

# Continuing the work (2 Ki. 2)

## Part 1

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*Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.*

[00:00:00] The second book of Kings and chapter 2, verse 1.

And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven with a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel.

And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.

And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace.

[00:01:03] And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.

And he said, As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace.

And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they, too, went on.

[00:02:02] And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood to view Aparah. And they, too, stood by Jordan.

And Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters. And they were divided hither and thither, so that they, too, went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee.

And Elijah said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing, nevertheless, if thou see me, when I am taken [00:03:02] from thee, it shall be so unto thee.

But if not, it shall not be so.

And it came to pass, as they went on and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder.

And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, and Elisha saw it. And he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more.

And he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan.

And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, [00:04:04] Where is the Lord God of Elijah?

And he also had smitten the waters. They parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over.

And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.

And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

Just two verses from a chapter already read to us this afternoon, the first of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter one of the Acts of the Apostles, verses eight and nine.

[00:05:07] But ye shall receive power.

After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

And when he had spoken these things, behold, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.

I would like to bring before you this evening, dear friends, something from the word of God on this subject of service that we've already had brought before us this afternoon. There was no arrangement between us, but if God speaks through his word in two succeeding [00:06:09] meetings on the same line, there must be something for us.

And we have in recent years lost quite a number of servants of the Lord who have ministered to us.

There was one whom we had hoped to see and hear on this platform, but now he is with the Lord.

Now the Scriptures have examples of this, of a servant being taken and the work being continued by another.

And this is the thought that I have before me this evening. And there's something for us all. Not only,

don't only think of those who have perhaps the five talents, but for all of us.

[00:07:10] If we think of other examples in the Scriptures, go back to Moses. He was mentioned this afternoon, but in the case of Moses we read that God was going to remove him, and in Deuteronomy, you needn't turn to these Scriptures, but I'll read them.

In the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 34, we read Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, and Moses laid his hands upon him, and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses.

[00:08:05] There wasn't another Moses, but there was a young man who was, as we read here, full of the spirit of wisdom.

And Moses put his hands upon him, he becomes the one to whom the people hearken. We could come to the New Testament. Our brother said from this platform, we don't have another Paul. But we do find that Paul has his son in the faith, Timothy, a young man, and he says to Timothy, now you commit this precious deposit of truth to others, that they may teach others also. The truth abides, the servants are taken, but the truth remains. Commit the truth to others, that they too may teach others. And you know dear friends, the provision that God has made for us is wonderful, isn't it? [00:09:08] Not only have we got the spirit of God given to us, the promise of the Father that the Lord told them he would ask, and it's been fulfilled, another comforter that he may abide with you forever, that has been fulfilled.

And the Lord himself says, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, unseen but an advocate in heaven, an advocate upon earth.

And the word of God abides, it lives and abides forever. So dear friends, we should be well equipped, shouldn't we? But we've read of the example in this chapter of Elisha, as it were, taking over from Elijah.

[00:10:04] And these two are so different in their ministry.

Elijah lived in an evil day, when Ahab, a wicked king, had taken a wife from the king of the Sidonians, Jezebel.

And terrible things were happening, and Elijah was a prophet. His name means, God is Jehovah.

And his ministry was one of judgment, he pronounced judgment. Why there are many things recorded, Ahab's son has an accident, shall he recover? No, says Elijah, thou shalt surely die.

Elijah's ministry was one of judgment upon a wicked people.

But now when he is taken, we've seen it here, we have, as it were, in his place, with the [00:11:06] mantle upon him, we have Elisha.

God is salvation, and he's a prophet of grace.

Mind you, dear friends, he doesn't go back to Ahab, but it's to those that have a need. He's the

prophet to minister grace.

And you know, this changing over from Elijah to Elisha, I think it takes us forward, because the very last verses of the Old Testament speak of one coming who was going to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and John the Baptist was he.

Let me read the last verse of the Old Testament to you. And behold, I will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful [00:12:08] day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. Now, the Lord himself has told us, the scriptures tell us, that John the Baptist was fulfilling that he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. But although he was a stern man, calling men to repentance, yet you know what happened to him?

