

Success - earthly or heavenly?

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Will you turn with me please, firstly, to the first book of Kings, chapter 19. The first book of Kings, chapter 19 and verse 19.

So he departed thence, and found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elisha passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elisha, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again, for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elisha, and ministered unto him. [00:01:06] And then in the second book of Kings, chapter 2, verse 1.

The second book of Kings, chapter 2, verse 1.

And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by 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 [00:02:02] thy head today?

And he said, Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace.

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.

And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood to view afar off, and they [00:03:05] 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 Elisha 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 from thee, it shall be so unto thee. But if not, it shall not be so.

And it came to pass, as they still went on and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder. And Elijah went out by a whirlwind into heaven. [00:04:04] 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, Here is the Lord God of Elijah. And when 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. May I read to you just two or three verses from the first epistle to the Corinthians?

[00:05:09] The first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 18.

Let no man deceive himself.

If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos [00:06:06] or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

All things are yours, they're yours, and rightly or wrongly this afternoon, it seems to me that all things being yours and being mine, I have rightly or wrongly some choice [00:07:04] in what I may do with them.

I believe that to be true.

But the apostle writing to the Corinthians says, all things are yours, and then he strikes what is to me and what must be to you, a most sobering note, and ye are Christ's.

Ye are Christ's.

I believe that in the kind of world in which we live today, many of us, if not all of us, have tasted in some measure, great or small success.

[00:08:08] We have discovered all kinds of things which we can have and which we can use.

The days of past when people were in the kind of poverty that was known before I was born and maybe before you were born, but some who are older may well remember such days. And in the material things of life, there is so much today of success, of that which man longs for, which his natural heart craves after.

But what kind of success is that? And you know, we have read together that very beautiful story of the call of Elisha, and [00:09:04] that's the story that I want to direct your attention to with this in mind. And I want to remind you, right at the very beginning, that this young man Elisha was no fool.

This young man Elisha was no man who was grovelling at all.

He was a very successful farmer, a very successful farmer, for the story opens concerning him by telling us that he ploughed with twelve yoke of oxen and he were the last. I don't know how many farmers you know, but I know of very few, if any, who would be ploughing today with twelve yoke of oxen or with twelve tractors, if you like.

[00:10:01] This young man was very successful, he had the world at his feet. Twelve yoke of oxen he needed to plough his fields, and it says of him that he was with the last.

Somebody once told me that that was a sign of his humility, he kept at the back. I wonder, I wonder, it seems to me more like being a real down-to-earth businessman.

He stayed at the back to see what the others were up to, to make sure that they were ploughing straight furrows and that they were doing their job as it ought to be done. He was a very successful man, but something happened to him. As he ploughed his fields this day, the prophet Elijah came past where he was and simply flicked [00:11:02] his mantle at him.

That young man immediately turned round to Elijah and he said, let me go and say goodbye to my father and mother.

Elijah says, what have I got to do with you? What have I done to you? What does this mean to you? It meant this to him, that he turned back and he took one of those yoke of oxen, he slew it and with the implements, the plough or whatever it was that he was using, he made a fire, he cooked those oxen and he made a feast.

And he turned his back upon it all and he followed Elijah.

It seems to me this afternoon, you know, that in Elijah we have a very beautiful picture [00:12:06] of the Lord Jesus and in Elisha, dare I suggest to you that we have a picture of you, of me, to whom the Lord has come and he has just flicked his mantle.

We have felt that touch of power and the immediate response of our hearts was to leave everything, all that we had of prospect in this world, all that the world had to offer us, and we would turn to follow him, cost what it may, and I am not suggesting for one moment that to feel the touch of the Lord Jesus means that you should give up your job. He never intends that for you, maybe, or maybe he does, I don't know, but what I do know [00:13:04] is this, that if you felt the touch of his mantle upon you, then you belong to him and although all things may be yours, ye are Christ's and he is the one whom you must follow, come what may, cost what it may, giving up all the so-called success of this

world and going after him, Elisha did just that.

