elisha did a miracle, it was a private thing.

Only a few people involved. Nothing, no death and destruction about anything that Elisha did. With Elisha, it was always healing and restoration and blessing.

He went about doing good to people. Elijah's ministry was a ministry of judgment. Elisha's ministry was a ministry of grace.

And interestingly enough, this is turned around, you know. According to our thoughts, we usually think God is gracious and he bears with people up to a point, and then, bang, comes the judgment. Well, it didn't happen in this case.

The warning of the judgment, the imminent judgment, was given in the life of Elijah, and then along comes grace, along comes Elisha, and he calms everything and everybody down. Now, I would like to suggest this may be one of the first lessons in the life of Elisha, because it points out to you and to me that however we might think that God operates, whatever our ideas may be, our God has a persistent grace. He goes so far beyond what any of us would do.

Very easy, you know, to call down judgment upon people. Very easy to speak of the righteousness of God and His righteous indignation and what He's going to do. That comes more natural to us than to speak of His grace and of His love.

And yet we live in an age that is a demonstration every day of the grace of God. Can you imagine a God that would put up with what He puts up in the world today? The things God will tolerate are unthinkable, and this speaks of His readiness to bless. This has something to do with our witness and our testimony.

Easy to protest against evil. Easy to declaim against sin. But, you know, we have a greater message than that.

We have a greater message than that for the world, and it has to do with the persistent grace of God, His will to bless men and women. We have such a small concept of God's grace, of His waiting. Turn with me now to 2 Peter 3, and let's look at the New Testament statement about this.

2 Peter 3, verse 9, where Peter writes these words, The Lord is not slack concerning His promises. Some men count slackness, but He is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And there we have the biblical explanation of why the judgment of God is stayed, why it is held back, because our God is persistently gracious.

How quick we are to judge, but not our God. Now, it's interesting to me that there's twice as much said in the Old Testament about Elisha as there is said about Elijah. The thing is, it's scattered around in the Old Testament, so that sometimes we miss it.

But let's pick it up at 1 Kings, chapter 19. And let's begin reading at verse 15. And the Lord said unto Elijah, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.

And Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel. And Elisha, the son of Shaphat, of Abel Meholah, shalt thou anoint to be the prophet in thy room. Now, this is interesting, because so far as I can find out, this is the only time an anointing of a prophet is mentioned in the Old Testament.

This prophet was anointed to be a prophet and to be the successor of Elijah. Now, when he was anointed, let's look down now at verse 19. So he departed hence, that is, Elijah, and he found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth.

And Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again, for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him and took a yoke of oxen and slew them and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen and gave unto the people, and they did eat.

Then he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him. Now, this doesn't sound like much, but there's a great deal in what we read. I would remind you of the circumstances of the day in which Elisha lived.

Elijah was the great national hero. He was the one who was a voice for God, and he would go in and talk to the king when he had something to say. And of course, that was front page news when Elijah went in to see the king.

And everybody in Israel would talk about this. Did you hear about what Elijah said to the king this time? And it would get around all over and those who were faithful to God would rejoice in what Elijah said and say, Boy, it's about time somebody told him, you know. And the rest of the nation, they sort of said, That guy again, he's around.

But anyway, he was known. His name was a household word in the nation. And the nation was very much opposed on the whole to him.

Now, he was the kind of man that the families would talk about around the breakfast table or the dinner table at night. What Elijah did today would be a common subject of conversation. And Elisha, being a younger man, as he lived in his home, he lived on a farm, as we see, he would hear his parents talking about this great prophet and what he did lately.

And of course, Elijah was the man that all the young men looked up to. That is, all the godly young men. They thought, This man, he is something.

And they all aspired to be Elijah's, you know. But nobody else had the courage to be. Well, Elisha is out one day plowing in the field.

And it says he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. This tells us a lot about Elisha. A man who would use twelve yoke of oxen to plow the field had a big farm.

Have you got the picture of twelve yoke of oxen pulling plows? That is to say, one would be here, the other would be here, the other would be here, the other would be here, twelve yoke wide. And he would be at the end of the twelve yoke of oxen. And others, I suppose, that were helping him were handling the rest of the animals.

And they would go down the field, I suppose it would be as wide as this building or wider when they go down the field plowing it. So this says to us his father was a prosperous man with a great big farm. And he was the son of the farmer.

And he is a hero worshipper. He thinks a great deal of Elijah. When one day he is out plowing the field this way, he sees a man come across the field.

And as the man approaches, he can hardly believe it. This has got to be the prophet. What is he doing here? And Elijah comes up to him and in the symbolism of the day, he takes his mantle off and he throws

it over Elijah.

And in the symbolism of the day, that meant I have chosen you to work with me. Well now, this is quite a situation. I wonder how we would react to that.

He thought Elijah was great, but everybody didn't. Especially Jezebel didn't think much of him. And the authorities always seemed to be looking for him.

He was always in trouble. And you would almost think, you know, that Elijah would say, hey, wait a minute. Don't throw your mantle on me.

