

Elisha

Part 4

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[00:00:00] Very difficult to select all the portions that are helpful in connection with this last meeting in relation to Elisha the prophet. I thought the ones that we've selected tonight might help us to see something more of this remarkable man of God. I think if we could write over the life of Elisha a title that would be descriptive of him, it would be something like this, a man who made things better. I think generally speaking this is the kind of man that Elisha was and that's a very very good commendation for anyone, a man who makes things better. I think you will agree with me that it's so easy to make things worse. Give a person of very low intelligence a sledgehammer and take him into a drawing room and tell him to get busy, well he could soon make a mess. But ask someone to repair the damage, [00:01:09] ask someone with skill and ability to gather up all the fragments and bring them together and restore the drawing room to its former splendor, well that takes some ability. Oh I believe that we can see this in Elisha, a man who can make things better. We've already seen this and I think in the incidents that we refer to this evening we'll see that this great principle comes to light again. This first story is very interesting, a time of famine but Elisha the man of God is a man of resource, he has some food and so he tells his servant to put the great pot on and to start preparing a meal. The sons of the prophets they had to go and gather some food, [00:02:04] put it into the pot and one in his ignorance collects poisonous things and puts them into the pot. It isn't very long before the whole pot is poisonous. Of course they shout out man of God there's death in the pot. Well Elisha didn't say well take it away, get rid of it, destroy it. No he says bring me a handful of meal and casting that into the pot he restored it to a condition of goodness whereby they could partake of it. Now I think there's a very good lesson in this for us all. First of all a famine. Now doesn't it always indicate unfaithfulness on the part of the people of God? Didn't God promise his people that if they were faithful and obedient to his word [00:03:02] their land would produce plenty, there would be ample supplies for everyone, safety from their enemies, an abundance of everything to satisfy their hearts. But he warned them now if you're disobedient then there will be consequences and one of the consequences was to be famine. So here we find a condition of death and it's the direct result of unfaithfulness amongst the people of God. Dear brethren how often we bemoan the low condition of things spiritually. Who is to blame? Certainly not God and I believe if we all humbled ourselves continually I mean not just coming together in one meeting but marked together with a spirit of self-judgment day by day and a continual reference to God about the low condition and an endeavor on [00:04:07] our part to better it by ourselves, better it by one man as Mr Darby was told by his father. I understand as a young man he was continually complaining about the sad condition of the world and the Christian world in particular. Well said Darby senior, John go and make it better by one man and that's always good advice that if we are bemoaning the condition of things locally we can always make it better by one man. The onus is always upon ourselves individually and I believe as we take account of the death oh dear brethren let's humble ourselves and let's be desirous in prayer and

exercise to improve the condition by ourselves. So easy to try and correct other people so easy to put the blame on others. Oh to be exercised that there might be a better condition [00:05:06] and that by each one individually so this death can be overcome. Well then the great pot is put on and in goes the different ingredients and then one man in his ignorance provides something that is poisonous. I'm perfectly sure he didn't mean to do it but in his ignorance he did this wrong thing that was that could have had very serious effects. Now I want to speak a little about this because ignorance is a dreadful thing in the sight of God. There is the kind of ignorance that God takes account of graciously. Even in the old testament there were sacrifices that were permissible for sins of inadvertence. People didn't know [00:06:08] what they were doing so it was permissible to bring an offering. But there were sins of willfulness that is direct disobedience, presumption, evil and this was an extremely serious thing in the sight of God. Now I believe there is a great deal of ignorance amongst professing Christians and of course each one of us must take a position of humility before God and on how little we know and understand of the things of God. I believe a great deal of the confusion that exists in Christendom springs from ignorance. Not so much willfulness although there may be that too but for this purpose tonight I want to concentrate on ignorance. Now let's see what [00:07:03] scripture says about ignorance. First of all it was ignorance that crucified the son of God. Doesn't it say that if the princes of this world had known the wisdom of God they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Didn't Peter stand up and say to them now I know that you did it in ignorance. Now that's a very very serious thing. You think of all that was expressed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, the life that we've been singing of, that perfect spotless pathway. Now by his words and by his deeds it should have been obvious to every intelligent Israelite that the Messiah was there in person but because of the blindness of their hearts and their eyes [00:08:01] they failed to appreciate who he was and in their ignorance they crucified him. We find a much more serious thing when we come to our day and we find so-called leaders and Peter in his second epistle refers to this. They bring in in their ignorance damnable heresies and those heresies produce terrible evil consequences. Now they do this in their ignorance. They are ignorant of the truth. They are ignorant of the person of the son. They are ignorant of the presence and power of the spirit and because of their ignorance they bring in all the most abominable things. I noted down one or two things. I can't remember them all but I want to refer to them from this piece of paper. When Paul was preaching on Mars [00:09:05] Hill in Acts 17 he said that idolatry was the result of ignorance. Now that's a very solemn thing again. Man ought to have been intelligent as to the mind of God. Instead of that in his ignorance he moved away from God and idolatry was one of the results. Now in Ephesians chapter 4 it says the nations they walk in vanity. They are darkened in their understanding. They're estranged from the life of God and that's the result of ignorance. You see dear brethren what a solemn thing it is to be ignorant of the truth of God. Now in 1st Peter 1 verse 14 he says your former lusts were the result of ignorance.