Imprisoned, beheaded, as he himself said of the Lord, he must increase and I decrease. And so we have the Lord taking over, as it were, with that wonderful ministry of grace that we have in a figure in the ministry of Elijah. Why the multiplied oil, the cleansing of the leper, the raising of the dead, the multiplied [00:13:06] bread, it all speaks to us surely, of that blessed ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was here, to those who had a need and felt it. And when the Lord is taken, he leaves his own here to continue this blessed ministry. That dear friends, is your privilege and mine, as those who are going to tell of the grace of God, providing in the Lord Jesus for all men everywhere.

Now this is therefore what I have before me tonight, that we have given to us, as it were, this wonderful privilege of continuing this blessed ministry that was begun, Luke says in Acts 1 again, the first verse, speaking of the things that Jesus began to do and to [00:14:04] teach until he was taken up, and he left his disciples to continue it.

But now, don't we all feel our need for some preparation for such an honoured service as this? I feel sure we do, and our chapter, I believe, brings before us what I might call the preparation for service.

Even in the record that we have of these two prophets going from place to place, they're not far apart, Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho, and back to Jordan.

But dear friends, in Scripture, places have meanings, and we've got that in these four very special meanings indeed.

[00:15:03] Let us think of them for a moment, and see if we can gather up the spiritual lessons from these places.

They begin at Gilgal.

At all these places, there were memorials in stone, you know, which speaks to us of the permanence of the, shall I say, the lessons embedded in these places. At Gilgal was that heap of stones that Joshua erected, taken from the bed of Jordan. When the people had come to the end of their long wilderness journey, and were really entering into the promised land, and that heap of stones would tell them that they had now crossed the Jordan, yes, on dry ground, the ark was there, and the people all passed by the ark into the promised land.

[00:16:02] But there's something more at Gilgal.

We read that the right of circumcision that had been given long, long ago had been neglected in Egypt.

They had lived in Egypt as the Egyptians. But now that they had come into that promised land, God would have them renew that ordinance of circumcision.

Painful experience, but it was to teach them a lesson. And there's no doubt in Scripture as to the meaning of this lesson. And we can surely learn it very easily if we read the Scripture. I'll just read a few verses, first of all from Colossians.

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in putting off the body [00:17:05] of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

Putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. Or again the previous epistle, Philipians.

We are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

This is the very first lesson we must learn, that our flesh, our old nature, is of no value in this service.

We must reckon it dead.

Gilgal would speak to us of this, that we must think of ourselves as finished, dead, in the death of Christ. [00:18:01] As all those Israelites came through the river Jordan, they saw there the precious ark on the dry river bed.

There were stones placed there, we come back to those presently, but there were stones placed there as a memorial.

And so dear friends, we have the truth that is set forth by this. Not only that my sins have been dealt with, I have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Back in Egypt the people learned that lesson. At the Red Sea they saw their enemies dead upon the seashore. They knew deliverance, they knew that resurrection life given to them, with their sins judged. But they carried themselves with them through the wilderness. They must now learn the lesson that they themselves, their very sinful nature that they have, must be kept in that place of death, or they'll hinder your service.

[00:19:05] How much service is ruined by self coming to the service.

Ourselves, dear friends, we must reckon as dead, crucified with Christ. That's the meaning of our first place, Gilgal.

And when Elisha goes on with Elijah, I think it was a test of his devotion that Elijah says to him, Tahir, the Lord has sent me to Bethel.

He says I won't let you go, I'll go with you. I think that really Elijah was just testing his devotion, if he would be a representative for God, if he would take the place of his master when he was taken, he must be tested. And Elisha stands the test here. [00:20:03] He goes with his master from place to place, he comes to Bethel, Bethel.

Again we only need to go to the scriptures to know the meaning of Bethel, its name means the house of God, and you know scripture gives us the names, the meaning of these names. Bethel, the house of God.

And in the 28th of Genesis I read this, you remember the story of Jacob's dream of that ladder reaching from earth to heaven?

And these are the words that he hears, behold I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest and I will bring thee again to this place for I will not leave thee till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

[00:21:03] And Jacob rose early, he takes the stone that was his pillow and sets it up as a memorial pillar and he called the name of that place Bethel, the house of God.

The place to Jacob where he heard personally from the Lord, I am with thee, I will keep thee. And dear friends, we as servants of the Lord must have this assurance before we set out that we have the Lord with us to keep us, but the place is called Bethel, the house of God.

In the house there is one whose authority must be recognized, and that is God's authority. And so the servant is one under authority.

[00:22:06] And if we come to think of the further use of this in Scripture, if we come to the New Testament we have the same truth. Take the thirteenth of Acts, when that great apostle of the Gentiles would start off on his journeys to reach beyond Samaria, Judea, Samaria as we heard this afternoon, and the whole of the Roman world.

