

II Kings 13:10-25; Psalm 64; The End of An Era I. The Weeping King II. The Arrows of Victory

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you get old you start to think about your own death a little more often. I had a friend who told me that he wanted to die with his boots on- he wanted to end his earthly life doing the things that he loved. Many people like the idea of coming to the end of their lives with gusto- going out in a blaze instead of a whimper. Being used by God and doing what they love right up to end. Well, today we find Elisha at the end of his life- and Elisha will die as he has lived- with a message of hope and deliverance mixed with a word of warning and rebuke. As we come to the conclusion of Elisha's life, we find that his work is now done. But even in death- as we see both this week and next- even now there is the promise of victory over the armies of darkness- and even the hope of victory over death! So as we come to the end of Elisha's life we are coming to end of era- as the main 2 prophets in the books of the Kings die, the descent into spiritual bondage and darkness accelerate. It is as if the presence of these two prophets were holding back the tide- now that they are gone evil rushes in and the nation of Israel is crushed. So this evening we consider this theme: in the death of Elisha the LORD promises a partial victory.

### **I. The Weeping King**

In our first point, we consider this weeping king found in v. 14. Now in order to keep our kings straight, we remember that this Joash in v. 14 is not the same Joash found back in 12:19. The Joash of ch. 12 was the king of Judah- he was a relatively godly man who sought to repair the temple. But today we are reading about Joash the king of Israel- the leader of the Northern tribes. He was the grandson of General Jehu. Now remember that when Jehu was anointed king, the LORD promised him a dynasty that would last 4 generations. So we are in the line of Jehu- but as far as Joash the grandson of Jehu goes- we find nothing new. He is not a godly king- rather he is idolatrous like the vast majority of Israel's kings before. As v. 11 explains- he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord- he did not depart from the idolatry of Jeroboam and he worshipped the golden calves. The same sin that brought about the destruction of

Jeroboam and Ahab's line is still alive and well. Now this fact makes the following interaction all the more interesting. Why would God listen to the prayers of this wicked king? Why would Elisha even listen to the words of or pay attention to this idolatrous rebel king? We are moving closer and closer to the end of the Northern Tribes- there are only a few more kings to go. The end of the 10 tribes of the North will come in less than 30 years and these tribes will be referred to as the lost tribes- or the dispersed people as they will be forced into captivity by the King of Assyria soon. But not yet- for now this nation remains and their king- Joash or Jehoash is mourning over the sick prophet Elisha. So now Elisha is sick- the one who healed and provided for many- is now himself sick. The one who raised the dead is now on the brink of death himself. No one lives forever- even the God's faithful servants succumb. And the King of Israel is weeping- crying over the impending death of the LORD'S prophet. But why? Why would a wicked king be shedding tears when the LORD'S prophet is on the brink of death? Well, the answer is connected to the work of Elisha. There are really 3 main reasons why a wicked king would cry when a prophet dies. Let's consider what Elisha had provided- and how this aid had benefited the kings of Israel. First of all, remember that the LORD had often used Elisha to protect and deliver the Israelites. The kingdom of the North and the capital of Samaria had enjoyed victories by the wisdom, insight, direction and work given by Elisha. Without Elisha, the nation of Israel would not have access to God's protection in the mind of Joash. The second reason that Joash would mourn the impending death of Elisha is because Elisha is the king maker. It was by the hand of the Elisha- as Elisha anointed men- that kings would come forth. Joash's grandfather, Jehu, is proof of this. Without Elisha, would the line of Jehu remain on the throne? And the third reason that king Joash needs Elisha is because of the desperate state of his army. Israel as a nation has been completely humbled. Look back at 13:7- their army has been reduced to a few horses and chariots. There is no military might left in Israel! Without the aid of Elisha, Israel will be overrun by her enemies. So Joash needs Elisha! So this king is overcome with sorrow at the loss of prophet because of the military benefit that Elisha had brought would be removed. There is no sorrow for the loss of the man of God as such- not

