

The Unchanging Mission of God

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1 Kings 18:19 – 2 Kings 2:18

Introduction:

(Slide 1) As you know, the Olympics are currently going on in Tokyo, Japan. The Olympics is always an entertaining and exciting time for the whole world. One of the things around the Olympic celebrations that I find most fascinating is the process of lighting the Olympic torch.

(Slide 2) Leading up to every summer Olympics since 1936, a ceremony is held in Olympia, Greece, where the Olympic Games originated, and there an Olympic flame is lit. This flame is then passed to a torchbearer where that one flame will be passed to 1,000s of other torchbearers as it makes its way to the stadium of the host country of that Olympics. So literally there is a relay that takes place around the world as this flame is passed from person to person to person to person to person until it reaches the host country of the Olympics.

As you can imagine this flame travels among thousands of people through many countries to get to the host city.

(Slide 3) For example, in 1996, when the games was held in our country and in the city of Atlanta, the flame traveled over 16,000 miles, with over 12,000 torchbearers as it made its way across the US starting Los Angeles to Atlanta

And let me tell ya, some countries got really creative in their torch relay. For example, when Australia hosted the Olympics the relay was almost totally by sea, and at one point the flame literally went underwater at the Great Barrier Reef on it's way to Sydney. **(Slide 4) (Slide 5)**

When China hosted the Olympics in 2008, the torch made its way to the top of the world as a team of climbers took the flame to the top of Mount Everest. **(Slide 6)**

And I am sure you are wondering, what happens if they flame goes out. If Billy is treaking through Arkansas, trips and falls, and the flames extinguishes. Well. if that happens, have no fear, there are lanterns on stand-by lite by the original flame as well. As I said, the Olympic passing of the torch is an awesome and fascinating event.

Well, today in our sermon passage, we are going to witness a passing of the torch if you will. Today we are concluding our family summer series called, "Days of Elijah". Throughout this series we have been talking about the mission of God, and how just like the prophet Elijah, we too have a mission that God has us all on. But today in our passage Elijah's mission comes to an end, as his time on earth, and his time as the prophet of God ends. But as we will see, even with the departure of the great prophet and man of God, Elijah, the torch of leadership is passed on and the mission of God continues.

Today, we are going be in a couple of places in God's Word, but we are going to start our time together in 1 Kings 18:19-21. So, if you have a bible I want to encourage you to turn there.

PRAY – Before we dig into God’s Holy Word together, let’s pray for our time.

As was reviewed in the kid’s moment, last week in our passage, 1 Kings 19, we found the prophet Elijah in great despair as he feared for his life and wondered alone out in the wilderness longing for God to take his life. But in his despair, we saw that God encouraged his servant as he feed him, and revealed Himself to Elijah through a quiet whisper on Mount Horeb. After God reveals Himself to Elijah, God tells Elijah to get back on the mission that God has for him go appoint Elisha as his successor as the next prophet of God. And this is where we will begin Part 1 of our story today.

Part 1: Elijah Calls Elisha

1 King 19:19-21

19 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah goes and finds Elisha working hard as a farmer out on the family farm as he was plowing a field.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

Kind of weird here. I mean can you imagine. You are out cutting the grass and then all of sudden someone comes up and throws their coat on you.

Well good thing it happened to Elisha and not to us because Elisha knew that this was meant to signify that he was to follow Elijah and become the next prophet of God. And Elisha was ready to join Elijah and follow him on his mission, but he had one last request before he left. He first wanted to say bye to his mom and dad.

Elijah allowed it and off Elisha went to say by to his family.

But when Elijah got back to his home he did a lot more than just say bye to mom and dad. Verse 21 says this:

21 So Elisha left him (Elijah) and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.

I absolutely LOVE this scene. Elisha goes back and takes the oxen he was using to do his work on the farm and kills them for food. He also chops up his farming equipment and uses it for the firewood to cook his oxen on.

In this act by Elisha, he leaves no doubt as to his decision whether to follow Elijah or not.

Elisha is fully and 100% in. There is no turning back. In fact, he hasn't even given himself a chance to return, as there was nothing for him to return to. He has no backup plan.

In the calling of Elisha we see him completely and fully surrender to mission that God has for him. That is part one of our story. Elijah's Calls Elisha

Now for part 2 of our story, we are going to skip a few chapters and pick up in 2 Kings 2. And if you want this week, go back and read 1 Kings 20 and 21, and 2 Kings 1. The big takeaway from that section is that evil King Ahab is killed and there are now new kings in the Kingdom of God.

But in 2 Kings 2:1 we will begin the second part of our story.