It was the Holy Spirit who said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul. They were in the assembly at Antioch, in the assembly which is the house of God today.

Not made of stones, but yes, of living stones indeed.

Living stones, those who have been given life.

[00:23:04] The Lord of life is risen, we sang, didn't we? And if you would know how you become a part of that house of God, one of those living stones, Peter tells you how in the record in the sixteenth of Matthew, when he comes out with that wonderful confession, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. He confesses him, and the Lord says to him, Thou art Peter.

Upon this rock, not you, but upon this rock, your confession of myself, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Now dear friends, the assembly then, the house of God, is the place from which the servant may go out.

Not that they appoint him, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, and when [00:24:07] they had prayed and fasted, they let them go. It's a very personal thing, service, you know, but do we not need the fellowship, the help, the prayer of the assembly?

Let us not take it upon ourselves to serve in self-will. Remember Gilgal again, and let us remember then that our service must come from the assembly with the fellowship of our brethren, with their

prayers, and it's a great privilege dear friends, to think of it in this way, that those who have gone out to distant parts of the earth, of whom we read, and we are thankful for what we hear of them, they are [00:25:02] with the fellowship of the assembly in this country and in many others. But there's more, going back to our chapter.

The sons of the prophets were at Bethel, and they came forth and say to Elisha, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? He says, Yes, I know it, you hold your peace.

The sons of the prophets. Now there's an interesting thing, you know, about these sons of the prophets. We read of them fairly frequently in Scripture. The first reference is back in the days of Samuel, when he spoke to King Saul. And he gave to King Saul certain signs that God was going to have him as a king.

And one of them was that as he went on his way, he would meet, first of all, three men, [00:26:06] all the details are given, and then there would be a company of the prophets. And as they prophesied, the spirit of prophecy came upon Saul, and he prophesied. And the Lord says, Go down to Gilgal.

Scriptures are all tied together, you know, study them. And presently we find that Samuel is said to be appointed over the sons of the prophets.

Now I believe that these, therefore, were younger men who got together. They had certain scriptures, not all that we have. They might have had some of the books of Moses by this time. It may be that these were the young people that copied them. We may owe something to them for their careful copying of those records. It may be from these sons of the prophets that some of the minor prophets that we have [00:27:02] here later came, because it's Amos, isn't it, who said that he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. He was a herdsman when the Lord called him, as though he's the exception. So it may be that some of the minor prophets were amongst these, the schools of prophets that we read of here and in other places.

But they go again, Elijah says, Tarry here, the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.

Jericho, another place with memories for the people of Israel.

That city that had withstood them as they came into the land. And how those walls fell flat, you remember, at their shout. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, except, of course, for that little piece where the house of Rahab stood.

[00:28:03] Maybe that that was just where the ark was, because they all went up straight before them. Perhaps that was the little piece where there was the ark, and there was Rahab saved when the city was destroyed.

Jericho, speaking to us, surely, of the power of Satan that's going to oppose our service.

It's not easy to serve the Lord, when you remember that the God of this world is blinding men's eyes.

He's been at it a long time. He goes about, sometimes as a roaring lion, sometimes as an angel of light. But the scripture says, resist him and he'll flee from you. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.

And we do need to know, dear friends, that we have on our side a power greater than his.

[00:29:05] We read of Jacob just now, for that ladder reaching to heaven. His inheritance was down there, but ours is at the top of the ladder, you know, where Christ is, blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. And that same book, the epistle to the Ephesians that tells us of this, it tells us of the wiles of the enemy, and how we can be fitted to stand against them, having done all to stand.

Remember, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The gates of hell, says the Lord, shall not prevail against my church. And so, dear friends, we need to know this if we're going out in service, that we have a power which is greater than that which is going to withstand us. I don't mean to say that Elisha or Elijah would understand perhaps what we're gathering [00:30:06] from these names, but they're put here for a purpose, I feel sure. And the lessons that they would teach us are surely very significant and needful to us. But we must pass on, because our clocks do.

They come now, sons of the prophets, fifty of them stood to view afar off, and they come to Jordan.

Now we've spoken of Jordan before, we're back, therefore, in a sense, to where we were. But the significance of these places you'll find if you just search the Scriptures, and if we go back again for a moment to Deuteronomy, we've got something about the Jordan. This time it's 32, verse 46, and he said, Set your hearts unto all the words which I [00:31:19] testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe, to do, all the words of this law.

