

Lessons from the Life of Elisha, Pt 2: Healed Waters and a Bear Attack

I. Study of the Life of Elisha – Part 2 of several lessons. What is the goal as we read the OT?

- A. Fully equipped – All Scripture is God-breathed and useful (2 Tim. 3). What are we to learn from these stories?
- B. Heart of God is revealed in the OT.
- C. Good and bad examples: many colorful characters in the life of Elisha who we can learn from.
- D. Foreshadowing of Christ
 - 1. Elisha as a type of Christ – you decide whether Elisha’s life, character, miracles and deeds point us to Jesus who would be born about 800 years later.

II. Summary of Last Lesson (2 Kings 1:1-2:18)

- A. Elisha lived around 850-800 BC. He was a disciple, servant of Elijah and takes Elijah’s place to prophecy to Israel, the Northern Kingdom.
- B. Dark time. David and Solomon’s Kingdom split in two.
 - 1. Southern Kingdom – Judah (from which the Christ would come)
 - a) Rehoboem (evil king), then Abijam his son followed, who followed his father’s sinful ways. (1 Kings 15:1-3)
 - (1) Built places of false worship and followed the ways of the nations around them.
 - b) Succeeded by Asa and then by his son Jehoshaphat, both who were good kings, undid much of the evil done by their father and grandfather.
 - (1) Really encouraging. No matter our background and family history, we can learn to follow and please God! Not trapped in the sins of our fathers and mothers. And our kids aren’t trapped in our own sins and weaknesses!
 - (2) Jehoshaphat will appear in the story of Elisha.
 - 2. Our story of Elisha takes place in the northern kingdom.
 - a) King Jeroboam made king of Israel. Takes 10 tribes to the north (all but Judah and Benjamin). Jealous of Rehoboem and concerned the people would turn back to Rehoboem when they returned to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 12:47)
 - b) Jeroboam devises a plan. He sets up an alternative way to worship than what God had commanded: makes two golden calves of gold, new houses of God and alters, and he “made priests from every class of people for the high places. Whoever desired to be a priest, he consecrated....”, not the Levites only. (1 Kings 12:48-52, 13:33-34)

c) Series of evil kings and tragedy, culminating with Ahab. **Read 1 Kings 16:38-41.**

(1) Continues Jeroboem's system of worship and takes a foreign wife, Jezebel, and begins to worship and serve the false god Baal, worshipping idols, and makes sacred groves.

(2) It is in this setting that God sends Elijah, then Elisha to speak to his people in the northern kingdom.

(a) Two Godly men to work miracles and proclaim His truth, during a very dark time.

(b) Heart of God, to call his people back to him. To intervene.

(c) Elisha means "My God is Salvation"

(d) a message of great hope and deliverance.

C. Elijah better known. Elisha's teacher and mentor.

1. Towering figure in the Bible. See in New Testament

a) Mt. of Transfiguration: Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Matthew 17).

b) Who do the people say I am? John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets? (Mark 8:27-28)

2. Elijah is mighty in prayer.

a) 1 Kings 17:1 Prays there will be no rain (James 5:17)

b) 1 Kings 17:21 Prays and the son of the widow of Zarephath is raised from the dead

c) 1 Kings 18:36 Calls down fire from heaven to consume the burnt offering with the prophets of Baal.

d) We will see Elisha too was a man powerful in prayer. Both miracle workers.

3. Elijah - Sustained by God

a) Fed miraculously by ravens (1 Kings 17:3-6)

b) then miraculously by the starving widow who has only a handful of flour and a little oil (1 Kings 17:8-16)

c) later by an angel who brings him a cake of wheat and a jar of water that sustained him miraculously for 40 days and nights (1 Kings 19:5-9)

d) We see in Elijah an example of frugality, trust, reliance on God. We will see this in Elisha's life as well. We see this in the life of Christ.

e) Clement of Alexandria – A.N.F. (Bk. 3, Ch. vii) (second century)

"Look, for instance, to Elijah, in whom we have a beautiful example of frugality, when he sat down beneath the thorn, and the angel brought him food. "It was a cake of barley and a jar of water." Such the Lord sent as best for him. We, then,

on our journey to the truth, must be unencumbered....

“For he who has the almighty God, the Word, is in want of nothing, and never is in straits for what he needs. For the Word is a possession that wants nothing, and is the cause of all abundance.... The good man, then, can never be in difficulties so long as he keeps intact his confession towards God. For it is appropriate for him to ask and receive whatever he requires from the Father of all; and to enjoy what is his own, if he keep the Son. And this is also is appropriate that he feels no want.

“This Word, who trains us, confers on us the true riches. Nor is the growing rich an object of envy to those who possess through Him the privilege of wanting nothing. He that has this wealth shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

f) Elisha was trained by this mighty prophet Elijah.

