

Place: Lurgan Baptist 1:5:2016

A MAN FOR OUR TIME

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-15

13. A NO - DEATH CONTRACT

Two men were dying across town from one another. One was a very wealthy man who had amassed and enjoyed a fortune. His home was lavishly furnished with antiques and expensive paintings. A stylish car sat outside the door and a boat was on the nearby lake. The second man had never flourished financially, but he had loved the Lord and worked faithfully in the village church. The first as he died moaned, “ *I’m leaving home, I’m leaving home.*” The second died with a glow on his face, saying, “ *I’m going home, I’m going home.*” A few hours before D. L. Moody the U.S.A. evangelist entered heaven he caught a glimpse of the glory awaiting him. He said, “ *Earth is receding, Heaven is opening, God is calling I must go. This is my triumph. This is my coronation day. It is glorious.*” Vance Havner, a famous American preacher tells us that when he started out preaching as boy, his father went along. Then when he got old enough to go out by himself, his father would meet him after a period of being away from home at the little railroad station in Newton, North Carolina.

His father would be standing there by the old Ford roadster, in an old blue serge suit that had not been

pressed since the day he bought it. The first thing he said to Vance was, “ ***How did you get along ?***” Havner says, “ *It’s been a long time, and one of these days when my train rounds into Grand Central Station in glory, I think he’ll be there not in the old blue serge suit, but in the robes of glory and I think he’ll say, “ how did you get along ?” I think I’ll say pretty well and I owe a lot to you for it.*” Then I think I’ll say, “ *You remember back in the country when I was a little boy, no matter where I was in the afternoon I was supposed to back by sundown. It’s been a long trip, Dad but here I am by the grace of God, home before dark.*” What a trip Elijah had been on. Trained at Cherith, shaped and refined at Zarephath, used magnificently on Mount Carmel, powerfully anointed to stand before King Ahab on more than one occasion, and finally given the companionship of Elisha, the old prophet had emerged as God’s man for the hour.

Heroic almost beyond belief, yet humble of heart, Elijah seemed to have reached the pinnacle of life’s experiences. But now he was going to top them all, he was going to dodge death. For the fiery prophet does not age gracefully and then die quietly, he does not die at all. Rather in one deathless stride he steps from the temporal into the eternal. And God has told him that today’s the day. My what would you do if you knew today was your last day on earth ? Think of this. Here is a man on the borders of heaven. Elijah, a man just like us is about to be translated into the presence of God. How does he prepare for his departure ? How does he occupy his last hours ? How does he get ready for glory ? I believe there are three words that sum up this final episode in Elijah’s life.

(1) PREPARATION

If you knew that God was going to take you home to heaven today, how would you prepare ? How would you spend your last hours ? Well, look at Elijah. My he knew he was going to be taken up to heaven without dying and because of this, he leaves us a fitting example of how we should be living in anticipation of the Lord's return. (2:9) What was he doing as he anticipates glory ? He was,

(a) *LIVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD:*

For of each step in that last thirty odd mile journey he can say, “ *the Lord hath sent me.* ” (2:2, 4, 6) His movements were a result of God's leading. Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan River were important places in Hebrew history each of them carrying a significant message. Do you recall that Gilgal was the place of *Beginning ?* (Jos 4:19-24) Bethel was the place of *Worship ?* (Gen 12:8) Jericho was the Place of *Battle ?* (Jos 6:17) and Jordan was the place of *Death.* (Jos 3:16) It is as though Elijah is reviewing the past and reflecting on it.

1. *There was a SPIRITUALNESS about Elijah:*

Again and again we read in Scripture of Elijah heeding God's direction on where to go and what to say. (17:2-5 17:8 18:1) Now he ends his life the way he had lived it in submission to God's will. Do you recall what was said of Enoch, the first man to be translated to heaven. “ *And Enoch walked with God.* ” (Gen 5:22) Elijah did the same

for each successive step he took was in fellowship with God. Do you recall John's words, “ *And now little children abide in him, that, when he shall appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.* ” (1 Jn 2:28) Think of what that first meeting with Christ will be like. The mists of earth will have passed away. Self-deception which is easy now will be no longer possible. Forgiveness will be wonderfully sweet, but will we be able to forgive ourselves ? As in the light of eternal glory we look back on our past life and conduct, and be ashamed of every hour spend out of fellowship with God. 1.