Part 2: Elijah's Mission Comes to an End

² Kings 2:1 When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind,

Ok let me stop here just a minute. We will see exactly what that means in just a minute, but what you need to know for now is that Elijah's ministry is about to end. It was almost time for Elijah to leave this earth and go to his heavenly home. Though his race was almost over, he had one last ministry journey that God wanted him to make.

*¹When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind,
Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.*

² Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel

Elijah gives Elisha an out. The opportunity to sit this last ministry journey out, but Elisha continues to remain faithful to his mission and calling to stick by Elijah until the very end.

Elijah and Elisha start their journey as they go to Bethel, and then from Bethel they go to Jericho, and then from Jericho, they make their way to the bank of the Jordan River. Once they get to the bank of the Jordan River, verse 7 says,

⁷Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan.

So Elijah and Elisha get to the bank of the Jordan and they have a little crowd that has joined to watch them.

Now, if you thought last week was crazy, as we saw things like God providing Elijah with a hot cake and water in the middle of the desert, or God revealing himself as a whisper on Mount Horeb, as the song says, "You ain't seen nothing yet."

Now I also think this is a good spot to give you a reference point again on a map.



You see Gilgal, then they go south to Bethel, Then southeast to Jericho, and now they are standing on the bank of the Jordan River.

As they are standing there in edge of the Jordan River, with 50 people watching, Elijah takes his coat, rolls it up, and strikes the water.

And when Elijah does this the Jordan River literally splits in two going to the right and to the left. Then both Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan River on dry ground.

After Elijah and Elisha cross on dry ground, the word of God in 2 Kings 2:9 says this,

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?”

Elijah is about to be taken from Elisha and Elijah wants to know if there is anything he can do for him before he leaves.

What a sobering moment. Elijah is about to leave this earth. This is the last time that Elisha will have his master, his mentor, his companion with him. I picture a dad in his final moments on earth talking to his son. I can just picture the care and tenderness that Elijah has as he wants to know how he can best serve Elisha in his final moments.

And Elisha takes him up on his offer by requesting this,

“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied.

Elisha is not shy about his request. He wants the Spirit of God that is with Elijah to be with him as he continues as the next prophet of God.

And maybe you are asking what I first asked about this request, “What does that mean?” Does he want to be 2x the prophet that Elijah was or something?

Well, Elisha could have been referring to a law in Deuteronomy where the firstborn son gets the inheritance of his father. In Deuteronomy that inheritance is called a “Double Portion”.

So again, Elisha is saying that he wants Elijah to pass down to him, as his inheritance, the Spirit of God that is with Elijah.

¹⁰“You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not.”

Obviously, the Spirit of God is not something that Elijah can give himself, but that can only be given by God Himself. So Elijah leaves that request by Elisha up to God. He says that if Elisha witnesses his ascension into heaven, Elisha will know if he has received the Spirit of God or not. If Elisha does not witness it, his request will not be granted.

Then scripture tells us that as Elijah and Elisha continued to walk along and as they are carrying on a conversation with each other, all of sudden a chariot and horses that are on fire, separates the two of them. Then Elijah, gets picked up by some wind and is literally taken up into heaven. Then verse 12 says this, ¹²*Elisha saw this (So he sees it, good news for him on receiving the Spirit of God) and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.*

Just like that, Elijah is gone. The great prophet of Israel. The man who God used in mighty, powerful, and supernatural ways was gone.

Which brings us to our last part in the story

Part 3: Elisha Continues the mission of God

The man who God told it wasn't going to rain for 3 years and it didn't, was gone. The prophet who declared that the drought would end after 3 years, and it did, was gone. The man who was provided food in the wilderness twice by God, gone. The man who had the power to raise the widow's son from the dead, gone. The man who didn't back down from the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, as His God proved to be the only true God over the false god Baal, gone. The prophet of God who stood on Mount Horeb as God revealed Himself to him, gone. The man who had the power to split the Jordan River in two, was gone. Elijah, the great prophet of God was gone!

What was going to happen now? What was Elisha going to do without him?

Yes, while God's prophet Elijah was gone, we are quickly going to see, that God's mission does not stop. As one commentator said, "Elijah left, but Elijah's God has not."

¹³ *Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.*

After Elijah leaves and goes to heaven Elisha now takes Elijah's coat. Remember what that coat signified by in 1 Kings 19, when it was first placed on Elisha? That one day, he would be the next prophet of God as he fulfilled the mission of God.

That coat signifies that the torch has been passed. Although Elijah is gone, God's mission will continue to be carried on.

Elisha picks up that coat and goes and stands on the bank of the Jordan River.

He then takes the coat and does exactly what his master Elijah did. He hits the water of the Jordan with it. And like his master before him, when the coat hits the water, the Jordan River splits in two. Elisha then crosses the river on dry land.

This here pictures that the Spirit of God that was with Elijah is indeed with Elisha as he now begins the mission that God has him on.

