

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

The new era had begun. Elijah was with the Lord now taken up in a whirlwind accompanied by the horses and chariot of fire. Truly it was a remarkable time. It was a time of wonder that whets the appetite for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What signs, wonders, and sounds will accompany the Lord as He comes to judge the living and the dead and to perfect the Kingdom once and for all? However, Elijah is not Jesus nor is Elisha left behind. Still the Spirit of the Lord was on Elisha. He hit the waters with his coat and the waters separated and he walked back into the Promised Land on dry ground. The 50 sons of the prophets exclaimed, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha,” and they bowed in honour of their new leader. It was a remarkable time.

It was still however a difficult and sorry time for Israel because the LORD was not worshipped in Spirit and in truth. In Bethel they still worshipped the LORD by means of the Golden Calf there at the shrine Jeroboam had set up. God is not mocked and open rebellion cannot be allowed to continue unpunished.

This morning we read of a remarkable time of healing and judgment and the mighty acts of God in two cities and once more we see that the Lord God of Israel who is the God of Elijah, for Elijah yet lives is Elisha’s God and ours too, in mercy and in justice. The God of grace was still in pursuit of his people.

We ought not to move too quickly from that point. It was made clear to us in the way the Lord again and again pursued Ahab and even his son Ahaziah that grace might prevail. Now too the man of God is sent back to the people of God that grace might abound and the LORD be acknowledged God over all.

I bring to you the Word of the Lord under the theme:

The Spirit of Elijah Rests On Elisha: A Tale of Two Cities**1. Healing in Jericho and 2. The Mauling in Bethel****Healing in Jericho**

While Elisha was in Jericho some of the men came to him to explain their situation. It was a nice area they told Elisha but the bad water made living there difficult. The language there, “unproductive” can refer to miscarriage by humans and cattle and/or the land being infertile. We note that they came to Elisha with their problem and by so doing they came to God.

Why was the land so unproductive? In Joshua 6:26 we read, “At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest.” We recall that Heil of Bethel had rebuilt Jericho during the reign of Ahab and had buried his oldest and youngest sons (I Kings 16). Some think that since Jericho was devoted to the ban, was razed and utterly destroyed in much the same way that Sodom and Gomorrah became the place of the Dead Sea, this curse on Jericho remained and so the water was still affected. Others think that perhaps we need look no further than the curse that God had put on the earth when Adam fell into sin. Whatever the case life was difficult for the people in Jericho.

Then the LORD did a remarkable thing in that city. He called Elisha to command the people to bring salt in a new dish or bowl. We note the obedience of the people. Elisha trusts that the LORD was going to show forth His mercy and in confidence he commands a people who trusting the prophet of God do as he says. We note also that Elisha included the people in the activity of God.

Without making too much of the bowl and salt, they are mentioned, and so we take a look at them for a moment. The new bowl pointed to the purity that was going to be restored and the salt, the preserving power of God so that the action would have a lastingness about it. It was a symbolic action in that obviously a bowl of salt was not going to heal the water and therefore the land.

Elisha spoke, “This is what the LORD says: ‘I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.’” And it was so. The spring became pure and at the time of the writing of this chapter the water was still pure. Amazing grace was evident there in the Promised Land. There in Jericho crops would grow and people would live in health. God had restored the area that He had cursed!

I know when we think of Christianity and the faith, when we think of the grace of our God we think of our salvation. We think of going to be with God and perhaps to be like as unto Enoch and Elijah in a special way. But the redemption and restoration is much more than that. In this story the Lord restored the creation— that spring of water in Jericho— so that the life of the people might be restored. God makes that part of the land to flow once more with milk and honey. He has the power to do that. He alone has the power to do that. We think of Leviticus 26 where the LORD promises that He will bless the land if the people remain faithful in life and worship. He warns them of the drought and disaster that will fall upon them if they fail to walk according to the covenant of love to which they had been called. But there is always hope isn’t there for God says,

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

(Lev. 26:40-42).

There in the place of curse and the non productivity, hearts were turned and the mercy of the Lord was given and healing of the water brought life.

Paul writes of this to the Romans 8,

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

These days of Elisha remind us that we are in the days of the Spirit and we too wait for what we taste of here in the story. The creation itself under the curse will be healed! One day the sons of God will be revealed. But for now we hope! The Spirit of God was on Elisha and the mercy of the Lord brought healing to the land and purity to the water.

What are we to make of these miracles? Why has the Lord been so active at this time in history? When Moses brought the people out of Egypt he was a man attested by signs and wonders. Now we are in the days of the kings and the office prophet was being revealed as distinct from the king. The prophet brought the covenant word of God with covenant implication of blessing and curse. So Elijah raises a boy to life, calls the rain from the heaven and all this because of the Sprit of God which was upon him. When Jesus Christ began His ministry he too was attested by many signs and wonders that all may know that He was the Word, the son of man, the Messiah, the Son of God our savior. He passed that power onto the apostles so that many would see and understand that these men came not in their own strength and calling but in the name of the Lord.

Therefore God speaks in Jericho in a supernatural way. He changes the natural order of things whether that is stopping the fast flowing Jordan or purifying bad water or taking

care of the needs of His people. In Jericho the people went to the man of God with their problem and by so doing they honored the LORD who through his man blessed them!

