

Elisha - the Prophet of Grace

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] Erster Vortrag Unser Vortrag besteht vor allem aus dem zweiten Buch des Königs, drei sehr kurze Passagen, die Erfolge der Leiche, 2. König, Kapitel 2, Vers 19. 2. König, Kapitel 2, Vers 19.

And behold!

And where the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water is bad, and the ground barren.

And he said, Bring me a new crude, [00:01:04] and put salt therein.

And they brought it to him, and he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha, which is faith.

Now if you please turn over to Chapter 4, in verse 38.

Chapter 4, verse 38.

And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dirt in the land, and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him. And he said unto his servant, [00:02:01] Set on a great pot, and seed pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild herbs, hidden lapdogs, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage.

But they knew not.

So they poured out for them there to eat. And they came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot.

And they could not eat thereof.

But he said, Then bring meal.

And he cast it into the pot.

And he said, Pour out for the people that they may eat.

And there was no harm in the pot.

And then in chapter 6 of the same book, in the first verse, [00:03:03] chapter 6, verse 1.

And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now the place where we dwell with thee is too strict for us.

Let us carry gravy unto Jordan, and take thence every man of Eden, and let us make us a place there where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.

And Rus said, You can take thy gravy and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.

So he went with them.

And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a bean, the axe head fell into the water. And he cried and said, Alas, master, for it was borrowed.

And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stake and cast it in there, [00:04:03] and the iron did swim.

Therefore said he, Take it up a bean.

And he put out his hand and took it.

Now, just a verse or two in the New Testament, in the Gospel of John, and chapter 5.

Verse 17.

Gospel of John, chapter 5, verse 17.

Jesus answered the Jews.

My father answered the Jews.

Verse 19.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do.

[00:05:03] For what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth.

And he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

For as the Father raises up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he

will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.

For he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

Have you ever wondered why it is that in the biblical narrative [00:06:06] we get Elijah first and Elisha afterwards?

If man had written it having in mind the New Testament which was to follow, then certainly we should have put Elijah first and Elisha afterwards, should we not? Elijah, the man we read of in the first chapter of this book, is described, King, asked, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you?

And they answered, He was a hairy man, and stood up with a girdle of leather past his groin. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.

A description in very few words which tells us a great deal. And Elijah in the Old Testament, he corresponds in some way to John the Baptist in the New Testament.

[00:07:09] In that respect we see a reason why he should come before Elijah. But in another sense, Elijah is a severe man who speaks of judgment. Whereas Elisha, who took up this mantle, is the prophet of grace.

And we read those words out of John's Gospel because we see so much of the character of our Lord Jesus Christ in this wonderful man, Elisha. As we go into his story, after his introduction, which we'll just refer to briefly, we find act of grace upon act of grace.

Wonderful incidents at a time when everything was at such a low end. And yet, Elisha does nothing but kind actions, good actions, saving actions, [00:08:07] time after time through these early chapters of the Second Book of Kings. And still we might well ask ourselves, why was it then that the very first of his acts, when he took over the mantle from Elijah and he divided the River Jordan with his cloak, remember he took the same cloak that Elijah took and he smoked the waters with it. And as Elijah had the waters divided, he went over on the dry land. Then why was it that the very first thing that's recorded of him is an act of judgment? You know the little boys came up, didn't they? And they saw him twirling it on the road and they said, Go up, thou bald head!

And was the talk pleased? Do you think he was insulted? Do you think that he felt they hadn't got enough respect for him? [00:09:02] I don't think that, you know. One or two of the commentators, and I think they must be right, draw our attention to the fact that they were referring to what had just happened to Elijah. And you know, I think news travels very fast, although it's travelled in our country by the media. I think it travelled by word of mouth in Israel, there's only a small country in Israel about the size of Wales, quite small in our terms. And the word would have got around very quickly, even before Elijah got there on foot. The word would have got around that the great prophet Elijah had gone up to heaven in a whirlwind, accompanied by the chariots of fire. That was a thing that had never been seen before in the history of mankind. And I think it was the talk of the country, let alone of the district. And then when they saw Elijah toiling along the road, going back up north from Jericho, [00:10:04] then I think that they were talking to him as much as to say, oh you're a poor little dog man, are you going up in a whirlwind as well? And so in fact they were calling down contempt on that great

act which God had accomplished for his prophet, in raising him up in that way, taking him to heaven. One of the two men who went to heaven without dying.