And remember those 50 people watching? Where they were still there, as they witness Elisha do the same thing Elijah had done by parting of the Jordan River. They were there too, and confirmed that Elisha was indeed the one to lead God's people on their mission.

Now, that is our story. Elisha Calls Elisha, Elijah ends his mission as God supernaturally takes him to heaven, and Elisha picks up the torch and continues the mission of God as he is empowered by God's Spirit to do so.

Now, as we always ask ourselves, what does this have to do with us?

This afternoon, as we talk about the applications for us today, I want us to be reminded that whether it was around 850 BC, in the Days of Elijah, or whether it was in the days of Jesus, or whether it is in the 2021, God and his mission has, and will always be the same. That Mission: To redeem and save from their sin, so that they can be in a relationship with Him.

When we look at scripture it is easy for us to isolate these stories instead of thinking about them as a part of one big story. The bible from Genesis to Revelation is God's story of how He provides a way for his people to be saved, and saved ultimately through Jesus.

So there are two things I want us to see this afternoon from this passage. I want us to

1. The Days of Elijah Remind us of Jesus

See Jesus in the Days of Elijah? Umm John, I thought we were reading from the Old Testament today. I don't know if you know this but he is in the New Testament.

And right you are, but as we see that the word of God is one big story, it is clear to see who the hero of that story is.

Illustration:

One of the bibles that we love reading to our kids is the "Jesus Storybook Bible" that if you don't have one and you have a kid in our kid's ministry let me know because we give every family in our church one of these. You can even have this copy, here. This book is so helpful in showing how the Bible is one grand story. I love how the Author opens up the story as she writes this:

"The Bible is most of all a story. It's an adventure story about a young hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one big story. The story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this story. And at the center of the story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture."

My point here today is not to make the argument that we are to see Jesus under every rock in the bible, ok, and there are people all over the map on that. But I want to simply point out, that he is

the star of the show. He is who the whole Bible is about, as Jesus is who our whole lives are to be about.

And as we go through Scripture there are places, even in the OT, where we are reminded to see Jesus. And the story today, is that kind of story.

We have learned a lot from our series about the prophet Elijah. But Elijah is to ultimately remind us and point us to the hero of the whole bible, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In our story, today we see a prophet of God, Elijah, on mission for God. That prophet then goes and calls his disciple Elisha and ask him to leave everything and follow him. He then goes and does ministry alongside his disciple. The time comes for God's prophet Elijah to end the mission that God has him on, so Elijah supernaturally ascends into heaven. After Elijah ascends into heaven, his disciple Elisha, is then filled with the Spirit of God and continues on the mission of God. That mission of leading people to turn from false gods to the one true God, so that they can be saved and have a relationship with him.

Does any of that sound familiar?

Remember when Jesus called His disciples?

Matt. 4:18-20

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Peter and Andrew left their jobs, left their life to become a disciple of Jesus and to follow Him.

Remember when Jesus ascended into heaven?

Acts 1:8-9

The disciples were gathered with Jesus one last time and said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Remember when Jesus' disciples received his power of the Holy Spirit?

Acts 2

At Pentecost, the disciples then received that Spirit that Jesus promised.

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they (Jesus' Disciples) were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting... ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

The prophet Elijah is to ultimately point us the Perfect Prophet of God, His Son, Jesus.

And as we are reminded of Jesus, this afternoon, I want us as we close out this series on the “Days of Elijah”, to be reminded of our mission. Because Elijah’s mission, was Jesus’ mission, and it is now our mission.

2. The Days of Elijah Reminds us of our mission

What we just saw in the three parts of the story of Elijah and Elisha and their mission is true for our mission. Where Elisha fully committed to God, we are called to fully commit to God. Where Elijah and Elisha relied on God, we are to rely on God. And where they went on their mission for God, we are to do that as well.

In our mission for Jesus, we are to:

- 1. Commit to Jesus**
- 2. Rely on Jesus**
- 3. Go for Jesus**

1. Commit to Jesus

In the calling of Elisha, we see his commitment to completely surrender his life to following and being a disciple of Elijah, as he kills his work oxen and burns his farming supplies.

It was a commitment to fully give of himself for the mission of God.

Application:

And church, this is what being a disciple of Jesus looks like. The giving of our lives as we give up this world and follow Jesus all the days of our lives.

Illustration:

When we see in our story Elisha burning his farming equipment, I immediately thought of the phrase you will hear, “Burn the Ships”, but do you know where that phrase comes from?

In the 1519, a man by the name of Hernando Cortes, set sail from Spain to the New World of North America, to battle the great Aztec Empire. He took with him around 500 soldiers and 100 sailors to command 11 ships.