But you know, it's a very wonderful thing in the heat of an evangelistic service to say as I realise for the first time that my sins are forgiven, yes I will follow him, I will do everything he says, I will go after him all the time, all the way, but next morning [00:14:10] we are faced with the cold light of dawn and we wonder just what we've done.

And as one young girl said to me one day just recently, yes it was alright last night but it's gone off today, yes it's not so easy to follow the Lord Jesus you know, I don't let anybody kid you that it is, and I don't think for one moment that this young man Elisha found it easy to follow Elijah.

And what I want to say to you today is this, that this young man was faced in the chapter that we read from the second book of Kings with three very real tests in his following [00:15:07] of Elijah. It's a wonderful story, a story that I'm sure all of us know quite well, of the way in which Elijah with his face toward God, knowing that he was going to heaven, I love this, it's one of the things which convinces me that it's a picture of the Lord Jesus, for we read of him in the 13th chapter of John's Gospel that he knew he was going to God, he knew all things and he knew he was going back to God. And Elijah knew he was going to heaven, he knew he was going to God, he knew that his life's work was over.

And here was a young man who was going to be left in the world, left in the world to [00:16:03] follow him.

My dear friends, the work that the Lord Jesus did in this world is over.

He completed his life's work to the glory of God and he has gone back to heaven and he's there in glory, but he has left in this world men and women whom he has touched with his mantle, whom he has called to himself and he has left us here to follow him, to go after him.

But I believe too that in order to test our discipleship, he has left for us, as Elijah left for Elisha, these three very solemn tests.

[00:17:01] We read in that second chapter of the second book of Kings that Elijah went out from Gilgal and Elisha went with him. He says to Elisha, tarry here I pray thee, the Lord hath sent me to Bethel. What was Gilgal? What does it mean to you? I have little to say about it because it doesn't come under these three tests this afternoon as far as I'm concerned, but you know Gilgal to the children of Israel was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled off from them. It was the place where they were set apart for the service of God. The place where, if you like, they were sanctified. It was the place to which, after every event in their history, in the early part of their [00:18:03] history at any rate, after every victory, after every defeat, Gilgal was the place to which they returned.

It was the place of strength. It was the place where they received from God that which they needed to go forward in his name.

Elijah with Elisha following him moves out from Gilgal to Bethel and he goes from Bethel Still further, and still further, the three tests that come to me as I have thought about what I was going to say to you today are simply these. First of all, the test that this young man faced at Bethel, the test that he faced at [00:19:06] Jericho, and the test that he faced at Jordan.

What kind of a test did he face at Bethel? What was Bethel?

This was the place where Jacob, when he left his father's house, spent the first night away from home.

This was the place where, taking a pillar of stone, he used it as a pillow upon which to rest his head as he slept after his day's journey. This is the place where he dreamed that famous dream known even to the children, where he dreamt of a ladder from earth to heaven, and where he dreamt that the angels of God ascended [00:20:04] and descended, the place of which he said, surely the Lord is here, for this is the house of God.

May I suggest to you that this is the very first test, the house of God test?

Where ought you to be, having sworn allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ?

You ought to be where God has put his name. You ought to be in the place where the people of God meet. You ought to be united with them, joining with them in all their worship and in all their activities.

Are you always?

It was a great test, for Elisha was this, but he didn't stay at Bethel.

[00:21:08] He moved on, proving that he was determined, come what may, to follow.

What does it mean to us in this day, I wonder?

You know, this house of God, this place of Bethel, wasn't always the kind of place that Jacob knew it to be.

Something happened many years after this and fairly near to the time of which we are reading, for one of the infamous kings of Israel brought Bethel down into the very dust, as it were. That which was the house of God, he made to be something which God must turn away from, [00:22:10] which true you know.