I think that's why it was that Elijah called out the curse upon them and the bears came out and tore forth the two of them. Terrible story really.

Sometimes we think that God was a bit hard on these young lads, after all boys will be boys. But you see the Lord Jesus was very careful to maintain the glory of God in every aspect, and especially where the work of the Holy Spirit was concerned. You know he taught men forgiveness, he taught men grace, wonderful kindnesses.

He showed to man in every respect that whoever sins against the Holy Spirit, [00:11:04] it should not be forgiven him either in this age or in that which is to come. You know I think we see a reflection of that in this act of judgment of Elijah. But having put the record straight as we would say, then we see him going on time after time after time to show grace.

And he's so often spoken of as the prophet of grace.

Well now we read three little incidents, three perhaps of the least significant incidents of the life of Elijah, and yet how eloquent they are in their teaching. The first one was in chapter 2, remember the 19th verse, and it took place at the city.

And if you look in the previous verse you find out what city, for it says he carried out Jericho.

[00:12:02] And we read it a bit quicker about here, and we say, ah Jericho, the city of the curse.

Well now before that you see it wasn't the city of the curse, it was the city of archery, wasn't it? And the men say the situation of this city is pleasant.

My Lord sees.

But there was all the mark of the curse there. The water, not naught, but bad.

The water is bad and the ground is barren.

That wonderful visitor of palm trees has been changed into a desert sea.

We don't have to look far to find out why.

Remember when Joshua took the city?

When that terrible incident of Achan took place? Achan took the accursed thing, you remember?

God had uttered that curse against the city that whoever built it, [00:13:06] that his whole family would die.

Well in 1 Kings 16 chapter 34 verse, you read the account of its being rebuilt, but you don't read the account of the curse being lifted there, within the days of Ahab. In his days his heir, the best elite,

built Jericho.

He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram of his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segar, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun. From that we understand the meaning of the words. As he went on building the city, so his family all died, one after the other.

God had uttered the curse. Although the city had been rebuilt, the curse had not been lifted.

And here when Elisha came there, [00:14:01] he came to the city which was still under the curse. And no doubt it was because of the curse, that the water was bad, and the ground barren.

Well now, Elisha has got rid of grapes, he has a cure, doesn't he? He has the answer to it. No hesitation. Bring me a new cruise.

An earthen vessel, and put salt in it.

What does it speak to us of?

Why does it speak to us of our Lord Jesus Christ, doesn't it? The first fruit of the new creation. The cruise, the earthen vessel, speaks to us of his incarnation. Not like the first man, the first man that was of the earthly, the second man is the Lord of our heaven.

We've got a new one here, come on the scene. We've got one here, who's come with the answer to the curse. The one who is able in himself to bear the curse, [00:15:04] and to redeem us from the curse.

As it says in Galatians 3, Christ has redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us.

As the scripture says, Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree.

There was a threefold curse, if you remember in the Old Testament. There was the curse upon the ground, for Adam's sake, which God had him. There was the curse included in the law, for the one who didn't follow the law. On the one hand, for those that did follow the law, there was the recital of the blessings, in Deuteronomy, and afterwards, in the 28th chapter, there was the curse. A series of curses, against those who refused to obey the law.

And then thirdly, there was also in Deuteronomy, there was this curse against the one who was hanged upon a tree.

[00:16:01] And this is the one, the third of these, is the one that the Holy Spirit takes up in Galatians. He says that Christ has redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us.

You know those Jews, as they stood outside Pilate's judgment hall, and they said, let him be crucified.

Pilate couldn't understand it. He said, why?

What evil has he done?

We know why it was, because they wanted him to be hanged upon a tree, so that he should be cursed from God. They wanted the Lord Jesus to have the very worst that the law could possibly give him, so they wanted him to be put in the place of the curse.