In 1st Peter 2 verse 15 it says foolish men are foolish because they're ignorant of the truth of [00:10:07] God. Now I believe that most of these references if not all of them stand connected with unconverted unconverted people. But you can see that being ignorant of God brings in its train all those evil things that are obnoxious to God. Now think for a moment of Christians being ignorant of the truth of God. They don't know, they don't understand. Are we surprised when we look abroad in Christendom and see the abominations that are connected with the name of Christ? It is because they are ignorant of the truth that's contained in this precious book. All the things that belong to man and his power and his knowledge and his mind is the direct outcome of ignorance of the truth of God. When you read the first epistle to Corinthians [00:11:09] you find at the very beginning Paul says to them now he says you come behind in no matter at all he says you've got all knowledge you've got all gift and you don't come behind in any of these things whatsoever. And yet so often we find that through the book he says don't you know don't you know don't you know. Why is he saying that dear brethren?

Because I believe that knowing the many things that they had been taught they weren't consistent with the things that they had known. They weren't consistent with the things that had been taught them and that's a very solemn thing for us to take account of today. I suppose most of us here have been going to meetings for how long? 30, 40, 50, perhaps 60 [00:12:04] years. My we ought to be good people. We've heard so much ministry. We've had address after address bible readings. We ought to be the most wonderful people in the world. We would have been if we'd been obedient to the many things that we heard. Oh how easy it is to hear and to accumulate knowledge and yet that knowledge govern us in our lives. And I believe this is a form of ignorance that perhaps God is deeply concerned about. You know what the bible says about some people? All was learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. All was in the position of being taught and yet never grasping the truth in an active operative way. And so I think you will agree with me that in our lives a lot of things have been allowed [00:13:06] into our lives through ignorance of the truth of God. But once we know we are responsible to God to obey that truth and we don't get any more until we move on in obedience. There's one outstanding passage I want to speak about before we leave this matter. You remember on the mount of transfiguration Peter said master we'll make three tabernacles.

One for thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah. And Luke the man of grace says he didn't know what he was saying. Now that's a nice touch from Luke because it puts a better complexion on Peter's expression. But it does reveal that Peter wasn't aware of what he was saying. Now if he had realized [00:14:05] the glory of the person who was before him the son of God and the father made him aware of it he would never have dreamt of putting beside the son of God Moses and Elias. He would have kept the unique character of the son of God before his mind all the time and never suggested that Moses and Elias should be on a par with him. It is right that he said the Lord first but oh he would have kept clear from any association with Moses and Elias as understanding a unique character of the son of God. Now as young Christians move along we bear with them with the utmost grace and kindness and tolerance. If they give expression to things that aren't right they have to be taught and taught graciously. But when a man is on the road for 50 60 years we don't expect him to be expressing [00:15:06] things that aren't in accordance with the truth. He ought to know better. He shouldn't be expressing ignorance. He shouldn't be like a babe. He should be a mature full-grown man. And so again dear brethren I would say it's a very serious thing today if a Christian is ignorant of the mind of God. He ought to be well informed and being well informed able to meet every demand upon him either in privilege or in responsibility. And it's a very wonderful thing that you can be full-grown in knowledge. This is the great desire of the prophet of the apostle in his epistles. Great desire that we might arrive at the full knowledge of the truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ and the purpose of God. And so this man in his ignorance he puts poison into the pot. [00:16:06] You see dear brethren if we're thoroughly taught in the truth of God we won't bring poison into the local company. We won't be saying things that bring down the truth of God in some way or another. Everything will be pure. It will be worthwhile. Isn't this what Peter says that we are to desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word? I'm referring to Mr. Darby's translation. What is pure and wholesome and sustaining? Paul says to Timothy that you're to be nourished up with the words of truth and good teaching. Nourished up. Ah nothing poisonous there. Real good sustaining food. The manna, the roast lamb, the old corn of the land.