I got a nice situation here. My father's got this fine big farm, and I am his son, and just, you know, let us alone. I'm fine.

I'm in a secure situation. You mean you want me to leave all this and come to be with you? No way. All I would get by doing that would be trouble.

I think some of us might react that way. But not Elijah. Hey man, the prophet came and threw his mantle on him.

And he ran after the prophet and he said, hold it. I'll come right away. Let me go home and kiss my folks goodbye.

And Elijah said, in effect, what have I done to you? You don't have to come with me. You do as you like. You better think this over.

It sounds, in the way it's written in our Bibles, as though Elijah made a rather unkind statement. You know, what have I to do with thee? But the significance of that statement was that Elijah was expressing his own irascible characteristics, and he didn't like people anyway, and he'd been told to anoint this fellow to be his successor. He wasn't very enthusiastic about that.

And he threw his mantle on him and kept going. And Elijah ran after him and said, I'll be right with you. And it's amazing what he did.

He ran home and you can see him bursting into the kitchen in the farmhouse and saying, Pop, Mom, the prophet is here and he threw his mantle on me. And the folks that stand there shocked. Their son was called to be the successor of the prophet? That's exactly what had happened.

And while they were trying to swallow this down and adjust themselves to the idea, he's all excited. He said, I'm going as soon as I can. And he gets rid of the oxen.

He offers the oxen as an offering to the Lord and invites all the neighbors in the whole area to come in and have a feast and a party because he's going with Elijah. He burns up his farm instruments and says, away with this farm life for me. I'm going to be a prophet.

I love this. Here is a fellow that got a call to the Lord's work and he thought it was great. You remember how you reacted the last time you heard somebody got a call to the Lord's work? You're one of those people that said, oh dear, he's certainly giving up some wonderful prospect.

Why is he quitting that good job in order to become a prophet? This is sort of the attitude a lot of us have about getting into the Lord's work, being involved. He was giving up everything, everything good in the views of the world. And he was taking on an assignment as a prophet of God, which is only going to lead him into trouble.

God still calls people and he still calls them the same way. Usually when God calls a man or a woman into his service, they're busy about what they're doing. As Elijah was.

Elijah had no notion of this. He was plowing a field. Chances are if God is going to call you into his service for some special thing he wants done, he'll call you right out of what you're doing.

That's the way he does. He doesn't call people who are standing around saying, I haven't got anything to do. He hasn't time for those people.

He wants people that are busy and that are busy about their proper business. And he found Elisha in just such a situation as that. And it says that he went and ran after Elijah and ministered unto him.

Now remember, his father was wealthy. He had a great farm. He was destined to be something.

I'm saying that in the terms the world uses. He had a good thing going. He gave it all up and he gave it up with a party and he gave it up with gladness because there was an opportunity to do something for God, even if it meant trouble.

And what did he get? He got a job as a menial servant. Later on we read in this connection that he is referred to as the man who poured water on the hands of Elijah. You know what this means? It means he was his funky.

He poured water on his hands. He went and got the water, put it in a bowl, brought it back and took care that Elijah was properly cared for. He saw that his clothes were in proper shape.

He took care of the man as his minister, doing the menial things. He was willing to give up all he had, even if it was to take on a menial job as the servant, the personal servant of a man who was mighty unpopular. You see, he was prepared to identify himself with Elijah.

And that's a good word, this word identification. Elisha wanted to identify with Elijah. He wanted to be known as the man who stood for the same things Elijah stood for.

And if that was true, that was all he wanted. That was enough for him. Now, you remember in the verse that we read in 1 Kings chapter 19, that the Lord had said to Elijah, anoint Elisha to be prophet in thy room.

So the Lord had in mind he wasn't always going to be a menial personal servant. He was preparing him through that ministry for something else in which he was going to use him. And this is what bothers a lot of us sometimes.

We get into doing things for the Lord and it always seems like all the dirty work falls on us. And, you know, this isn't what I did this for. I didn't go to school and get trained to do this kind of thing.

I've heard that statement so often. We don't like to go through the internship of the menial jobs. Before we are used greatly, we think I made a great sacrifice.

Look what I gave up. I think the Lord ought to dignify what I've done and use me in some great way. The Lord doesn't usually start that way.

He called this man, he put him to a menial job, but he had in mind that he was going to take the place of his great servant. That was what was signified when Elijah threw his mantle on him. He was going to take his place.

Now, the king recognized this later on, Jehoram, and we may get to that miracle later, in this, that when Elisha died, the king said exactly the same words that Elisha said when Elijah died. Now, or when Elijah was taken away in a chariot to heaven. We read that he was taken away in a chariot to heaven and Elisha stood there and said, The chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof, the defense of Israel is gone.

And that's exactly what the king said when Elisha died. The defenses of the nation are gone. He had fully taken the place of the man he was called to replace.

And this is what he wanted. When he was asked what was the one thing in all the world that he wanted most, he said to Elijah, to be just like you. Now, let me stop there.