And the Holy Spirit, in commenting on this, he said, indeed he has been made a curse for us.

Cursed is everyone that's hanged upon a tree. And we can follow down through the history of mankind, right from the time of the Deuteronomy, [00:17:03] the law being given, right down to the time of Judas Iscariot, who went and hanged himself. We can see all these dreadful people that were hanged upon a tree. But amongst them we find the blessed person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who bore the curse for us.

So Elijah calls for the new cruz with the salt in it.

And the salt, well it's the symbol of grace, isn't it?

The new cruz with salt in it. Remember it's said in the Biblical, let your words be with grace, seasoned with salt.

And salt and grace go hand in hand, they are always associated.

Salt is that which preserves freshness. And here it's a symbol of grace, the new cruz with the grace in it, is the answer to the curse.

And Elijah is able to speak the words of Jehovah as he says, [00:18:01] I have healed these waters that shall not be any more dead or barren land.

As we move on in the scriptures, we come to the last chapter, the Revelation.

God having fulfilled all His purposes in redemption and brought mankind into blessing through the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking of that heavenly city. It says, And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in them for ever.

Wonderful words, aren't they? Our God portrays for us that which is in His mind for the blessing of mankind and for the glory of His beloved Son and of His own holy name. No more curse, but the throne of God [00:19:02] and of the Lamb in the holy city, His servants all serving Him, seeing His face and His name, not the mark of the beast, but His name in their foreheads.

That's what we're looking forward to, beloved, that it's all the result of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first fruit of the new creation.

And now we come on to the second incident in chapter 4.

Winston looked at it in a way a bit different.

He was a son of the prophets and there's a canon.

And he noticed, do you, that Elijah says something which is rather extraordinary.

He says, set on the great pot and make a stew for the son of the prophet. [00:20:01] We might as well put it into modern English because you and I, when we go in the kitchen, we have to see what he's doing. We make a stew.

Set on the great pot and make a stew for the son of the prophet. There's a family in the land. And you can hear them saying, what with?

Where does it take you to? Well, it takes you to the scene of the beating of the 5,000. Doesn't it?

Remember the beating of the 5,000? It was a desert place.

And the Lord Jesus says to the disciples, you give them something to eat.

Why? It almost sounds like a joke to us, doesn't it? In this desert place. 5,000 people imagine it. It's as much as we can do to feed 20 when we have a big house full in our homes, isn't it? Why, it's a real effort to feed 20. And there's these disciples, and they're all men, not women, you see, and they weren't used to feeding people. [00:21:01] Twelve disciples, he says to these twelve disciples, you can give them something to eat. They say 200 pennyworth of bread would not suffice for every one of them to have a little.

And then there's Andrew with his faith. There's a net here with five barley loaves and two small fishes.

And then you see we have the Lord Jesus provision there with the 5,000 dead people. Provision which he makes in this great multitude so that they not only eat and are filled, but they take up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remain. And remember that the five loaves and the two little fishes would have gone in a very small basket, one very small basket to begin with, but when they gathered up the fragments, there was enough to fill up twelve big baskets, one basket for each of the disciples of fragments that remained. That's a lesson in multiplication. That's the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, [00:22:02] at work in blessing.

A millennial scene being pre-enacted in his ministry here.

But what a different scene we have here. Elijah says, set on the pot.

They don't ask him what to put in it.

They go out into the countryside, see what they can gather. We see they're ignorant. They haven't studied their plants, have they? And they find this wild vine with its girds.

They look nice, and no doubt they'll be fine in the pot.

And aren't we reminded about what the woman saw? Remember what the woman saw in the garden? She saw, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and it was pleasant to the

eyes, and all that we desire to make man wise, she took her fruit and she did eat, and she gave unto her husband, and he did eat.

[00:23:02] Quite a re-enactment of the fall, isn't it?

Man in his self-will, in his own wisdom such as it is, takes something which is quite contrary to the mind of God, and he puts that in the pot. And the result is death.

Death.

What did God say to Adam? In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.