the representative of a Holy God- but sorrow for the loss of the benefit! Joash is not a godly man- he is pragmatic! He knows that Elisha gives good advice- he helps us win battles- and the loss of this advisor is what Joash mourns. Why he is crying makes all the difference! As v. 11 says- Joash did not depart from his sins- he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. So any grief must be found in human reason and not spiritual reasons. Why you cry makes all the difference! For example, let's say that there is a grown child whose parents die. Now this grown child lives at home- and upon learning that his parents are dead he goes around weeping. But why does he weep? Sorrow over the loss of their presence- or is he sad that his parents will no longer be able to provide for him? Does he have selfish reasons for his grief? It makes a big difference! Well, we know that Joash will not miss Elisha's sermons so much as Elisha's military advantage! This is always a temptation- even today! To equate the love for the benefits God provides instead of loving the God who provides! To love gifts more than the giver! This is the traditional foxhole prayer. In times of war and distress, many people call out to God for protection and aid! There are many people who still go to church for practical reasons. They are pragmatic in their religion! They pay lip service to God because they hope God will do something good for them! This is really what the prosperity gospel is! Loving the message of those who promise earthly blessings while refusing to repent of your sins- just as Joash refused to repent in our passage. But even without repentance, Joash is still filled with sorrow. He says in v. 14- my father, my father. This is a term of respect for this old prophet. And he continues- the chariots of Israel and its horsemen. Evidently Josiah had been told of what had transpired when Elijah had died and was taken to heaven in a whirlwind- now the king uses the same words found back in 2:12. So Elisha's words are being repeated back to him again at his own death. Now Elisha knew of chariots and horsemen not of human flesh- for he had seen chariots of fire and angelic horsemen both at Elijah's death and on the hills surrounding Dothan. Soon Elisha would see these angels again in glory.

## **II. The Arrows of Victory**

But before Elisha leaves, He has one more message of hope and promise of deliverance to bring. So he says in v. 15- take this bow and arrows- shoot an arrow towards the east. This bow and arrows represent the LORD'S arrow of victory of Israel over Syria. So this bow and arrow are incorporated into a prophecy- an image of deliverance and victory over the Syrian foe. Records of the bow and arrow imagery are still very prevalent in the Middle East, Egypt and Assyria. Whoever is holding the bow is the victor and the direction of the arrow signifies the advance of your army. So bow and arrows symbolize dominion and victory. Even as we read back in Psalm 64- God is seen as shooting arrows at his enemies! But this should be striking- we are caught off guard here. Why in the world would Israel be given victory over Syria? Knowing what we know about Israel and her kings- we are not expecting Israel to have any good news here! Israel's kings worshipped golden images. Israel and her kings were idolatrous- they consult idols and worshipped Baal while the kings of Syria respected the LORD and His prophet. Remember what Elisha saw back in 8:12- that Hazael and Ben-Hadad would do great harm to Israel. They would be persistent thorn to injure the people of Israel. Added to this, we know that Israel had only a small army left as we found in 13:7. The mighty men of Israel have been reduced to dust. So if anything, we expect Syria to continue to dominate Israel- we are not expecting the Joash to be promised victory! But there is victory promised- the hope of a reprieve! By whose hand? By the arrow of the LORD! The Lord will do this- not by human might or by Israel's own hand- they have no power in themselves. Shoot to the east as v. 17 says- and since Syria was located to the east- the LORD was promises victory over Syria. And then in v. 18 Elisha tests Joash. Take these arrows and shoot them. Likely shooting them out the window into the dirt below- Joash was to prove his faith and testify to his resolve to carry out the LORD'S command. Strike the ground with these arrows. But what we see is anything but encouraging. Elisha had made it clear- this bow and arrow are a sign of God's victory over Syria. Now go and shoot these arrows into the ground out the east window. But Joash is content with firing only 3. This weak willed and tepid response proves that Joash is lukewarm. He has no confidence; he is not bold and courageous. It is as if Elisha has said- you

