

## **The Account of Elijah & Elisha Instructs Us**

**Sermon on 1 Kings 19:19-21**

**Weekend of July 15, 2007**

**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**

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The Psalms urge us: *Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration this morning resumes our sermon series on Elijah and Elisha. In fact, it describes the time that Elijah and Elisha met. We read First Kings, chapter nineteen, verses nineteen through twenty-one:

**So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.**

**Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-by," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"**

**So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.**

This is the Word of the Lord.

### **Introduction: Farming Is Noble Work, and Elisha Was a Farmer**

Dear fellow Christians—called by Christ and following Christ:

This morning's Word from God introduces us to Elisha. And Elisha starts out as a farmer....

Have you ever considered what a noble work farming is?

You know, back when this church was built, I wouldn't have had to ask that question. Back then, and for dozens of centuries up until that time, most people were farmers. Nowadays, due to advances in agricultural technology, it's less than one in a hundred who is a farmer.

But you who are farmers: yours is still a noble work....

Farming is hard work. You put in lots more hours than most of the rest of us. Farming is good work. You really can't get into too much trouble working the fields or handling the animals. Farming is honest work. Your livelihood is what you produce; it's as simple as that. And farming is necessary work. You're producing something each of us genuinely requires: food—and you don't have to talk us into needing that.

### **Theme: The Account of Elijah & Elisha Instructs Us**

Well, God's Word to us today leads Elisha from one noble work, farming, to another noble work, ministry. See, THE ACCOUNT OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA INSTRUCTS US that that's true. And even for those of you who aren't farmers or ministers, this account instructs you that (1) WHEN CHRIST CALLS... (2) YOU DROP EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW HIM—just as we'll see in the account of Elisha.

## Exposition One: The Lord Called Elisha Through Elijah

Now, it's been a couple of weeks since we first considered the life of the Prophet Elijah. You might recall that Elijah lived and operated some eight hundred fifty years before Christ, some two thousand eight hundred and fifty years ago. Back at that time, God's people were divided among two nations: the smaller (and relatively-more-godly) southern Kingdom of Judah, and the larger (and plenty ungodly) northern Kingdom of Israel. Elijah was prophet in that northern kingdom.

You recall how Elijah prophesied against the false fertility god, Baal, that so many of his people worshipped. In fact, to show how false Baal's fertility really was, Elijah declared from God that there would be no rain—for three and a half years! After that, the Prophet Elijah held a contest with the prophets of Baal: a showdown where the nonexistent Baal did nothing, but the true God answered with fire from heaven. And then, God made it rain.

But King Ahab and Queen Jezebel still planned to put the Prophet Elijah to death. So, despondent, he fled more than two hundred miles to the south, to Mount Sinai. There God appeared and announced to him that he was sending help for the future—including a successor to Elijah himself: namely, Elisha.

***So Elijah went from there*** – oh, and this is actually God's Word to us today! – ***Elijah went from Mount Sinai***, two hundred miles back up north, ***and found Elisha son of Shaphat***. Elisha was at his home in Abel Meholah: twenty miles east of King Ahab's home at the capital city of Samaria, and ten miles west of Elijah's old haunts at Tishbe.

Now: ***Elisha was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen***. It was *plowing* season—for them: November or so. Elisha was a landowner with *twelve yoke of oxen*—in his day: twelve tractors (plus employees to man them). You see: Elisha was a hardworking farmer, and his hard work had made him well-to-do. ***And he himself was driving the twelfth pair***. Elisha was not too proud to work right along with his men, and he followed them, because finally it was his responsibility that everything turned out to his satisfaction.

So, it's a nice, cool November day—like many before it. Work is going fairly well, as usual. And Elisha is working his fields, just like twenty generations of his ancestors had done. And all of a sudden: boom! ***Elijah went up to Elisha and threw his cloak around him***. And Elisha's entire world changed—because that *cloak* was a special prophet's coat, carrying with it the dignity of the proclamation of God's Word. (In the original language, the word for that *cloak* actually does mean all that.) It all would have been as striking as me taking this robe off and walking down and putting it on one of you. And Elisha's entire world changed, right then and there.

## Application One: The Lord Has Called Us through the Gospel

Now, has anything like that ever happened to you...?

...Yeah, this is your experience, too—all of you.

See, you entered into the world the same way: The day of your birth was like any other day before it or after it. Like two hundred generations of your ancestors – and two hundred generations of your descendents, if the world lasts so long – you were carrying out your work, your sinful work. There you were: minding your own business, your own sinful business, with a wicked inclination toward evil that would land you into the very ground Elisha was working.