Now how in the world is a group of 600 people, going to go and overthrow the large and powerful Aztec Empire that had been around for over 600 years? Well, as history tells us, their success was due to their leader Cortez giving them no other option. As Cortez and his men arrived in the New World, they banked their ships on the beach and gathered to listen to their leader Cortez give them their final marching orders. “Burn the ships” he said. “Burn the ships, if we are going home, we are going home in their ships.”

Application:

Jesus is calling you to join His mission as you commit your lives to Him.

If you are here today, and you are not a follower of Christ, I want to invite you to accept the invitation to follow Him today. To commit your life to follow after the one who loves you so much that He gave his life for you. That before **HE** ascended into heaven, he descended onto the earth, as he left heaven to become a baby. A baby that would grow up and allow his body to be crucified on the cross so that he could take on the punishment of our sin. And then three days later defeating sin and death by rising from the dead.

May to be the day that you answer Jesus' call to commit your life to Him.

And brothers and sisters in Christ, be reminded today to give all of ourselves to Jesus. To not be left serving him half-heartily but giving of ourselves fully to Him.

Christian, is there something that you are holding back from God?

- Is there an area in your life where you are like, God you can have most everything else but I want to hold onto this. A particular sin, a relationship, your job, being bold and sharing your faith with your friend, not giving your worry and anxiety to him?

May we burn our ships together church, as we follow Jesus and live on mission for him.

And can I tell you church, it is worth it. Surrendering of life for Christ is living the life that we were created to live, as we get the joy of being a part of the unchanging mission of God.

1. Commit to Jesus

2. Rely on Jesus

To fulfill the mission that God had for him, Elisha knew he needed God's help, so for his last request, he asked Elijah to give him the Spirit of God to help him.

If we have learned anything from this series, we have learned that living on mission for God is not easy. As Elijah was on God's mission, Elijah had to live in the wilderness while he feed by Ravens. Remember that? Elijah had to bring bad news about God's judgment, like how it wasn't going to rain for three years. Elijah had to compete in that Showdown at Mount Carmel, when everything was stacked against him. Elijah ran for his life because Queen Jezebel wanted to kill him. Elijah hit rock bottom and wanted God to take his life. Living on mission for God was not easy for Elijah.

Living on mission for God is not easy for us.

But like Elijah, our God has not left you alone.

As Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples as he sent them on their mission, that "I am with you always."

Christian, you have the power of the living God, living inside of you as you live on mission for him. May that be of great comfort to you as you live your life on mission for him.

1. Commit to Jesus

2. Rely on Jesus

3. Go for Jesus

The mission of God is still going on, and Jesus has now passed the torch to you and to me, to carry his message of the hope and forgiveness found in Jesus.

I love the word “Go” for this point for a couple of reasons. Mainly because it is the Word that we see in Matthew 28:18, when Jesus sends His disciples on mission by saying “Go make disciples”.

But I also love the word “GO” because it is the motto of the seminary that I graduated from. The seminary that many of our church members here go to.

Everywhere you “go”, no pun intended here, you see this word as it serves as a reminder to all of the students to “Go” for Jesus.

And one of the things that I love that Southeastern has done is made these little signs. And in this sign, it really helps personalize the what it means for you to go for Jesus.

And if we are honest, sometimes that task of being on mission for God can seem vague and overwhelming. But “going for Jesus” really does look different for all of us. As God has placed all of us in different places, and with different relationships.

Illustration:

A few years ago, SEBTS, started making these “I am going” signs. I love these because they really help us understand that every one of us is called to go, but it looks different for every one. The I am going part, is in print, as that doesn’t change, but the rest is left blank for the person to fill in that is holding the sign. I saw some where people said I am going to a foreign country, or I am going to plant a church. But others wrote things that weren’t for just pastors and missionaries. I am going to equip men, minister to kids, worship with my local church, evangelize, make disciples, these are things that everyone can do.

So you have a blank sign. Where is God calling you to GO?

And to help us figure that out, I think it can be as simple as where does God have you now?

How can you use the places and relationships that he has placed in your life to carry out his mission of making Jesus known? How can you make disciples God at home? Workplace? Neighborhood? Extra-Curricular activities?

And also another way to help you “Go” for Jesus, is to join your church Perry Creek on mission. We were getting ready here in a few weeks to launch back in to the Perry Creek community that

we so dearly love. And as a church we are going to refocus ourselves on reaching out into that community, and into other communities as well. So on August 22nd shameless plug when you come to outreach Sunday we're going to talk more about what that looks like and then even get really practical in our small groups. So when we get ready to launch back into outreach one way God is calling you to go is to join us on that mission.

Conclusion:

This has been a great series on the Days of Elijah. I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have, and I hope that all of us, myself included, pick up the torch that Jesus has passed to us, as we commit our lives to Him, rely on Him, and go for Him.