Christ himself nourishing pure food. Not a false Christ. A Christ that is derived from the [00:17:05] scriptures in truth and in dignity. And this is the great food for the people of God to feed upon and to be intelligent as to this great and wonderful person who is known to us as Savior and Lord and we feed upon him that is we appropriate him for our souls. So we don't want any poisonous food to be circulating amongst the people of God. It brings spiritual death. We want wholesome pure food that

we might all feed upon it the best possible advantage. When it became, when they became aware of the poisonous character of the food in the pot they cried aloud. A protest if you like. Something comes to light. Here's poison. What do we do with it? Well the prophet he takes some meal and he casts it into the pot. Everything's all right. [00:18:08] I suggest to you that the handful of meal that is thrown in is typical of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'll tell you why. Paul speaks about the truth as it is in Jesus. Every feature of truth will find its center in Christ and in some way or other whatever their poison might be, whatever the wrong teaching might be, there will be something connected with Christ that will rectify it. I'm perfectly sure of this. If we understand the greatness of the person of the Son, his greatness and glory and all the offices that he fills and the way he operates in the assembly, if we understand that the Lord Jesus then we'll be able to bring in rectifying [00:19:02] truth that will put things right. We were speaking the other night about the epistle to the Galatians where they were in danger of going wrong because of the Judaizing teaching and without doubt the truth of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the antidote to that kind of thing. But I also believe that along with that is the truth of the person of the Son and Paul's great desire for the Galatians was that Christ may be formed in them and if Christ was formed in them then in the power of the Spirit they would be able to defuse the wrong teaching. There were people who were going into the Colossian assembly and they were saying it's all right being a Christian but why don't you add something of man's philosophy to it? Man's a very clever creature. These philosophers are very clever men. They can tell you a lot about [00:20:02] the origin of mankind, its destiny and how things operate. Why don't you add a little bit of philosophy with your Christianity? Paul says no. Christ is everything. You are complete in him and if we are complete in him we need nothing else. So man's philosophy is intellect however great and attractive it may be is out as far as the Christian's position is concerned. You are complete in him. Christ is everything. The Corinthians they were in such a bad state. Oh they were boasting about their wisdom and they were allowing the most awful sin in their midst and so Paul says now look Christ is the wisdom of God and if you want wisdom there it is in all its glory and perfection and in connection with this evil in your midst why don't you remember [00:21:03] that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us? Cleanse out the old leaven that you might become a new lump. Christ again the answer to the problems amongst the people of God. Oh dear brethren if we only knew Christ better if we were only more wrapped up in his glory and his greatness and his love and his humility and meekness too oh how it would answer the many problems individually and collectively. But thank God there is some response in our hearts and lives to his glorious person. He has made himself known to us. He has revealed his glory to us and how thankful we are for it. Oh that we might respond to it more and more and so the meal cast into the poisonous mixture changed it completely and the prophet could say serve out now give them [00:22:03] something to eat and they were all happy and satisfied. Yes dear brethren once things are set right in relation to the person of Christ what peace what joy what happiness. Now comes a man from Baal Shelisha and he brought the man of God bread of the first fruits 20 loaves of barley and folias of corn and the husk thereof and Elisha said give unto the people that they may eat. I don't see anything in the passage to suggest that the person brought this food to Elisha for the sake of the people. It would appear to me that this was a present to Elisha himself and here I see the unselfish character of the man of God. Something given to him something [00:23:02] really worthwhile. Something of the first fruits the very best of the crop and these barley loaves all this speaking of real good nourishing food that is made available for the man of God. And he doesn't say well this is mine I'll keep this to myself. No he says we're going to share it we're all going to enjoy it together and when the servant says but it's only a little drop amongst a hundred people why share that amongst a hundred men. He says you go on you serve it out the word of the Lord is there will be plenty for everybody and so they did. Now this is the first thing we want to speak about dear brethren the unselfish character of the man of God. We'll find this we didn't read the verse and in connection with Naaman but you remember that [00:24:04] Naaman's servant I beg your pardon

