

I Kings 19:19-21; Matt. 11:7-19; Elijah's Successor Appointed I. Elijah is Comforted II. Elisha is Committed III. Elisha is Faithful

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, if you had the choice, would you want to be involved with finding your replacement to carry on your work after you have retired? It could be a blessing- to be able to identify, train and then hand over your work to someone whom you deemed trustworthy! Some in the church have family businesses- sometimes you can find someone to take up your work after you and sometimes not. Well, today we find our beloved prophet Elijah finding his apprentice- someone who will assist him and his ministry and continue that ministry after Elijah dies. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ graciously provides an apprentice for Elijah who will continue carry His word to His people. Finding a pair of servants in the Bible is not all that uncommon- where men are called to service together for a time. Where one was older and the other younger- one a teacher and the other a student. But who is better- who is greater? Jesus tells us that the servant is not above his master- the student is lower than the teacher- which is true for us as followers of Jesus Christ. But in the Bible- we often find that the second man to come in the pairs often does greater things than the first. Even Jesus said that we would do greater things than He did in John 14. So those who come second can and often did perform greater things in the Bible. For example, think of Moses and Joshua. Moses led in the wilderness and gave the promise- but Joshua brought Israel into the promised land and gave possession of it. We will find a similar point as we compare the ministry of Elijah and Elisha- who is greater? Who has the largest influence and brings the greater blessings? So today we find the successor of Elijah is identified and appointed.

I. Elijah is a Comforted Prophet

In our first point, we find that Elijah is comforted in this task of appointing and anointing his follower- a fellow prophet to carry the burden. Although one may fall down when they are alone, two working together- side by side- can lend a hand and strengthen the other. A man alone can be overpowered- but two can resist and defend as Ecc. 4 puts it. The reason that this message from God is comforting is because Elijah needs to be reminded- you are not alone and your ministry is not a failure! Not only are you not done, Elijah! More importantly, I the LORD am not done! Thinking that he alone was left, now Elijah will see that others will literally

take up his mantle and continue his work. So in v. 19 Elijah goes and finds Elisha as instructed, and he throws his prophetic cloak around him. Traveling NE to the Jordan Valley, the ancient city of Abel-moholah is his destination. Abel-maholah means “meadow of dancing!” And there were dancing in this town- because the drought was over! Finding his man, he goes up to him and commissions him. Remember that this hairy cloak was a sign of his office- it pointed to his being clothed with the Spirit as Judges 6 puts it. So to throw his cloak around Elisha is to both identify Elisha with the wearer of the cloak and calls him into service. It was akin to calling someone to be your disciple. So to take up the cloak is to take up the office and to be seen as one clothed or filled with the Holy Spirit. This cloak will again play an important role in Elisha’s life in II Kings 2 when this cloak will fall from Elijah to be picked up by Elisha once again. Now when we take a step back, we see that Elijah and Elisha together will be used by God to perform His wondrous works in Israel- but they are not alone. Now if you look down at 20:13 and 22:13, you find that there are other prophets active in Israel at this time. Obadiah had saved 1000- and we read of this unnamed prophet in chapter 20 and Micaiah in 22- so Elijah is not alone and the work of God within Israel is not limited to this one man. However, Elijah and Elisha do have a special place and prominent role in the rise and fall of kings as we will see in later weeks. With Elijah and Elisha together- we have in many ways a promise and fulfillment. A duet that gives a beautifully full picture. So when we have Moses and Joshua- we get a fully picture of God at work in Israel- promise and fulfillment. With Elijah and Elisha- we have The LORD is God now the LORD God Saves! We catch a glimpse of OT and NT- Law and Gospel- justice and mercy. In Malachi 4:5 we find this promise- that the LORD will send Elijah before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. So Elijah’s ministry was always meant to be preparatory- to declare- make straight the way of the LORD before His coming! And as we read in Matthew 11; John the Baptist is the one sent by God in the Spirit of Elijah- preparing for the greater one to come. So Moses gives way to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, and John gives way to Jesus! And John will decrease as Jesus comes- for John is not worthy to untie even the sandal of Jesus. When we see the big picture- that Elijah was the OT version of John- we start to see his function more clearly. John was like Elijah- in his dress, function and message. These men called for repentance, came with weeping and sorrow as they lived in a time of drought- and ushered in the end of that

drought from God's Word. Prepare the way for the coming one- as Isaiah 40 puts it. Both John and Elijah rebuked kings and spent time questioning their role. But the one to follow will be different. It will be Elisha- our OT version of Jesus- who comes with joy, gladness, feasting, dancing, and life to the fullest. When people reject Elisha and Jesus- they will be judged swiftly! No more waiting- a separation and completion takes place! And both prophets- Elisha and Jesus- will come bringing plenty and life to those who are suffering. Now as we read in Matthew 11- many people rejected both Elijah and Elisha- as they also rejected John and Jesus. But to those who receive Him- He gives the right to become children of God. So the Law comes by Moses, Elijah and John; while grace and mercy comes in the ministry of Joshua, Elisha and Jesus.