And men today have taken religion and they have done exactly the same with it. This King Jeroboam, what was Bethel to him? A place where the ladder rested its foot that went up to heaven? Yes, but Jeroboam only knew the foot of the ladder, he knew nothing of what was at the top. Only the foot did he know and that wicked king used the place which was the house of God to further his own ends and to gratify his own lusts and to bring glory to himself.

Oh my friend, as you have come to know the Lord Jesus, as you have taken your place here [00:23:12] in the house of God, for what purpose?

The things that you do under the name of service, for what purpose are they? For your glory or for God's?

To gratify yourself or that Christ might be exalted? A very solemn thing is this.

Very solemn thing that Jeroboam used the house of God to his own ends and for his own benefit.

Not so this young man, I love this you know. If you were to turn to the book of Amos, you would read in connection with this a very [00:24:06] solemn thing.

For there the prophet writing and speaking of these places of which we have read says this. This is the Lord speaking, seek ye me and ye shall live, but seek not Bethel nor enter into Gilgal and pass not to Beersheba for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity and Bethel shall come to naught.

Seek ye the Lord and ye shall live.

My friend, it is the Lord and only the Lord who should be before your heart and before your affections.

He should be the only one in your sights.

[00:25:07] Is that true?

This may not seem to you a very difficult test. It's easy in theory, but if you're anything like me it's extremely difficult in practice. To know that I belong there, but oh to keep everything in its proper perspective, to go on with my eyes fixed upon the Lord.

But they moved on.

They moved from Bethel to Jericho.

Test number two, what do you know about Jericho? Jericho was the place that stood first in the way of the children of Israel when they [00:26:04] had crossed Jordan and were going into the promised land. It was a city which God had said would be destroyed and the walls of Jericho came down. They were brought down by faith because I tell you this, that everything that happens to you in the way of God's power operating on your behalf is brought down by faith unless you believe nothing will ever happen. The walls of Jericho came down, but God proclaimed a curse against that city. He said curse would be the man that builds it and the king who was on the throne at the time of which we are reading caused it to be built again. [00:27:06] But faith had brought down a worldly man built up, a city of a curse and a test.

Have you faced such a test?

How many things have been built?

The things which our fathers by their faith have built? No, the things which our fathers by their faith have caused to be thrown down, the things of this world, the things which are cursed things in the sight of God and our fathers have stood firm and caused them to totter and fall. It seems to me that we in our day and age and if ever there was a challenge this is it. It seems to me that we are building up the very things which the faith of our fathers [00:28:09] brought down. Is it true of you as you follow your Lord, do you know what it is to really live for him in this world, in a world which hated him, despised him and cast him out? Do you know what it is to live for him, separate from it all, in it but not of it? You know I was talking to a man the other day and as business acquaintances often do just for

the sake of making conversation with a prospective buyer, he talked to me about all sorts of things and he discovered that I didn't do the things that the ordinary man in the world did.

I didn't smoke, I didn't drink, do you know what the next thing is? I didn't do that either. [00:29:01] And he just looked at me and he says, what have you got to live for, you might as well be dead.

My friend that's just it, as far as this world is concerned I am dead, for ye are dead says the apostle writing to the Colossians, for ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God, dead to the world and all that it means, to all its attractions, to all its religion if you like, dead to it, but gloriously alive unto God, ye are dead.

Are you dead to the world?

You know what I mean don't you? Test number three, they moved on and still Elijah was saying to Elisha, you stay here, [00:30:03] stay here, I must go on, you stay where you are, you've come far enough, but Elisha says no, where you go I go, I'm going with you, I'm following you and they came to Jordan and they crossed over Jordan, the two of them together, kind of a test is this, death isn't death, this really is death, a place where death has been overcome by the power of life, they followed through death, are you prepared for that, with all its implications, with all that it means, if you are, you will come to the place where Elisha came with Elijah, [00:31:05] right to the very place, the gate of heaven, the gate of heaven, and there that young man saw his master taken from him, look they were so closely attached that he took a chariot of fire to separate them, do you know anything of that kind of attachment to your saviour?