Elisha's servant Gehazi he ran after Naaman and he asked Naaman for a present and when he came back Elisha he chastised him severely in the sense that he indicated to him how wrong he was in doing this kind of thing and he said this isn't the time to receive money. Now I think I see this kind of principle with the prophet here. I've received something but he says I'm going to share it amongst the lot. This is the principle of fellowship the unselfish character of this man. I said at the beginning he made things better we've already seen this in putting the bad food right now he's got an ample supply of good food for himself but he says we're going to share it amongst them all and in divine power as led by the Lord what [00:25:04] he has is expanded and made available for all for their satisfaction. Now this unselfish character comes to light in many of the great men of God that we read of in the bible. We think of Paul he said in Acts 20 I've coveted no man's silver or gold. I haven't coveted their clothing. I'm only concerned about giving. He says these hands have ministered unto my needs and the needs of others. There was a man who was only concerned about the spiritual well-being of the people of God and if there was anything that he could do in a material sense he was quite prepared to do it. We read of Nehemiah who was the governor in Jerusalem and being the governor was entitled [00:26:02] to a very large portion of provisions but things were difficult. Plenty of the people were starving plenty of the people were in great difficulties and so Nehemiah he waived his right as to this provision and he says I don't want it. Now this again is an unselfish character and you'll find this all through the scriptures. Men of God who were prepared to sacrifice or share in relation to the things of God. Now what I've mentioned is in a material sense but then if we apply it in a spiritual sense how wonderful it is to have a supply of good nourishing food in our souls, spiritual food and share it with the saints. I don't think there's any room for men with minds like an encyclopedia that can store up an abundant knowledge in their minds. [00:27:08] It's not that kind of thing that's wanted. It's the ability to arrive at the truth and make the truth known circulated so that the saints get encouraged and get helped. Now the man of God thoroughly associated himself with the people, identified himself with them in their need and was prepared to come down amongst them and share with them all that he had and that's a very wonderful thing. Well dear brethren how do we get such stores of good nourishing food?

Paul says to Timothy, Timothy you pay attention to yourself. Now you might say well that's a very selfish thing to do to pay attention to yourself but Paul is saying this in view of Timothy helping [00:28:02] others. Now he says if you pay attention to yourself, if you get right yourself, if you accumulate the truth and enjoy the truth for yourself then you'll be in a position to save others and be a blessing to them. You remember that well-known character in the old testament Ezra? What did he do? He set his heart to learn the law of the Lord and to do it and then to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. There's no good trying to help anyone if you haven't the resources to do it. We see in the newspapers harrowing pictures of children in the last stages of malnutrition. We see awful pictures, please for help and what can we do? So very little.

[00:29:01] We might say well if we were supermen with the limitable resources at our disposal how gladly we would rectify the position and we look at the saints of God and we see them they're so anxious to have some ministry. Well how do we how do we get it? By applying ourselves to it, by reading out bibles, by prayer, by crying to the Lord that we might have an abundance of food to share with others and so when we come along to the bible reading it's not just to get but it's to give, to give something for the benefit of others. Of course it's a very good thing to come along to get too and we all share in what's available. Sometimes today there's a tendency to perhaps not arrange fellowship meetings at difficult periods because there are difficulties regarding catering. We remember the war years when we provided our own sandwiches and brought our flasks along [00:30:05] and we still enjoyed the fellowship and material things can be overcome if the desire is there. Far better to have

the fellowship and enjoy our own sandwiches and perhaps share them too with others with our flasks of tea. This is the great thing, have the fellowship, overcome the difficulties never mind these small material things. Oh how important it is to come together and share and enjoy the precious things of heaven. I'm sure that those different people in those two different incidents were really glad that there was such a man as Elisha the prophet amongst them, a man who could make things better, a man who could cure the poisonous food, a man who could make available good food and he did it in a very unselfish way. And so now we come to the story of the healing of Naaman.