A Mauling In Jericho

We note that Elisha heads back the same route that Elijah came and heads back to Samaria. There the Word bearer will speak to the false shepherds of Israel. It is a rather different reception though that he receives now. We wonder where the sons of the prophets of Bethel are. But Bethel is the more wicked place and openly hostile to God. Hiel was from here—the builder of Jericho at the expense of his two sons. That doesn't surprise us for since the days of Jeroboam, Bethel, together with Dan, was set up as a shrine for the golden calf worship. It is an affront to God. There was no memory in these people. Do they not recall the wrath of God when their fathers worshipped the Golden calf at Sinai? Do they not know what God had done to Baal? But recall that during those days of Elijah it was dangerous to be a prophet. The people were happy with their impure religion. Heil has no issue in disobeying God when builds Jericho. And this band of youths is simply the result of the culture of Bethel. However, once more the people there would know that Bethel is “the House of God”.

Many find this story to hard to believe. They find it vindictive and mean spirited. They attribute the action to Elisha, or the motivation to God to be unseemly for Christianity. We have spoken of that before when the fire came down twice and 102 soldiers of Ahaziah are burned alive.

I am telling you that when I first heard this story as a child, I was afraid! What does it mean? Could that happen to us? But then it was explained and though perhaps a real sense of comfort was not achieved a better sense of God was. This morning too we must see the immutability of God. We must understand God as God. Yes the healing of the water and land

and the undoing of the curse is wonderful, I am more comfortable with that God. It is more comfortable to tell others about that God. But there is this event in history that too must be understood.

Elisha comes to Bethel where he is accosted by a band of youth who jeer or we read that insult him in the most offensive and provocative manner. They are deriding him and this is not the activity of boys being boys be foolish. This jeering is meant. They are belittling the man of God. Go up you bald head! Go up you bald head. Was Elisha bald? Perhaps. There is much speculation about it and we will leave that as it is. The point is they are saying go up you baldhead derisively. Go up we ought to take to mean that they knew that Elijah had gone to be with the Lord in that supernatural way and now they are telling Elisha to do the same. In other words— get lost you creep— go the way of your mentor, you are not appreciated around here.

This is horrible on any level. It is socially rude, it is disrespectful towards elders. But far worse Elisha is the man of God. What now can Elisha do? This is not personal. He does not have hurt feeling here because they don't like his hairdo or that they don't want him. They have cursed God! They have ridiculed the man of God. When Ham uncovered his father's nakedness, what happened! He was cursed. Do we recall in those early days of Israel just after the redemption from Egypt? There was a young man there whose mother was an Israelite but whose father was Egyptian. The young man blasphemed the name of the Lord. He was taken and stoned by all who heard him. You may not take the name of the Lord in vain. They had derided the prophet of God! They had blasphemed the name of the Lord. So Elisha now rightly uses God's name and calls down a curse in the name of the Lord and two bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths. Forty-two funerals! Forty-two bodies torn and ripped apart! It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God! Bethel is not so big that it will easily

replace these 42 young men. But Bethel had produced these men and the curse of the father's sin was met on the sons. A terrible truth indeed!

But what do we say about Elisha? Is this not too much now? Is this not over kill! Call down a curse on these young men! But remember these young men know what they are doing and they know to whom they are doing it. Perhaps we think for a moment of Jesus. We think of the words of Psalm 22 as they refer to our Lord Jesus Christ,

*Ps 22:6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.
Ps 22:7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: Ps 22:8 "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*

At Golgotha they do not say, go up... no they say come down from the cross. It is Satan's way! To deride, to mock and insult to goad into anger! But Jesus will not jump down. Jesus cries out that the Father would forgive them for they knew not what they did. Elisha is not angry now in a petty sort of way. He is not on fire with rage, but the Name of the LORD which he carries has been defamed by those who know.

The LORD sends the bears. Most other English versions render it she-bears. Then there are some comments that the bears felt perhaps threatened for their cubs and so on. That may be the case but we can be sure that these bears are the covenant executioners sent by God according to His word. Once more we go back to Leviticus 24. There we read:

Lev 26:21 "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. Lev 26:22 I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted."

These bears are signs of the covenant! Yes the wrath of the covenant God whose man has been insulted. The prophet has been ridiculed and denied. This is God for His own! I know we laugh at this notion sometimes. We need only respect whom we desire to respect. If I

do not agree I need not respect my parents. If I do not like the leading I will not respect the leadership of the church. That perhaps is one thing but when it becomes the matter of insult, gossip and derision then we all must step back and think that it is God whom we offend. The Jews in Jesus' day forgot it. In the same manner they humiliated the Son of God; they crucified him. They held in him that kind of derision. He was made an object of scorn. For us who believe we see, and repent and rejoice. We must. But be warned for in some 40 years God would wipe Jerusalem out. He would destroy the temple. He would execute his judgment! A taste now! We must listen and sit up and be shaken up again. This too is our God whom we love. This is the God who has saved us in spite of our sins. We must love and honor this God. We must receive His Son with honor as well and go to Him with our prayers and petition for in Him we meet the God of mercy and of love.

How long then before the Lord Jesus will come? How long before those who deride us and insult us will know the horror of what they have done? It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God.

The Northern tribes now knew that the Spirit of Elijah was upon Elisha and we have come to see that Spirit reveals God in Spirit and truth. In one city where God was honoured life was restored and in the other where His man was ridiculed there was horrible death. This is our God!

*Of Mercy and of Justice, My Thankful song shall be;
O Lord in joyful praises, My song shall rise to thee.
Within my house I purpose, to walk in wisdom's way;
O Lord I need the presence, how long wilt thou delay.*

Two cities, two outcomes and one God and we give him all the glory and adoration due His most holy name. Amen.