Another lesson. Are there very many people saying that about you? That the greatest aspiration of my heart is to be like him? This says something about Elijah, but it says something to us. Are we the kind of men and women that those who are coming in the generation to follow look at and say, Lord, make me like him.

Make me like her. And if you had the choice of one thing in this whole world you could have, you know, we read about the Arabian Nights and this was one of the tricks in that was to offer people, you can have any three things you want or any one thing you want. Well, what if you were offered one thing? What if somebody said to you this morning as you leave this meeting, met you on the path out there and said, I have been sent by the Lord to suggest to you, to tell you, you can have any one thing you want in this world.

What would you say? Now, to give you long enough to think about it, you're going to get around to the idea that what you should say, whether you would or not, is to be just like the Lord Jesus. Right? That should be the aspiration of every one of our hearts, to be just like him, to be his double in the earth. And that was Elisha's greatest wish, was to be like Elijah.

He wanted this. Now, let me remind you that in all of this, God took the initiative. This was not Elisha's idea.

This was God's plan. He had in mind all of this way in advance. It was a long time before when he told Elijah, I want you to go and anoint Elisha.

God had Elisha in mind and what he was going to do with him. Elisha didn't have the faintest notion about this. And I suggest to you, you may not have the faintest notion about what God is prepared to do in your life.

But I'll tell you this, he has greater ideas about what he can do in and through you than you think. He has great ideas in mind for every one of us. And he will accomplish greater things in our lives as they are committed to him, the way Elisha's life was, than ever we would believe if we were told.

And God, as I said, calls us from our work. He called Elisha from the farm, from plowing. He called the disciples from mending their nets.

He called Matthew from his work sitting at the seat of custom. He called Saul from his zealous persecution of the church when people don't expect it. Do you expect it this morning? Are you expecting anything from the Lord this morning? Or have you just come to a nice conference? You're going to enjoy the ministry of the word of God and the fellowship of his people.

Great! But look, God wants to meet you this morning. God wants to do something in your life this morning. He wants to call you to something beyond and above anything you've experienced until this morning.

He's looking for men. He's looking for women who will respond the way Elisha responded, with a glad response to his call. This is an interesting study.

Make it some time. When God called Isaiah to his service, in the year the king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up and his throne filled the temple. And he said, who will go for us? And Isaiah responded and said, Jeremiah, send me! Oh, man, he wanted God to use him.

God used him. You come to Jeremiah? He was a young fellow when God called him. And he said, hold it, wait a minute.

Not me. You're not calling me. I'm just a kid.

I can't go to these older men and tell them what to do. And the Lord said, when I send you, don't worry about whether you're a kid or not. You go and say what I say and it will have its effect in their lives.

And he went out for 46 years and proclaimed the Word of God through thick and thin, through agony and joy. Then you come to Ezekiel. God called Ezekiel, it says, that one day he was out walking by the river Kibar, and the glory of the Lord shone down on him, and he saw the Lord.

And the Lord called him to his service. And Ezekiel said, no, thanks. And the Lord said, do you know who's talking to you? Now, listen, this is what I want you to do.

And Ezekiel said, nothing doing. And the Lord said, look, if I was asking you to do something, going to estranged people or being a foreign missionary or something, I could understand your attitude, but I'm just asking you to go to your own people and tell them what I say. And Ezekiel, the Spirit took Ezekiel and put him right down in the spot where he could speak to the leaders of the nation, and Ezekiel wouldn't open his mouth.

And so the Lord said, OK, if that's the way you feel about it, if you don't want to speak for me, you won't speak at all. And for the next three years, Ezekiel's tongue was cleaved to the roof of his mouth, and he couldn't say a word for the Lord or himself or anybody else. And then the Lord took that man, and through one illustration in his life after another, he brought the people of Israel to him, and they said, what do these things in your life mean? Explain this to us.

And then he was able to speak for God. Now, did people respond differently to the call to serve the Lord? But the Lord is not frustratable. The Lord will accomplish his purpose.

All he asks you and me to do is to respond with joy and enter into the joy and the gladness of it. That's what this man did. When he was called to be the word of God to the people, to be the one who would

stand up and speak for God, although it would mean unpopularity, although it would mean the kings were against him, although it would mean he'd be a hated man.

Elisha gave a party, and Elisha said, this is for me. God help me to be like Elijah. And I suggest to you this morning, the same call is going out over the land where there is so great need, just as great as there was in Samaria.

The call is going out by God to men and women everywhere to come stand up and be counted for me. And to count it joy, whatever it costs. And we should be giving parties because God has deigned in great grace to call you and me to represent the Lord Jesus in the earth.

God help us to respond. O God, we thank thee that when we speak of thee out of thy word, we can speak of a God of persistent grace. One who longs to do us good.

One who calls us to himself. One who has shared his very spirit with us and given us his life. And calls us to be distinct and different in the world of men.

To stand up for what the Lord Jesus stood for. And we pray thee, O God, speak to our hearts this morning. Give us a new aspiration.

A new, fresh desire to be in the earth, we pray in his dear name. Amen.

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