

Kings and Prophets 13-11-22a

This is Friday the 22nd of November 2013. We continue our study in the book of 2nd Kings, picking up in chapter 3. We'll take a moment as is our usual practice to give each of us a chance to focus our concentration, go before the Lord and ensure that we are prepared to undertake the study of God's Word under the ministry of God's Spirit, shall we pray? Father, it is a privilege for us to spend time together with the express purpose of gaining a better understanding of your Word, of sharing our enthusiasm, of receiving and extending the ministries that are our privilege to exercise through the power of your Spirit. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and his work for us, the wonderful realm that we have entered into and the privileges that have been granted to us through him.

We thank you for this portion of your Word. We thank you for the truth that has been preserved down through the centuries and the millennia so that we could partake of it. We don't have to live in the Middle East.

We don't have to go to a synagogue or to a holy place. We have access to the truth of your Word every day, wherever we are, at any time. We can answer any question.

We thank you for the privilege of such unprecedented access and help in understanding. We pray tonight that as we study together that, first and foremost, your guidance and your power will be with us so that we can not only understand what is contained in this portion of your Word, but that it will be meaningful to us, it will be practical, and it will work itself out to reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name.

Amen. We saw last time something of a structural clue to what is going on here in 1 and 2 Kings, which, as you will recall, the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are doubled in our English translation, but they are a single book in the Hebrew text. So although we seem to be sort of jumping back and forth across this canyon between 1 and 2 Kings, there is no break in the original.

This is simply a matter of convenience. I'm not completely sure why these...you say, well, it's the length. You can look at Isaiah.

That didn't get broken into two or three books. So I don't really know. I haven't delved into it, but it is what it is.

And in our English Bible, we separate these into halves. But we are looking more specifically and more helpfully at the two halves of prophetic ministry in the Northern Kingdom suggested to us in the career of Elijah and Elisha. And the Bible makes a very strong statement in the chiasmic structure that we have seen in chapter 2 of 2 Kings.

And so I tried to draw this out a bit in our preceding study, and we have seen in particular that the focus of this structure is in verse 11. It happened as they continued on and talked, Elijah

and Elisha, that at a time of God's choosing, they knew the day, but they did not know the hour. And we have looked before at the words of the Lord Jesus with regard to the second coming, that no man knows the day or the hour, not even the angels or the Son of Man himself.

But Jesus also said you should be able to read and interpret the signs of the times, and you should be able to discern the season in which a thing will take place. And we saw in chapter 2 that the sons of the prophets are well aware that this is the day that the changing over of prophetic office and authority is going to happen, but they don't know exactly when. So Elijah and Elisha don't say at the appointed hour they arrived at the appointed spot, and behold the appointed chariot did pull up and he stepped on the appointed step and was taken off to the appointed place in the sky.

They are continuing on, they are talking and they are continuing. And we recognize that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night, both generally in terms of the second coming of Christ and in our case specifically the timing of the rapture is unknown. We know what the conditions will be like.

We tend to think it has never been as bad socially, politically, morally, culturally, spiritually as it is in our day. But it's very interesting to go back and read the detailed writings of people who lived a hundred years ago or two hundred years ago or three hundred years ago. Beyond that we don't have much detailed writing because we didn't have a lot of reproduction of writing and of books.

But just looking back over the centuries, the turn of the 19th century to the 20th, circa 1900, there was a lot of apocalyptic talk. World War I, the war to end all wars, many many believers thought this is, they were looking for the Antichrist. He's here somewhere.

World War II, even more so. They were certain that the swastika was the symbol of the Antichrist. And people have been convinced in their own generation, and by the way, those of you that have been through the lengthy biography of George Washington where you really get into the nitty gritty of his times, there was rampant corruption, rampant immorality of the most egregious kinds.

Even in the wonderfully colored illustrations we have for the American Revolution, or as we like to call it, the First War for Independence, we think, well, the patriotic Americans throwing off the yoke of the oppressive British and so on. But here are these allegedly patriotic Americans selling supplies and goods to the British Army, the Howe brothers and Cornwallis and the rest of the British leaders and their troops and their sailors and so on, because England paid with gold. And George Washington couldn't get wool blankets because they wouldn't take the colonial script.

They wouldn't take the congressional promises of reimbursement. They didn't want that. They wanted gold.

And so they would smile and pat George on the back and say, well, we hope it all goes well. And then they were selling to the enemy rampantly, freely. Why do you think George Washington was shivering at Valley Forge? Because the British bought everything.

And their troops were warm and well-fed and well-quartered. And it was rife with immorality of all kinds. The camp followers that came along, the different kinds of disease that afflicted the troops under Washington.

Same thing in the time of the Civil War. You can see two sides. You can get the book Christ in the Camp.

I managed to obtain an original of that book and was reading through it. And they talk about the wonderful sense of revival. But one of the reasons there was a revival that swept through both the North and the South during the Civil War is because everybody looked around and thought Jesus must be coming back because everything is so awful.

So in looking today, this being the anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy here in Dallas, there's been extensive amounts of review and rehearsal of that history. And back in those days, 50 years ago, people, when he was elected in 1960, thought that he was somehow either the Antichrist or the beast because he was a Catholic. He was the first Roman Catholic elected.

There were huge outcries, reservations, opposition. If you go back and read editorials and writings and published sermons from back in those days, people thought that the Antichrist 666 Roman Catholic Church was taking over the world and this was setting the stage and that Jesus would be back in the 60s. So it has ever been thus.