And here, with the girds in the pot, the man of God, there's death in the pot.

And they could not eat of it. Once again, the prophet of grace he had the answer through meal.

And what's meal aside of?

Why we have it, don't we, as the second of the offerings in Leviticus?

Fine flour mingled with oil.

Unleavened wafers anointed with oil. [00:24:02] What do they speak to us of? They speak to us of the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The bread of God came down from heaven that a man should eat of it and not die.

If any man eat of this bread, he says, he shall live forever.

Well, he's the answer to the death of this world, isn't he? So the meal is taken and is cast into the pot.

One of the words spoken of the Lord Jesus in respect of death, in that passage in the second chapter of Hebrews, for as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself, likewise to his father the same, that through death he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

[00:25:03] Did you notice that whereas in the curse in the last incident, the Lord Jesus was made a curse, and now to confront death he had to go into death, he had to become dead in order that he might break the power of death. So we have him here, coming here and the body prepared for him, laying down his life according to his father's commandment so that he might break the power of death and so that we might know what eternal life is not in the coming day just, but even right here and now. He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son hath not life.

And then we have that wonderful incident when the Lord Jesus in the early part of the Revelation makes himself known to the Apostle John. He says, I am he that liveth and became dead, [00:26:02] and lo, I am alive forevermore, and have the keys of Hades and of death.

He is the one who now holds the power. He is the one who holds the authority. No one can go to

death without him.

Imagine that, people think that death is an accident, they think death is a tragedy, they think death is something which man can bring about, but no, the one who gives life, the one who sustains life and the one who admits it to death is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who has the keys. He won them off Satan when he gave his life on the cross. Satan was the prince of this world. Satan was the one who had the power of death, but now the Lord Jesus is the one who has the keys of Hades and of death.

So here the meal is cast into the pot, and instead of poison in the pot, they sit down to a banquet.

What a wonderful thing it is to be able to [00:27:03] sit at the Lord Jesus' feet and share in the wonderful things which he has provided for you and me. Not just again in the coming day, but now we have a banquet at the feet of the Lord Jesus in a provision which he has made. As we gather around himself, as we partake of him, he is the one who feeds our souls, he is the one who enriches us, he is the one who satisfies our every need, so that we, continuing to eat of him, we shall never hunger, we shall never thirst.

This is the word of God. When we come to chapter 6, we might say, well, this is a bit different, isn't it? This is not the curse, and this is not death, but this is a personal problem.

It's all it is really, isn't it? Because with other acts, [00:28:02] we had every man, their acts, and every man was spelling a beam, every man was making his contribution to this new house, to the sons of the prophets. First of all, you notice that the greatest inaction, because the sons of the prophets started rambling, saying, there's not enough room for us all, we've got to get some other place. He says, all right, then go somewhere else. And they say, well, come with us, he says, yes, I'll come with you. You see, that's the greatest attitude he shows. He doesn't say, now look, you lot of naughty boys, you just sit down and be satisfied with what's given you. Not that, not this prophet. He's the prophet of grace. He says, all right, you go and make somewhere else to live. Yes, I'll come and live with you. There's no problem here, grace is inaction.

And because grace is inaction, then when this personal problem crops up, once again, the prophet of grace, he has the answer.

And it's been pointed out that here we can be amazed that the one whom God has raised up to do such mighty deeds as he did, raising the dead, [00:29:01] cleansing the leper, and all the other things that we see him doing, we see him there on the hilltop surrounded by the host of the horses and chariots of fire for his protection, and yet he can be concerned with one little man's little problem concerning a little tool that he borrowed from his neighbour. Great, isn't it? And you know, it's been said, it's Mr. Bellick that I was reading, that I found him remarking, with God there's no such thing as small and great.

He says, the one who made the world and the universe around it was the same man that made the wing of an insect.

The same one, the same person, the same great creator that made the wing of an insect. God is just as much involved in the fine detail of this world as he is in the immensity of space.