[00:31:09] And Naaman says, now therefore I pray thee take a blessing of thy servant but he said as the Lord liveth before whom I stand I will receive none and he urged him to take it but he refused. This is another very important principle that we find. Many men of God were like this, we've already mentioned them in connection with Nehemiah and Paul and we can remember Peter who when he was addressing the elders in his first letter in chapter five now he says remember you're serving under the great shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep. Now you perform your shepherd service amongst the saints of God not occupying a place of preeminence amongst them [00:32:05] but being amongst them in love and care and concern and he says don't do it for filthy lookers sake don't do it for some personal advantage do it because you love the people of God. Oh what a wonderful thing that is. You remember when Paul was seeking to encourage the Corinthian believers in sending their help to some saints who were in need they had a desire to do it but somehow or other they had forgotten to fulfill it or they were a bit lackadaisical in fulfilling it. Paul says ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be enriched. What a powerful lever to produce in [00:33:01] the hearts of the Corinthians an eagerness to fulfill the desire that was upon their hearts. Here again we find this principle. Elisha saying now look dear brother saying this to Naaman I don't want any reward for this blessing why I'm only the vehicle of the blessing of God it's God to whom you should turn with your thanksgiving give God the glory give God the thanks I'm only the vehicle why come to me with this no he says I don't want to belittle the things of God by accepting this and that's a very very important thing oh what a happy thing it is. I remember reading about our brother Billy Graham that he felt that a great deal of dishonor was being brought on the Lord's name by some of the evangelists acquiring great sums of money. The last night of the gospel [00:34:06] campaigns was the night when the collection was taken and usually 30 or 40,000 people there and the Americans are very generous when it comes to religious collections and so these evangelists were acquiring 30 40 perhaps 50,000 dollars for this one night and he felt that this was bringing the truth of God into disrepute. I think we should mention this now he said this has got to stop and so he and his companions who were engaged in this kind of work they obtained the average salary of a clergyman in America and so this destroyed forever the accusation that persons were preaching the gospel simply for monetary gain and I think that's an extremely commendable thing in relation [00:35:03] to our brother and so here we find Elisha saying exactly the same thing to Naaman no I don't want a present I'm only here as the servant of the Lord and it's God who is to get the glory. Didn't Abraham do the same to the king of Sodom perhaps a little different but the same principles there he says I don't want anything not a thread to a shoelace he says lest you turn around and you say you've made Abraham rich. John says that he and his companions they went forth taking nothing from the Gentiles they were utterly relying upon God and his power and goodness and so I think the unselfish character of Elisha comes to light here not motivated by any desire of personal gain or glory only desirous of bringing blessing into the lives of others. Now lastly before we close [00:36:07] this incident of a young man who was very concerned because of the nature of the opposition that was against the man of God. The man of God was the object of great hostility and he was in a position of great danger. The king of Syria had sent a great band down. The young man is terrified sees all this great army and here a poor defenseless man

Elisha. Elisha said to the young man now don't be worried don't be afraid there are far more for us than against us. Why it's almost like Paul in the eighth chapter of Romans saying if God be for us who against us. Oh what a wonderful thing it is to have faith in God and Elisha he prays to God that the young [00:37:05] man's eyes should be opened and the young man's eyes were opened and he saw this great army this great army that God had provided to meet the opposition. Dear brethren it's so easy to get fearful as we see the tides of evil running high as we see evil men waxing worse and worse.

The fulfillment of scripture yes we know this and yet a terrifying thing in another sense as we see them moving forward and seemingly no check to their power and advancement. What are we going to do? Ah the only thing we can do and it's the best thing to do is to have faith in God that God can deal with the problems as they come. If God in his permissive ways allows these things to happen we can be sure that he has a plan he has a purpose in mind and we submit to that and [00:38:06] we seek his power and grace and strength to carry on and be a testimony for him in the midst of these evil days and so the position was entirely reversed instead of these people coming with power and strength and capturing Elisha and those with him they are blinded and then they're taken away captive and the king of Israel said oh at an opportune moment I've got them now they're blind will I smite them? Ah then we find the grace of the servant. No he says why should you smite them? Give them something to eat show them kindness and when they did this it touched their hearts and they came no more into the land of Israel. How gracious and kind Elisha was he might easily have retaliated in anger we might even have said he was justified in doing so but he was like the [00:39:08] apostle Paul. Grace and humility the servant of the Lord says Paul must be patient apt to teach gentle and so on and Elisha exhibited those features so like the master not seeking to assert himself not revengeful oh kind and gracious and what a character he was. I feel dear brethren that we've gone over these incidents in the life of Elisha in a very scanty way but I trust enough has been said to whet your appetite that you too might look into these incidents and derive help in your own study of them and fresh thoughts coming into your soul. Now we said at the very beginning that Elisha was referred to so often as a man of God and I just want you to bear with me as I quote [00:40:09] two passages from Paul's letters to Timothy where this kind of thing is mentioned. In chapter 6 verse 11 Paul says to Timothy but thou oh man of God flee these things and follow after righteousness godliness faith love patience meekness fight the good fight of faith lay hold on eternal life where unto thou art called and has professed a good profession before many witnesses there we find the pathway for the man of God to flee to follow and to fight. Now in the second epistle [00:41:04] we find the resource for the man of God but continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and has been assured of knowing of whom thou hast learned them chapter 3 verse 14 and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect through the furnished and to all good works. I believe these two passages would help us to be men of God in these last closing days. First of all I believe the passage in second Timothy isn't it remarkable that in the letter that contemplates the worst [00:42:07] possible conditions in Christendom Paul says to Timothy don't forget the word of God it's this that will really equip you to be a man of God and in the first epistle he indicates the character the features that belong to a man of God as he is found here in witness for him. Oh dear brethren let's aspire to this wonderful appellation a man of God because we believe it will be the great barrier against the inroad of evil amongst the people of God and will be the means of maintaining a testimony for God in this poor sad world. May it be so for his namesake.