Chariot of fire separated them, and as Elijah went up into heaven, that young man who had followed him knew that the thing that he had asked was granted to him, because the mantle of Elijah was left behind, and he turned back from Jordan, he turned back from that [00:32:03] scene in the wilderness to Jordan, and he struck out with that mantle as Elijah had on their outward journey, and the waters parted, and they went over together, oh my friend, seems to me this afternoon that that was the place where that young man Elisha knew what success was, he knew what success was in that moment, he knew that successful businessman he had been, a farmer with everything at his feet, turning his back upon it to follow Elijah, and in this moment as he stood at this point, he knew, he knew that God was his God, [00:33:02] he knew when others doubted, you know as he comes back, those 50 sons of the prophets come out to him, and they say we better search for your master, he said you'll do nothing of the kind, you'll do nothing of the kind, they insisted I know and he allowed them to do it, but that doesn't alter in my mind this wonderful thought, that that young man knew where his master had gone, and because he knew his master had gone to heaven, he went back from that point with all that knowledge to work for him. You reach that place, I believe you know with all my heart that this is the point where we can link with the words that we read from Corinthians, all things are [00:34:02] yours, but ye are Christ's, the world may be before you with all its attractions, with all that it's got to offer. My friend, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are his, ye are Christ's, you're his because God has given you to him, did you know that? You are his by the very gift of God, and if you want any proof of that, listen to these verses in the 17th of John. As thou has given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou has given him. Verse 6, I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world, [00:35:05] that thou gavest me out of the world. Verse 9, he said I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which thou has given me, for they are thine. Verse 12, while I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name, those that thou gavest me, I have kept. Verse 24, father I will that they also whom thou has

given me be with me where I am. My friend, you are his, you belong to him, you are his because God has given you to him. All things are yours, ye are Christ's, ye are Christ's, and more than that you know, you're his too by redemption. Remember that will you? Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it. He's by redemption, [00:36:10] ye are not your own. The apostle writes further on in the epistle to the Corinthians, ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price, ye are bought with a price. Look, if there's any challenge at all in what I have to say to you this afternoon, and I've got about three minutes to say it in, it's here. Ye are Christ's by gift, by donation if you like, ye are Christ's by redemption, costly redemption, it cost him his own life's blood, ye are his. Are you his by dedication?

[00:37:06] Are you by dedication?

The apostle Peter says, ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, listen, that ye might show the virtues of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

This is success. This is coming to the place where God wants you to be. This is the kind of success [00:38:09] which will be for eternity.

I don't know how long ago it is, but it must be a hundred years at least, since two young men living on the outskirts of Glasgow were faced, as I believe Elijah was faced, as I believe you have been faced, those two young men were faced with a decision. They'd been brought up together, they were brothers. One of them chose the way of the world with its success. He left the shores of Scotland [00:39:01] and he crossed the Atlantic to America and he lived and he worked for years and he died. And when they read his will, they discovered that he had left 250,000 pounds in cash and a quarter of a million in insurances. His brother left the shores of Scotland and he went into the heart of Africa and he spent himself in serving his God, showing forth the virtues of the one who had called him out of darkness into light. Out of darkness into light. And he died on his knees in a hut in the African jungle.

[00:40:01] You know his name, don't you? David Livingstone. But his brother John went the other way. All things are yours, but ye are Christ's. The name of John Livingstone, but for that story is forgotten. The name of David Livingstone will live forever. It's enshrined in heaven. Now, which is success, think you? Which is success? Why even in this world those that honor me I will honor, says our God. Which is it to be? Are you prepared for the tests? It's not easy. It's not easy, but it's gloriously possible. All things are yours, but ye [00:41:11] are Christ's. God grant that that might be the success because that will be for his glory now and forever. Amen.