And as we come to translate that into human problems, [00:30:01] the same God who deals with our eternal welfare is concerned with the little problems of everyday life, such as this embarrassing incident where the ax bit falls into the water. What does it tell you of me? It tells us this, that as we go on living our lives, and before the face of our father who cares for us, there is no problem which is too small but what we should bring it to him because he loves us and because grace makes provision for us day by day along life's pathway.

And so here we find that Elijah says, bring a stick, and he takes the stick and he throws it in the water and there's the ax bit floating.

But you know this incident, it takes us back, doesn't it? It takes us back to the days of Moses in the wilderness and to the waters of Marah. Remember the waters of Marah? They were brackish waters and they just came to the waters [00:31:01] and they couldn't drink them because they were brackish. And Moses took a tree and he threw the tree into the water and the waters became sweet.

If we think of that, the tree always reminds us that because of Christ, you might feel here that there's some sort of connection with that incident here. It's not a tree, it's a stick, but somehow it's a derivative of the tree. And there's a suggestion here of the work of the cross. It all comes through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ that this problem is resolved and this natural process of the iron sinking to the bottom of the water is reversed. Isn't it true that the cross of Christ has reversed all natural processes as far as we're concerned? That the soul that sinneth it should die, the waste of sin is dead, but the gift of God is eternal life. [00:32:02] Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound than where sin reigned at the death. So grace reigns through righteousness and through eternal life, through Jesus Christ.

Everything is reversed and instead of sinking to the bottom, it floats up to the top. And you know, I'm going to go further and you can tell me I'm going too far if you like, but I think that this act, it has another little lesson for you and me.

This time, in Israel, the separate character of the people of God had been lost through idolatry.

God had decreed that his people should not be like the nations around God, they should be separate under him, sanctified for himself.

They got merged with the people around God because they followed Baal and Chemosh and various other idols that the Philistines and the Ammonites and the Edomites and the Moabites [00:33:01] and all these other lot, they all worshipped. The Israelites seemed to like to worship anybody else except the true God, Jehovah, who had been so good to them in all the way that he dealt with them. Anybody else would do except Jehovah. And here, you see the idea with an axe here, what's it for? It's for cleaving wood, isn't it? You take your chopper, you take it to chop wood, don't you? You do it to split between one thing and another thing. And I think they have that idea with an axe here. This has been lost.

But did Isaiah, the prophet of grace, he was going to restore the cleaving power of the axe. And the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who came in the greater power than Elisha, the one who came in the fullness of grace, of his fullness, the Gospel says, have all we received, grace upon grace. He has also brought in this separation thought.

People don't like to talk about separation. [00:34:02] They think it's pious. It is pious.

We're sanctified. He's set us apart for himself in holiness. And you know, as he prayed to the father on the 17th of John, he had those wonderful words. He said, for their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Or as Mr. Darby Wren said, that they also might be truly sanctified.

The Lord Jesus wants his people to be set apart in holiness for himself. He doesn't want us to be merged with the world around us. It's so easy for us. We give up.

We're casual about our fellowship with him and our prayers and our reading, our feeding upon the bread of life. We're lazy about it.

And what happens before you can say, Jack Robinson, there we are.

We begin to be merged with the world again. [00:35:01] And the thought of the Lord Jesus is that we should be truly sanctified. And so that axe which is sunk to the bottom of the water and is no longer able to cleave the wood is brought up to the top through grace so that this cleaving operation can be put in once again.

All right.

I'm spiritualizing it too much. The teaching is there in the scripture and we do well to take account of it. So there we have these three little things in Elisha.

Somehow they seem to be so closely associated although they cover such a wide range of teaching for us. But they draw to us all of the work of Christ in every respect.

And Elisha, as we read of him, in everything that he does, he's so like our blessed Lord Jesus, the one who has done all for our blessing and for whom we wait to bring us into the fullness of it. [00:36:01] Now let's sing our praises to him. It's 517.

In the Lord, 517.

Let us sing of his love once again, of the love that can never decay, and none of the Lamb who was slain till we praise him again in that day.

There is cleansing and healing for all who are washed in the life-giving flood. There is life everlasting and joy after the wrath of heaven and of God. To the Lord.

The Holy Book, 517.