2. *There was a STILLNESS about Elijah:*

He knew that before long he would be standing in the light of eternity, beholding the face of God, understanding all mysteries that puzzled his eager spirit. But meantime instead of being taken up with ecstatic things, he visits the “ *schools of the prophets,* ” and quietly talks with his friends till the chariot comes and sweeps him away. As John Knox said on his death bed, “ *Oh, serve the Lord in fear and death shall not be terrible unto you.* ” 1. 2.

3. *There was a SELFLESSNESS about Elijah:*

For although he knew about his glorious departure (2:1,9) he makes no mention of it, nor does he glory in it. Indeed it seems that his desire was that he should leave this world alone for he says to Elisha “ *Tarry here.* ” Did Elijah fear attracting honor and glory that was due to God alone ? My here is a man on the verge of heaven full

of genuine humility. My is this not where many of us fall ? How eager we are to tell others of how much we have done or are doing for the Lord. The moment God uses and blesses us, how quick we are to tell it and feast our souls on their praise and admiration. But not Elijah. He was not thinking of his personal glory, but only of God's glory. My in light of your departure via the Lord's call or the Lord's coming are you living in fellowship with God ?

(b) LABOURING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD:

Why was Elijah wandering around the countryside, going to Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho ? If Jordan was to be the place of his departure why not go straight to Jordan ? Well, historians tell us that the " *schools of the prophets,*" were located at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. These were early " *Bible Colleges,*" if you will, most likely founded by Samuel, schools where young men were trained to undertake the sacred calling and the disciplined life of a prophet. (1 Sam 10:5 1 Kings 20:35 2 Kings 2:3, 4:1 4:38) My was it not Elijah's desire to meet one last time with the young prophets in training and offer final words of encouragement, to those who would carry the torch of truth after his departure. (b) John Wesley was asked, " *What would you do if you knew the Lord was coming in three days time ?*" Wesley replied, " *I should just do the work I have already planned to do, ministering in one place, meeting my preachers in another, lodging in yet another place till the moment came that I was called to higher service.*" Beza said to his scribe as he was

translating the gospel of John, " *Write fast, write fast for I am dying.*" Then when he got to the last verse he said, " *Now shut the book, and leave me alone a minute.*" Beza fell back and entered heaven. In light of your imminent departure from this earth, can I ask, what are you doing for the Lord ? Are there still souls in your family that have not been warned ? Are there still children that have not been taught ? Are there still fields of usefulness that you have not ploughed ?

(c) LOVING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD:

For was there not a sweet attractiveness about this grand old warrior Elijah. Well, Elisha felt it and he refused to leave him, even though Elijah tested his devotion three times. (2:2, 4, 6) But Elisha passed the test most successfully. " *I will not leave thee.*" (2:2) So " *they went down to Bethel,*" (2:2) " *they came to Jericho,*" (2:4) " *they two went on,*" (2:6) " *they two stood by Jordan,*" (2:7) " *they two went over on dry ground,*" (2:8) " *they were gone over,*" (2:9) " *they still went on,*" (2:11) The old veteran and the young prophet in harmony, in unity, in fellowship. I mean these two men represented different generations and opposite personalities yet they were able to walk together. No doubt during the last ten years they came to love and appreciate one another in a deeper way. You see, " *It is not good that the man should be alone,*" (Gen 2:18) not only applies to *marriage* it applies to *ministry* as well. We think of Moses and Aaron, David and Jonathan, Paul and Silas even the Lord sent out His disciples two by two.

(Mk 6:7) I can recall an elder in one of my previous churches praying for Christians who were not going to get better. He prayed something like this, “ *Lord may they be at peace with you, with themselves and with their brethren.*” Is it not a great thing as the time of your departure draws near to be at peace with your brethren ? The psalmist says, “ *The days of our years are threescore years and ten.*” (Ps 90:10) Life is so short. Are you there yet ? Are you nearly there ? Are you growing old gracefully ? Is there an appeal, an affection, an attractiveness about your life that draws even the young to you ? Or could it be that you’re on edge of eternity and disputes have not been resolved, apologies have not been made, and words have not been withdrawn ? Near to the border of heaven, but are you (a) (b) (c) ? (1)

(2) TRANSLATION

Can you picture this scene ? Elijah and Elisha walking and talking together when suddenly, and dramatically Elijah was swept into heaven by a whirlwind. The Hebrew can also be translated, “ *in a gust, in a windy movement.*” Most folk are acquainted with how tornadoes pick up things and carry them many miles. In similar fashion Elijah was picked up from the earth and carried to heaven. My in some kind of sweeping movement, Elijah was caught up and in that instant he was gone from this earth into God’s presence. Now he was swept into glory by a flaming chariot. The chariot and the horses only accompanied him. Indeed when Elisha saw “ *the chariot of fire and horses of fire,*” he cried out, “ *My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.*”

(2:12) My was it not fitting that a whirlwind man should be swept into heaven in a whirlwind manner ? Elijah had a no-death contract. Now what can we learn from Elijah’s translation ?