choose how great your victory will be. And Joash says- 3 times is enough. Now children, lets illustrate this. Lets say that this coming December your parents say to you- I want you to choose how great this Christmas will be. Here is a bag of Christmas ribbons. For each ribbon you take you out, your sibling will get a present. So you know- for each ribbon you take out of the bag, your sibling will be granted a gift. How generous will you be on behalf of your sibling? Will you be bold and take 1 or 2, maybe 3? But your parents have said- you can take as many as you like! You can be the reason your sibling is richly blessed? Well, Joash settles for 3 when he could have secured 5 or even more! And thus the nation of Israel does not enjoy a complete victory and deliverance which could have been theirs! The nation of Israel suffers because her king was weak willed- content with too small of a blessing- not willing to be bold and persistent in his asking for the LORD'S blessing. He did not ask- and therefor he would not receive!

Now we have to be clear here- why does the LORD promise to deliver the Israelites? What is the ground or the reason behind this deliverance from the hand of the Syrians? The answer is given in v. 23. Why did the LORD continue to help His people- even as they have weak kings and a pitiful army? Well, the answer is clear- because of He is gracious and compassionate. Pity and favor- kindness and mery. And because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His Berit- His faithful agreement and promise. The reason that the LORD continues to help, deliver, protect and defend is because of His character and His covenant! Who He is and what He has promised! He has pity – even on stubborn sinners! And He keeps His word- His promises are sure! That is the good news in our passage today! God does not allow the enemy to destroy His people- He does not give us what we deserve! Because of who He is and what He has promised, we have reason for hope and peace! So in our passage the enemy of Israel is partially defeated and their reign of terror comes to an end in v. 25. Joash defeats Ben-Hadad 3 times and the lost cities of Israel are recovered- as the LORD has promised by the Word of Elisha. But think of how great the victory could have been. Back in v. 19 Elisha is angry. He is mad because of Joash's lack of resolve and unwillingness to be bold in His claim! Yes, the enemy of Israel is partially subdued, but there is still such

weakness on the throne! No dedication to holiness, no resolve, no repentance and no revival! Yes, there is a military victory- but the people of Israel and their kings are not getting any better! They continue to spiral down into the pit of rebellion as it was in the day of the judges. Yes, there are occasional saviors and momentary reprieves- but we desperately need a King who will do what is right! We need a King who will come at the head of a better army. One who is not tepid or weak willed- but one who says- Here I am, Send Me! Behold I have come to do your will. So once again, we see a very broken picture in our passage that leaves us wanting something- someone better! As Psalm 119 says- someone who has sworn and oath and confirmed that He will keep God's righteous decrees! We need the rider on the white horse we saw a few weeks back in Rev. 19! One who would pour out all seven bowls of God's wrath upon His enemies! One who would protect and defend His bride and completely destroy and consume His and our enemies! To say this another way, Jesus will take the bow of the LORD'S victory- and instead of shooting 3 arrows- Jesus will shoot all 7 into His enemies until those enemies are completely vanquished! He will perform His work of saving and delivering the people of God-showing God's kindness and mercy- keeping the covenant promises- until the last foe- even death itself is defeated. But to hear more about how the foe of death is defeated, you have to wait until next week as we conclude our series by looking at v. 21!

To conclude, the temporary deliverance evident in our passage is but a brief and passing reminder of God's protection- as He promises so He does defend His people from their foes. The Gates of Hell will not prevail! The gracious and compassionate God- the covenant keeping God- would not let His people be destroyed! This is good news for us- as we have a better king and perfect savior revealed in the coming of Jesus. As our theme states: in the death of Elisha the LORD promises a partial victory. As we will continue next week- in the resurrection of Jesus, the LORD secures our complete victory! Praise God that we have a king who protects us from our enemies- one who will reign until every foe is vanquished! For He must reign until all His enemies are placed under His feet- and the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself!