

II Kings 8:7-15; I Kings 19:15-18; Fulfilling the Master's Plan I. Fulfilling Elijah's Task II. Fulfilling the LORD'S Purposes III. Fulfilling the Transfer of Power

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever had to do something that was painful but you knew it was necessary? For example, let's say that you have a cavity that needs to be drilled out- or a impacted tooth that needs to be pulled. You know that the process its going to be painful but you know that the removal of the bad tooth was necessary. As it is often said- this is going to get worse before it gets better! Well, today in our passage we find such an example. When things are going to go from bad to worse in Israel. But once again, this is all part of the master's purpose. As our sermon title says- this is all about fulfilling the master's plan. As we have seen in the past, the LORD sets up kings and He is free to take them down. Kingdoms rise and fall at His command. And God keeps His promises- His word is true- His plan will come to fruition! We have seen the certainty of blessings in the future- the promise of riches and rewards in heaven this past week. But today we find the flip side- the promise of destruction and loss. On that last day- not all will be brought into the Kingdom of God- not all receive the blessings of eternal life and an imperishable inheritance. So today we consider this theme: the faithful and compassion prophet carries out the master's plan in Israel.

I. Fulfilling Elijah's Task

In our first point, we find the connection between Elisha's ministry and that of his predecessor- Elijah. As we have seen over the last weeks, there is great compassion shown to the suffering. As the ministry of Elisha comes to a close, we can see the echoes of eternity. As you may remember, the connection between Elijah and Elisha is akin to the connection between John the Baptist and Jesus. From promise to fulfillment. Foretaste to bounty. But one of the important aspects of Elijah's ministry that remains undone was that of anointing the next kings. As we read a few minutes ago from I Kings 19, Elijah had received a commission from God. Remember that Elijah was afraid at this point in his life. He thought that he alone was left- that there was none else who serve the LORD. He thought that wicked had won-

and had gotten away with it! That Jezebel and the line of Ahab was untouchable! But in response to this view, the LORD gave Elijah a 3-fold task. First, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. Second, anoint Jehu to be king over Israel. And third, anoint Elisha to be a prophet in your place. So Elijah runs off and anoints Elisha to be his successor. But he does not anoint Hazael over Syria nor Jehu over Israel! These aspects remain unfulfilled- unaccomplished. But as we find out today and next week, Elisha will complete this task! So today we find Elisha in the company of Hazael- with the assumption being that Hazael is anointed to be the next King of Syria. Now why this delay- why this significant wait? We see that Elisha served as a prophet for around 60 years- from II Kings 2 until chapter 13. Why the wait from the beginning until now near the end? Well, all that can be said is that our God is incredibly patient with His people. We will note this more in our next point, but knowing everything that will happen during the reign of Jehu and Hazael- all the death destruction that these two men will bring. The fact that God stayed his hand for 60 years- allowed this time to pass from the prophecy to the fulfillment- is a testament to God's patience! His longsuffering with His people. The debt was deferred for a time. Not cancelled- but deferred! Payment postponed for a time! As we find in II Peter 3:9- God is not slow- He is not slack in keeping His promises. Rather He is patient- not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance. This delay between the promise of destruction- and the fulfillment- was to give for the people of Israel to repent! However, they did not. So Elisha carries out the commission given to Elijah- and the instrument of God's wrath is anointed- Hazael will be king! As II Peter 3 continues- the day of the LORD will come like a thief! Do not think that God's patience means that His judgment will not arrive! When you think about it- why has God waited all these years? Jesus has conquered- why wait over 2000 years before coming back and destroying His enemies completely? Well, part of the answer is found in God's patience with a sinful world!