(a) *The Future of The Christian is in God’s Hands:*

You see, Elijah had now got to the place where he was prepared to accept his Heavenly Father’s plan for him. Do you remember that ten years earlier he had suffered a severe bout of depression and he had prayed, “ *O Lord take away my life for I am not better than my fathers.*”

(1 Kings 19:10) Isn’t it a good thing that all our prayers are not answered the way we want ? Elijah prayed and God said, “ *No, I’m not going to take your life from you, I’m going to give your life to you.*” F.B. Meyer said, “ *we shall have to bless Him for ever more for prayers He refused than for those He granted.*” My Elijah had ten more years of service for his Lord. Elijah’s way was death in the desert sands, God’s way was a no death contract.

“ *And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*”

(2:11) Someone has said, “ *God always gives the best to those who leave the choice with Him.*” The psalmist says, “ *My times are in thy hand.*” (Ps 31:15) Do you recognise that ?

1.The Timing of your Departure is in God’s Hands:

Elijah wanted to go ten years previous but God said no. Its Christ and not circumstances who will determine our departure from this world.

2. The Manner of your Departure is in God's Hands

Fancy, Elijah being taken to glory without having to pass through the article of death.

3. The Place of your Departure is in God's Hands:

I mean Elijah's departure took place in an obscure place just east of the Jordan River. We might have planned a more prominent place with a bigger crowd to watch the home call of the man of God. Do you know something? Your location in life may be obscure, you may not have a famous position in life, you might not even have many folk at your funeral but so what? Elisha was the only man with Elijah when he departed, but he had a glorious home-going do you know why? He was faithful to the Lord. (a) My is it not wonderful to realise that He who said, "*Behold I am alive for evermore,*" said also, "*Amen and have the keys of hell and death.*" (Rev 1:18) Listen, despite cancer, heart trouble, dementia, old age, growths you'll never depart this world until Christ says so. He is in control. (a) But,

(b) The Rapture of the Church is in God's Hands:

For surely in Elijah's translation to glory we see a type of the rapture of the church. Now many are skeptical about this is, just as the "*sons of the prophets,*" were in relation to Elijah's translation. But the passage states that he went to heaven without dying. "*And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*" (2:11) The mortal put on immortality, the body of humiliation was exchanged for a

body of glory. This man who burned with a holy zeal for God is now with a heavenly fire translated. My will this not be the privilege of those who "*are alive,*" when the Saviour comes again? Do you recall how Paul describes it? He says, "*The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*"

(1 Thes 4:16-17) The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest explains the various meanings of the Greek word that is translated "*caught up.*" (harpazo) ***it means to catch away speedily: to seize by force: to claim for One's self: to move to a new place: and to rescue from danger.***

My million's of graves are dug every year but it's wonderful that one generations of Christians will cheat the undertaker. Oh, what a thrill it would be, to be found preaching for Christ, living for Christ, working for Christ when He appears.

**Oh joy, oh delight should we go without dying
No sickness, no sadness, no dread and no crying
Caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory
When Jesus receives His own**

(3) CONTINUATION

For here we see Elisha taking the mantle of Elijah. On the 12th April 1945 Harry Truman received a message asking him to come to the White House, as "*quickly and as*

quietly as you can.” Truman left immediately thinking that the President had a special job for him to do. To his surprise when he arrived he was ushered into Mrs. Roosevelt’s sitting room. She got up, put her arm on his shoulder and said, “ *Harry, the President is dead.*” Truman was too stunned to speak. Finally, he managed to say to Mrs. Truman, “ *Is there anything I can do for you ?*” “ *No, Harry,*” she said “ *Is there anything we can do for you ? You are the one in trouble now.*” It’s hard enough to become President at any time, but this happened in the middle of the Second World War. President Roosevelt had been the longest serving president in American history. The war was going well but there were big decisions to be made. Now all the responsibility of leading his nation and the free world was suddenly on Truman’s shoulders.