For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life, and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

This is your life, to observe, to do all these things, because you are going over Jordan to possess the land.

[00:32:04] Now I know many hymns will tell you that Jordan speaks of death, but dear friends, it's rather of what is set before us by our baptism, our death with Christ, which enables us to enter into our spiritual inheritance. That's the significance of Jordan. And again I'll say, when we think of the Jordan with those stones upon the riverbed, where the ark rested, it speaks again of our death with Christ.

Not quite perhaps what we had at Gilgal. And here I would like to refer to a verse or two in Romans, because the Scriptures themselves I want to speak to us.

[00:33:04] In Romans, speaking of baptism, in chapter 6, therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.

That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, for if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. So that Jordan speaks of death



with Christ, but as that which brings us into a newness [00:34:03] of life, to live with him. Now this again, we have to remember if we would serve the Lord acceptably. Not in our own strength, but rather as those who are new creatures, made anew, a new life. This is your life, says Moses in Deuteronomy.

So we've got, as we're right round our four places, we are back near where we started. But there's yet something more.

Now we come to what was so significant, where Elijah says to the younger man, now ask what you will, I'm leaving you.

What does he ask? A double portion of thy spirit.

[00:35:01] Now I don't think he was wanting to excel his master. There was no sense of pride in this, of wanting to be somebody. I believe Elijah felt the need of a double portion to continue his master's work.

It may be too, I know the double portion is said to be in Deuteronomy, the portion of the firstborn.

Well it may be that he felt he was privileged indeed to be there to witness Elijah taken up into heaven.

Couldn't he claim therefore a firstborn's portion?

But that mantle that fell from Elijah, he takes to himself and he goes down to the river. We read it, didn't we?

And again, don't you think that he was getting a bit cross when he says, where is the Lord [00:36:01] God of Elijah?

He wanted for himself to have proof that he might be assured that what Elijah had promised him and what God had promised was indeed fulfilled to him. He wanted proof of his ministry in that sense. And so he takes that mantle that falls from him and the waters are parted. But my dear friends, isn't this significant in connection with what we've had in the first of Acts already?

What a wonderful figure in the Old Testament of a prophet of God, Elijah, being taken up and another being endowed with what came from him. Now this is the provision that the Lord has made for you and me. He's fulfilled his promise, he's given us of his spirit to clothe us as the mantle would [00:37:06] have clothed Elijah.

And unless we have it, dear friends, our service may count for nothing.

Well dear friends, I believe that this is for us tonight. These thoughts from the little historical story of these two walking around from place to place, but we've gathered up, I trust, some thoughts as to the preparation of ourselves for service of the Lord.

But here is the one that comes at the end.

Wherever he can carry on with that precious ministry of grace, as we read of Elijah if you follow the record in Kings, he too must be clothed with that mantle that falls from the prophet, taken up into heaven.

[00:38:08] Now dear friends, I feel that I can tell you a little personal story here.

Some years ago I was privileged to visit in a little humble little house in Southampton our beloved brother Godfrey Knight, who had been for many years General Secretary of the Southern Railways.

A servant of the Lord indeed, but not one to speak in public, but in his way a wonderful servant of the Lord.

And I feel indebted to him for several things.

But when I parted from him, he gave me a few lines. I don't know the author of these. They might have been his own. [00:39:01] I've never found them anywhere else to check them. I can only go by my memory, but these were the lines.

He is worthy, take it with thee, just this thought to ponder o'er, till his loveliness and beauty fill thy soul yet more and more, till thy heart be filled with longing, till thy lips be filled with praise, till himself become the object of thy thoughts and words and ways.

Yes, dear friends, follow these two and go back over it and just see how the Lord is speaking to us in all of these of himself.

[00:40:01] And we want to be occupied with him if we would serve him acceptably, not with ourselves. There's another couple, I've quoted, I can't tell you the author of this one. Oh, that a man might arise in me, that the man I am might cease to be.

I don't know who wrote those, but dear friends, it's what we have really in the scripture, that this that the prophet longed for is indeed a reality to those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ and believe the promise of the Father, and they're equipped for service in that way. Or may God grant that we might be the better equipped to serve our blessed Lord and Savior as we're occupied with him in our hearts constantly, and as we seize every opportunity to show his grace, to tell the message of his grace to those in need around us.