II. Fulfilling the LORD'S Purposes

So in our passage we find the next king of Syria being identified. As terrible as Ben Hadad was to Israel- he will be nothing compared to the suffering that Hazael will bring upon the Israelite people. Jehu will take care of Ahab's line- as we will see next week. But Hazael will be the whip that God uses to discipline his people. The fire of God's wrath that consumes the stubble and chaff in Israel. So Elisha reveals to Hazael in v. 13- the LORD has shown me that you will be king over Syria. And as king, Hazael will cut down the people of Israel. As v. 12 expands- as the new king of Syria, Hazael will burn the cities and slaughter the people of Israel- cutting down both young and old. Great evil and calamity will come at the hand of this new king. So Hazael is going to be used by the LORD- as God has and continues to use wicked men to carry out His own purposes. The old saying is that God can use a crooked stick to draw a straight line. Well, God uses the crooked king of Syria to whip the backs of his stubborn people- the Israelites. As I said before, this is a foretaste and a reminder of what will happen on the last day. Not only is this destruction and death a fulfillment of God's promises and curses upon Israel for her sin and rebellion- it is also a reminder of a future day of judgement! The fact is, there is a day of reckoning! And the prospect of this coming day moves Elisha to tears in v. 11. He wept as he prophetically saw the destruction and death among the Israelite people! Yes, Israel is getting what they deserved! After all these years of idolatry and rebellion, the swift sword of justice would fall. After years of patience and waiting, the Day of the LORD was at hand. But even in Elisha emotion- being moved to tears- we find a glimpse of our God's heart! We see God's mercy and compassion- present even now! God grieves- His heart aches as He sees His people suffer! The fact is, God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked as Ez. 18 says. Yes, it is the LORD who causes this calamity in the city! It is the LORD that anoints Hazael and sends his sword against His own nation! But even as He does this, his heart grows warm! He mourns at the sight of His people suffering- even as they brought this suffering on themselves! It is like a parent who see their child suffer after making a foolish decision! They know that this child has to bear the consequences, but that does not mean they are uncaring or unloving! No, parental compassion

flows forth! Even as I Chron. 21 puts it, the LORD was sorry over the calamity that he sent on His people! Or think of Jesus Christ- weeping over the city of Jerusalem in Luke 19. He sees the city- He knows their rebellion and their plan to kill him. And yet- even now- He weeps! Oh Jerusalem- how I would gather you under my wing- but you would not have it! So it becomes clear- judgement is both necessary and sad to God! On that last day- we could say that even through tears- God will cast out the wicked into the darkness! The compassion and mercy of God is truly astounding to consider- that He is moved and has sorrow- even as His creatures reject and rebel against Him! Such is the heart of our God! There is an element of divine sadness in judgement. But judgement is necessary and coming none the less.

III. Fulfilling the Transfer of Power

But as we return to our passage, we find Hazael is identified and set apart to be the instrument of God's justice. Our passage starts with Elisha coming to Damascus. Now the context is that Ben-Hadad- the current king of Syria is sick. And Ben-Hadad is sending to Elisha for Elisha to consult the LORD on his behalf. Notice the irony here- in the past the king of Israel, Ahaziah, in 1:2 sent to the land of Ekron to consult Baal-Zebub when he was sick. But now, we have the king of Syria calling for the prophet to consult Israel's God on his behalf. And he sends this huge gift of 40 camel loads- bringing to mind what Naaman the Syrian has also done. So II Kings 1 opens with a mirror passage- but the Israelite king goes to the idols while the Syrian King calls upon the LORD! Striking! So we find Elisha in Damascus- in a foreign land- conversing with Gentiles concerning the God of Israel and His plans for the future. So the question that Ben-Hadad asks is this- will I get better? Will I recover from this illness as v. 9 says. Well- the answer given is not so simple. The text itself can be read- yes and maybe no. Depending how you translate one word in his context. So the answer is given – yes- Ben-Hadad- you will recover. This sickness is not going to kill you. But- No- you will not live- because the very messenger you sent will be the instrument of your death. Under normal circumstances, Ben-Hadad would have gotten better. But

by the hand of Hazael- the king will shortly die! So it is by the word of Elisha that Hazael is emboldened to commit treason- taking matters into his own hand- he kills his master and takes the throne for himself. And as a result – God’s Word is fulfilled! According to the Word of the LORD- Hazael becomes king over Syria in v. 15. And the instrument of God’s wrath is in place- so that in II kings 13:22 we find Hazael harassing Israel, just as it was foretold.

To conclude, God’s Word always comes true! His promised justice and judgement will arrive- the sword will fall- the ax is at the root of the tree! When the Day of the LORD arrives- there will be sorrow in the heart of God! He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked- He freely offers salvation! Come to me- flee from the coming wrath! Why will you be consumed? But that is not to say that our God is weak and lacks resolve. For it is also true that He rejoices in justice and delights in Holiness! As our theme states, the faithful and compassion prophet carries out the master’s plan in Israel. The Master’s Plan is certain- His purposes fixed! His justice demands that sin be dealt with! But the Love, mercy and compassion of God cannot be removed from his heart! Sinners can flee the coming wrath by looking to the one who wept over Jerusalem! So look to the Son- and find Him who is gentle and lowly in heart! And as God’s people, let our hearts also break for the lost- as we display the love of our God who seeks and saves the lost!