The next day he said “ *I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me.*” Few assignments are more difficult than following a great and gifted leader, whether it is a president, a parent or a pastor. But leaders no matter how good and godly don’t last forever. Change is inevitable. Good people die or depart, new problems emerge, new opportunities arise. Gary Ingrig says “ *Sometimes we would love to clone the past, but life doesn’t work that way. And all of us face times in the relay of life when the baton is in our hands and the next lap is ours.*” My can you imagine the feelings of Elisha as Elijah was translated to heaven and he was left standing alone by the banks of Jordan ? Have some of you not been to the very place where Elisha mourned the loss of a loved one ? What are you to do ? How are you to

act ? Well, did you notice what Elisha did. Yes, there was **a period of sorrowing** as he rent his clothes (2:12) But my the period of sorrowing gave way to **the period of serving** as he took Elijah’s mantle, his cloak and he cried, “ *Where is the Lord God of Elijah ?*” (2:14) In other words, Elisha continued where Elijah left off. (2:15) Is that not what you are to do ? My pick up the mantle that your loved one has left, pick up the legacy that your loved one has left behind and continue the work of God. Don’t say, “ *Where is Elijah ?*” But “ *Where is the Lord God of Elijah ?*” **Continuation.**

Is that not what Fred Orr did ? For on his way up the river to Boca do Acre, Ina, his wife took ill. For days he nursed her on the boat, but on the 4th June 1954 she fell asleep in Christ. My she was only 29 years of age, she had been in Brazil for just six weeks. What did Fred Orr do ? Well, the Acre Gospel Mission offered to bring him home to Belfast, but he declined the offer feeling that he should continue the work that he and Ina had gone to Brazil to do. (3) Did you notice here though,

(a) *The Man of God Departs the Person of God Remains:*

When a man or woman of God dies, nothing of God dies. When God’s leader is removed everything of God remains. Transition times are times to refocus on the unchanging God. “ *Where is the Lord God of Elijah ?*” reminds us that even though Elijah was missing, God was still present and active. My

1. The Provision of God is Still the Same:

The God who sustained the prophet in the Raven Hotel, by the brook Cherith, and at Zarephath in the widow's home is your God and “ *my God shall supply all your need*,” (Phil 4:19)

2. The Promise of God is Still the Same:

“ *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.*” (Matt 7:7) My did Elijah not prove that ? My when we pray we move the arm that moves the world so that impossible things become possible.

3. The Power of God is Still the Same:

For when Elisha took the mantle of Elijah and smote the waters “ *they parted.*” (2:14) Has God's power diminished ? Is anything too hard for the Lord ? Is He not “ *able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us.*” (Eph 3:20) (a)

***(b) The Man of God Departs the Purpose of God
Continues:***

Sometimes we get so caught up in the lives of certain individuals that we begin to think we cannot do without them. What limited thinking. My even when a mighty servant is gone, God has seven thousand who have never bowed the knee to Baal. You see, God's plan never misses a beat. ***Exit Elijah. Enter Elisha.*** A man of God with the power of God, for had he not asked “ *Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.*” (2:9) He asks to be marked out

as Elijah's firstborn son in relation to the other “ *sons of the prophets.*” (Deut 21:17) In so doing he asks to be equipped with spiritual power. A man of God with the power of God, to do the work of God and all for the glory of God. You know, Elisha's miraculous crossing of the Jordan River not only revealed the power of God, and the faith of His servant, but it also announced to the sons of the prophets that Elisha was their new leader. A.W. Tozer used to say “ ***It takes more than a ballot to make a leader,***” and he was right. So God authenticates by demonstrating His power. (1) (2) (3) **A No-Death Contract.** “ *And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*” (2:11) (1) (2) (3)

Thus ends the earthly story of one of the greatest men of God who ever lived. My he laboured in a remote corner of the globe. He had not much of this world's goods, he had none of this world's applause. When he left there were no memorial services for him, no monuments erected in his honour, no halls named after him. But the Lord afforded him the greatest privilege imaginable, a heavenly escort to bring him bodily to glory without having to taste of death. My Elijah honoured God, and God honoured Elijah. Are you honouring God ? Will God honour you ?

**Only one life twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Jesus will last
Lord at thy feet, myself I cast
Help me, run well for Thee**