II. Elisha is a Committed Prophet

Now that we can see how Elisha functions in Redemptive History, we continue in our second point by seeing how Elisha when called becomes the committed prophet. Elijah may have been the reluctant prophet last week- but Elisha is willing and eager to take up this work. So when Elijah casts his robe or mantle on Elisha- Elisha leaves all and follows after his new master. In v. 20 he asks to kiss his parents goodbye- effectively cutting his ties with his earthly family. He forsakes all to follow the call of God- as Jesus will say in Mt. 10- if you love father or mother more than me, you are not worthy of me. Or again in Mt. 12- who is my mother and my brother? Those who do the will of my Father in heaven. So Elijah becomes Elisha's new family. It would be like the oldest son choosing not to go into the family business- but rather enter the ministry and attend seminary. Added to this, Elisha burns the bridge of his previous employment. In v. 21 he takes the yoke of oxen, makes a meal of their meat and burns up the implements of labor. Now remember the context, why was Elisha plowing the field? Well, they could finally plant something! Finally, it rained and the earth that was as hard as iron has now been softened. And being the 12th of 12 teams, Elisha must have come from a family of significant means. He was the supervisor of this fleet of oxen. But in killing the oxen Elisha is making it clear- I will not be going back to this old labor. Like the disciples who left their father in the boat- leaving their nets behind to become fishers of men- now Elisha leaves the earthly field in order to sow the Word of God in the soil of man's hearts. There is no

going back. Elisha takes up his cross and follows his new master. As Luke 9 puts it, if you are plowing and you look back, you are not fit for the kingdom. Well, Elisha is not going to look back- he is fully committed to this new calling and commission!

III. Elisha is a Faithful Friend

After breaking his ties with this former occupation and earthly family, Elisha follows his new master and teacher. There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother! So in v. 21, Elisha goes after Elijah and assists him- pouring water on his hands. He ministered faithfully- being content to follow and learn. As an apprentice of sorts, Elisha is going to encourage Elijah so that both men might further their task- and God would continue to bring His Word to His people through their collective voice. Over the next chapters there is going to be an ebb and flow- as one must decrease so that the other might increase. Although sharing each other's burdens at this point- Elisha will soon replace Elijah on the center stage. Although already wrapped in Elijah's cloak in our text- the time would come when Elisha would carry his master's mantle as well as being filled with a double portion of his master's Spirit in II Kings 2. So for the time being, there will be two prophets in Israel. The word of God will not be silent. These men are sent out together- and they will rebuke kings and bring the Word. Even Jesus sent out His disciples 2 by 2. Having a faithful companion who can help you- assist and aid- someone to share you burdens and joys with is a great encouragement. It is not good for man to be alone and the LORD said. Elijah was alone- or so he thought- but now he has a God-given companion and friend! Someone to carry the cloak of his master.

Before we conclude, we notice something that is missing from our text. Although Elijah was commissioned by God- instructed to anoint 2 kings and 1 prophet- we never read that Elijah actually does this anointing. In fact, does Elijah really anoint Elisha? He casts his robe around him, a symbol of alliance- and Elisha does become the personal assistant- but what of this anointing with holy oil? And we never read of Elijah's anointing these two kings as commanded in 19:15. In fact, it will be Elisha- not Elijah- that will eventually anoint Jehu in II Kings 9. As we scan the next chapters of I Kings, you will note that Elijah begins to decrease in stature and influence already.

Other prophets are arising- and they are doing God's work as well. What one leaves undone, God can accomplish by another. So again, Elijah does not fulfill every aspect of his calling and the command given by God. But praise God- Elisha is faithful! Elisha does what Elijah failed to do! Just as Elisha will be greater than Elijah- Jesus will be greater- perfectly faithful where John was not. Although John would ask of Jesus- are you the one that was to come or should we look for another? John was in prison- and he was not sure if Jesus was the one he expected as had been promised. But Jesus sends a message to John in Mt. 11- the blind receives their sight and the lame walk and the good news is being proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me. In this John had his answer- the greater prophet had come and is identified! The gospel of reconciliation and peace has been proclaimed- we have seen His light shine in the darkness and His glory on the Mountain- He is greater- and He must increase!

To conclude, normally as Jesus said, the student is not greater than the teacher. Jesus is greater than we are- and He must always increase! His glory must always be before our eyes- and His word in our hearts. However, as we see with Elisha, it is possible for those who come second to do greater things than those who went first. Elisha will receive a double portion of the Spirit! And Jesus said in John 14- that we will do greater things than Jesus did! How? Because we have His Spirit- and by His Spirit hard hearts will be broken and the gospel seed will take root in the softened hearts of man! Jesus does greater things through us by His Spirit! His work continues in us and by us! That is what Elisha's ministry will do- continue what Elijah started! As our theme states, Jesus Christ graciously provides an apprentice for Elijah who will continue carry His word to His people. By way of the Spirit, God does not leave us without a witness! We, like Elijah fail and leave things undone. But the Work of the LORD is not hindered and does not fail- it will not stop until it has carried out God's will! The gospel continues to go forth and the Word is not silenced! By way of His Spirit, Jesus is never absent from us for a moment! He is that friend that sticks closer than a brother. He is our Immanuel- God with us! And His Spirit resides with us! Praise God for this constant companion- comforter and source of encouragement and peace! He will continue His work until the church is gathered and all His enemies defeated!