D. In our last study we read about Elisha’s call.

1. Called to a very intense commitment. Left his family to follow Elijah. Leaves what appears to be a nice, comfortable situation, walking into a death trap to serve with Elijah, who is being sought after by King Ahab. (1 Kings 19:19-21)

2. Intense discipleship!

a) Time together to confront Kings Ahab and Ahaziah.

b) Read 2 Kings 2:4-14

(1) Closeness of the two drips off the pages.

(2) Elijah strikes Jordon and it divides.

(3) Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit and receives it.

(4) Elijah taken up... “Father!” Gut-wrenching scene. Elisha tears his clothes in two. Elijah’s mantel falls on Elijah. Elisha strikes Jordan River with mantel.

(a) At first nothing happens.

(b) “Where is the Lord God of Elijah himself?” And the water divides and he crosses over. Just like Elijah. Also like Joshua who would lead God’s people into the promised land.

(c) The first of Elisha’s miracles. The baton has been passed.

(5) We pick up here. Two short stories, miracles #2 and #3. **Read 2 Kings 2:19-25.** What are we to learn from these?

III. Miracle of the Healed Waters

- A. Pleasant city, but the water is bad and ground is barren. Looks good, but there is death in the water. Things can't live, thrive, grow without clean, good water.
- B. Elisha performs a miracle. Takes a new pitcher, puts salt into it, and casts the salt into the water in the city of Jericho.
 - 1. Thus says the Lord: "I have healed the waters; from them there shall no longer be death or barrenness."
 - 2. We know that salt is a preservative for food. Used for meat. Also used as fertilizer. Placed in soil as well as on manure piles – helps soil to produce crops. Used in the ancient world, still used today.
 - 3. This, of course, was a miracle. What healed the waters? God! Used salt as an agent to work His power. This was done at the word of the prophet.
- C. This is a beautiful picture of God, who heals his people.
 - 1. Israel is sick, nearly dead. Led by the worst King of all time. And God desires to heal them. Elisha starts his ministry by going to Jericho, and healing its waters, bringing life to barren land and to the people. What a statement by God!
 - 2. Joshua had parted the Jericho River and marched into Jericho to destroy it. The sin was so great. Here, God could have brought judgment again against his own people. But, he is patient instead. Sends his prophet to bring a message of cleansing, life, and hope. Desires them to turn back to him.
 - 3. People who came into contact with Jesus were cleansed: Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, the thief on the cross. Saw Jesus' righteousness, his purity, his love, his strength, his compassion, his goodness – they turned themselves in. Repented of their sin and followed him.
 - 4. We were the sick water. Dead, diseased, stuck in our sins. Pursing pleasure, selfishness, false Gods, idols, and pursuits. But, we were cleansed. We were purified. God healed us, made us whole. Jesus continues to purify us and continues to make us whole. Once diseased, now healed. A miracle!
- D. But Jesus also does something quite unexpected.
 - 1. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." **Matthew 5:13**
 - 2. "Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" **Luke 14:34**
 - 3. What do these passages mean?
 - a) Salt is a seasoning, has a sharp taste. Also a preserve for food, purifies and cleanses. Also a fertilizer: makes things grow where they otherwise would not.

Used as fertilizer in the ancient world and still today, including mixed with manure piles as it preserves the fertilizing properties of dung.

b) We are to be salt for the earth/the world? How?

c) Luke 14:25-27,33

- (1) No compromise on following Jesus. Above closest relationships, sentimentality. Pick up one's cross, die daily.
- (2) "...whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple..."
- (3) Those who do this – follow Jesus above all else – have salt in them, which creates saltiness, a preservative and life-giving quality to others.
- (4) If you don't have this quality (haven't put Jesus and his teachings into practice), "lost your saltiness", you are not fit for the land, or the dunghill. You are not able to be a preserve, or a fertilizer to make things grow.

d) Let's go back to Matthew 5:13 and read the passage in context. How are we to be salt in this world? **Read Matthew 5:1-12.**

- (1) This is how we are to be salt of the world! This is what preserves, fertilizes, turns what is dead and diseased into something that has life (just like the water that Elisha was asked to heal)
- (2) Humility, mourning, mercy, purity, peacemaking. Challenging stuff. Requires us to take up our cross. But this is what brings life to a dead world.
 - (a) I know everyone in this room. Everyone here has experienced putting into practice the beatitudes (home, work, neighbors, family, with other brothers and sisters).
 - (b) The challenge is to keep doing it. In every situation.
 - (c) So hard! We need to pick up our crosses. We need God's Holy Spirit. We need His favor/grace, his power.
 - (d) Huge impact. When we treat others this way.

e) Jesus' example:

- (1) He did not retaliate when on trial, did not defend himself; did not curse.
- (2) Jesus reached out to the thief at his side, took care of his mother (giving her care to John), showed mercy: "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do...."