And all of a sudden: boom! Your entire world changed. A rainfall of water showered upon your head. You heard the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” And all of a sudden, the prophet’s cloak was wrapped around you. The beautiful, soft, shiny clothing of Christ’s glorious, righteous holiness wrapped around you.

And your entire world changed. All of a sudden, you were clean—with your inclination to evil washed away. All of a sudden, you were adopted—a daughter of God, a son of God. All of a sudden, you carried with you the dignity of a prophet, a priest, a king—gifts from your Savior Jesus Christ.

## **Exposition Two: Elisha Dropped Everything & Followed Elijah**

So, what happened to Elisha happened to you. As the Lord called Elisha through Elijah, the Lord Jesus has called you through baptism. Now, how did Elisha react? And how should we react?

*Elisha then left* – kind of *abandoned* – *his oxen*: already he sort of abandoned his old life. *And Elisha ran after Elijah*. His heart was into pursuing a whole new life. Now, being a polite son – and he was probably not too old; both parents were still alive – he asked: *"Let me kiss my father and mother good-by, and then I will come with you."* Permission was granted, as we read: *"Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"*

*So Elisha left him and went back*. But get this: *Elisha took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them*. Literally, he *sacrificed* them. And this was no small sacrifice! It would have to amount to thousands of dollars in our day—maybe more, because Elisha was giving up what in his day amounted to an entire tractor. And clearly, he was cutting himself off from his former way of life. *He burned the plowing equipment* – he wouldn’t be able to use that again either – *to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate*.

Finally: *Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant*. Literally, Elisha *ministered unto* Elijah. We would probably say that Elisha became Elijah’s right hand man and his hand-picked successor. And Elisha left his former way of life behind.

## **Application Two: We Drop Everything & Follow Jesus**

And that sets the pattern for us, too, doesn’t it? When the Lord called Elisha through Elijah, Elisha dropped everything, sacrificed everything, abandoned everything, and followed Elijah. Our Savior Jesus has called us through baptism. We must drop everything, sacrifice everything, abandon everything, and follow Jesus!

So, fellow Christian, drop your plans! Drop your plans to make a name for yourself in this world. Drop your plans to make a life for yourself in this world. Drop your plans to pursue fun for yourself in this world. And follow Jesus!

Sacrifice to Jesus! Sacrifice to Jesus the time you spend sleeping, the time you spend waking, the time you spend working, the time you spend playing. Sacrifice cheerfully to Jesus the money you spend on taxes, the money you spend on the mortgage, the money you spend on the bills, the money you spend on the groceries, and a big chunk of money right into the offering basket, too. Follow Jesus!

Abandon everything for Jesus! Abandon the daydreams that keep you from listening to his Word and the false priorities that keep you from reading it. Abandon your

rebellion, your hatred, your lust, your greed, your dishonesty. Abandon your sin, whether it's big or little. And follow Jesus!

Follow Jesus: in your schooling. Follow Jesus: in your working. Follow Jesus: in your families. Follow Jesus: in your retirement. Follow Jesus: through suffering. Follow Jesus: through death. And follow Jesus right on up to the paradise he promised you when he paid his blood to cancel the debt of your sins.

### **Conclusion: Elisha Was a Minister, and Ministry Is Noble Work**

To conclude: Elisha used to be a farmer. And farming is a noble, noble work.

Elisha became a minister. And I am remiss if I don't say, "To this day, ministry is a very noble work. And of course, I'm talking about being a pastor, or a teacher in a parochial school, or some other sort of church worker, operating with God's Word. And maybe, just maybe, Christ is calling you – especially some of you younger people – to such ministry...."

Like farming, ministry – at least ministry done right – is hard work. You never run out of souls to benefit with the proclamation of God's Law and God's Gospel. Like farming, ministry is good work. I know that working with God's good people to proclaim God's good Word keeps me out of no end of trouble! Like farming, ministry – at least, ministry done right – is honest work. Nothing is more true than the Word we get to proclaim! And like farming, ministry is necessary work. It is vitally necessary that people get to understand: their sin leads to their death—even eternally. And it is eternally, vitally necessary for people to understand and to come to believe that: Christ Jesus covers their sins; Christ Jesus reverses their death.

So, fellow Christian, how about you? Are you willing to drop everything, sacrifice everything, abandon everything, and follow Jesus—as did Elisha? ...Amen.

The Psalms urge us: *Declare God's glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.* Amen.