E. Lessons for Us

1. Remember: we are just salt, thrown in the water, thrown on the ground, mixed with the manure like fertilizer. Like Elisha, it was not the salt that does the healing. It is God's power.
2. Out of his love, he healed us. Then, for some reason, God has chosen to use us in

our weakness as his salt, to bring healing and life to others. Really remarkable and an awesome responsibility.

3. May God give us ears that hear, that we might rise to this challenge to become and remain salty agents for His purposes!

IV. Elisha curses a group of boys, 42 are then mauled by 2 bears

A. 2 Kings 2:23-25 How do we make sense of this?

1. God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He does not change. How do we reconcile this with God's nature? Mauling 42 boys? Perhaps we should just skip this section!

B. Context:

1. A King and a people who had completely abandoned God and set up their own form of worship and were worshipping false Gods. Their children were following their example.
2. Elijah had come and worked miracles, including calling fire down from heaven to reveal the power and authority of God.
3. God was seeking to get Israel's attention and to win back their hearts.
4. Elisha had also worked a public miracle of the parting of the Jordan River, in keeping with both Elijah and Joshua, who had done the same. Great demonstration of God's power.
5. Yet, Israel was not getting it. Here we have the prophet coming into Bethel, and a group of young boys, running in a pack (a gang), are teasing and taunting the Lord's prophet. May have been a threat to Elisha physically. (me: ran into a pack of 10 kids during college)
 - a) Elisha does not lash out physically, take out his sword. Instead, calls down a curse and leaves things in God's hands. God responds swiftly.
 - b) What do we make of this?

C. Tertullian (early church father writing late 100s, early 200s) against Marcion (a heretic to the faith). Tertullian defending the Christian faith.

1. Marcion is saying that the Christian God is responsible for all evil that takes place in the world.
2. Tertullian says no, you are confusing the word evil, lumping all evil together. We Christians believe there are two types of "evil"
 - a) Sinful evil (which Satan authors), morally wrong (murder, deception, violence, etc.), and
 - b) Penal evils (which God authors) and is used against the evils of sin and to bring about justice. Examples of penal evils that God brings:

- (1) The Flood and the fire of Sodom killed the unjust, those doing evil.
- (2) 10 plagues sent against Egypt. "...Egypt, although most depraved and superstitious, and worse still, the harasser of its guest-population"
 - (a) Speaks of Pharoah "who had already denied God, already in his pride so often rejected [God's] ambassadors, accumulated heavy burdens on His people, and (to sum up all) as an Egyptian, had long been guilty before God of Gentile idolatry, worshipping the ibs and the crocodile in preference to the livng God."
 - (b) This punishment certainly seems like evil to those being punished, but this is justice, seek to stop their evil. He then goes on:
- (3) "Even His own people did God visit in their ingratitude. Against young lads, too, did he send forth bears, for their irreverence to the prophet." ANF Bk 3, Pg. 309
 - c) Calls out Marcion for putting the Judge on trial. That God will choose the severity of the punishment and it is reasonsable and just.
 - d) "Well, then, even though [God] required the sins of the fathers at the hands of the children, the hardness of the people made such remedial measures necessary for them, in order that, having their posterity in view, they might obey the divine law. For who is there that feels not a greater care for his children than for himself?"
 - (1) Parents may not repent when they face difficulties as a result of their sin, but parents may repent when they see their children going through suffering due to the parents' sin!
 - e) Being mauled by 2 bears - think that got the attention of the boys' parents and the community?

D. Lessons for Us

1. We are to stand in awe of God and His power, his commands are to be followed, his name to be honored, he is to be adored and revered.
2. God will make himself known on the last day, every knee shall bow and every person will appear before the judgment. God wants all men to be saved. He wants all men and women to share in His great banquet.
3. It is a blessing that God intervenes to get people's attention before the final judgment day. The reality is that often people only turn to God, humble themselves, when bad things happen.
4. Many examples of Godly men who were punished by God
 - a) Jacob (deceit), Moses (kills a man), David (murder, adultery)
 - b) Hebrews 12:3-11

- (1) God scourges and chastises his sons, in love, to make them “partakers of holiness”
- (2) “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:11)
- 5. Jesus modified things a bit from Elisha’s day!
 - a) Elisha cursed the boys, and left things in God’s hands.
 - b) Jesus says: feed and pray for your enemy. Paul in Romans 12:14: bless, do not curse those who persecute you. Then leave things in God’s hands!
- 6. May this strange, short story help us remember that God is a God of justice. He will not hesitate to punish men, women and children, including his people. Why? That we might turn to Him, be healed and cleansed, and share in His love and, ultimately, eternal life.
- 7. We’ll return to our Genesis study next week, but continue with Elisha’s life next opportunity we get!