So what I think is applicable for us in looking at this verse, it happened in verse 11 of chapter 2 of 2 Kings, as they continued on and talked. We don't know precisely. We think it is near.

I can confidently say it's closer than it's ever been. But there could be another hundred years. There could be another 500 years of history.

We think there's a six millennium span to history, but we're not real sure when Adam and Eve walked this earth and when the events of the flood and so on took place. It may be that we misunderstand the timing. The Bible doesn't say there were 4,000 years from Adam to Christ.

This is a calculation and an understanding on our part. Maybe it's right, maybe it's not. The Bible gives it in terms of generations, not in terms of years.

So we estimate, we hope in many cases that the time approaches, but we really don't know. So what do we do? We have one eye on the sky and the other eye on the ground in front of us as we continue on and talk. What would you suppose a conversation between Elijah and Elisha would be about? I doubt that they were discussing the weather or the flora and fauna on this side of the Jordan.

I have to think in these closing moments, knowing that it is the last day that they will share fellowship, that they are talking about things that count, things that matter. And this is what we should be doing, continuing on and talking, speaking the truth to one another in love. I think when you look at the focus of this wonderful symmetry, this wonderful chiasmic structure that we detail last time, this verse is the focal point.

It is undeniable, it is inescapable. If you spend any time at all looking at this, you cannot help but see, this is where we are supposed to look. It is helpful to have all of the surrounding information.

People that have that eye disease where they lose their peripheral vision and it keeps shrinking until they can only see what is directly in front, recognize the value of context. Our eyes do not focus out to the side. We get blurry fill-ins.

Our brain interpolates. But if you look straight ahead and think about what you are seeing in the periphery, it is vague. It is general.

It is just enough to help you with what you can see sharply, hopefully, right in the center. Well, this is the center and these other things are of lesser importance. You can say, well, if this is point C and point C prime or point G and point G prime, shouldn't there be a huge significance to that? Everything is significant, but the purpose of the structure is not to emphasize every single point.

The purpose is to focus at the center. So what is the value of what is at the center? My first suggestion is what they are doing when it happens. They continue on and they talk.

And day by day, whatever life throws at us, whatever is in the plan and purpose of God, whatever challenges face us, whatever opportunities are granted to us, whatever strength and blessings are bestowed upon us, whatever discipline and rebuke and correction comes our way, we continue. We persevere. We endure.

How many times have we reviewed those New Testament passages that our inheritance depends upon persevering? Keep on keeping on. You have need of patience. The trial of your faith worketh patience.

Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Continue. Keep on plugging.

One of the most difficult times to do that is when our emotions are in turmoil. Reviewing happenings in Dallas on this day 50 years ago, one of the things that impresses you is in the aftermath of that completely unforeseen assassination, it was chaos. It was bedlam.

It was unprecedented. Nobody had any idea of what to do. The police didn't know who to let in and who to keep out.

They didn't know how to control the crowds. They didn't know how to manage the press. People in the area were causing problems.

It's miraculous that the assassin was apprehended because every place a police car showed up, crowds gathered. They never got into the Texas Theater. They had to assemble 200 policemen to get into the theater.

The crowds were just unmanageable. Chaos. To concentrate under pressure, to function effectively under pressure is essential for us.

We practice this. I will make a prediction based on the Word of God. I don't think that in the eternal future there is an absence of pressure.

I think there will still be challenge. I think there will be obstacles to overcome. Why do I surmise there will be challenge? Look at all of the challenge negotiation and challenge management training that we are getting in this life.

I will take a moment here. I'm going to digress, but not for long. Hold on to your hand grip here for just a moment.

I was out of nowhere. A thought struck me. Not totally out of nowhere, but looking at Elijah and Elisha, thinking about Revelation, thinking about the two witnesses, thinking about the prophecy at the end of Malachi, Elijah will come before the great and terrible day.

He will turn the hearts and so on. Just revolving those things around in my heart and in my mind and thinking specifically about the two witnesses, you remember my speculation on the identity of those two witnesses. But it made me go back and think about James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

This goes to my point about challenge management, pressure negotiation, functioning under pressure. How many disciples did Jesus call? He went up in the mountain and He called how many individuals to Himself? He called twelve. One of them is going to disqualify himself and be ejected from his office.

The lever is going to be pulled. The button is going to be pushed. Judas, ejection seat, he's gone.

Now there are eleven. That seat will be reset and Saul of Tarsus will become the apostle Paul and will replace the unfaithful believer who malfunctioned in his opportunity. I personally don't think he lost his salvation, but he certainly lost all of his potential, all of his opportunities for service.

We could have had a legitimate book written by Judas if he had been a different kind of man. He had the same opportunities as Peter and John, but he didn't avail himself of them. And it is a warning to us that just because much is given doesn't mean that we're going to fulfill that

potential.

But think about the sons of Zebedee, the sons of thunder, James and John. What is James' name in reality in Aramaic and Hebrew? In Greek it's Jacob and John. Now, what is John's name in Hebrew? Now, what is James the son of Zebedee? What do we have in the church age from James? What all have we inherited from his apostolic ministry? Book of James? No.

Now this James was a disciple of the Lord Jesus who was given privileged access and advanced teaching all the way through. Who's in the upper room when Jesus raises the little girl? Who is on the Mount of Transfiguration? Who is in the garden? Now John and Peter, I get it. But it's all wasted on James, isn't it? What a waste.

James is killed just very early on, before the Jerusalem church even gets underway, James is killed. So did Jesus not see this coming? Why wasn't it Andrew, Peter and John? Andrew apparently lived on for years after Pentecost. Why wasn't it Matthew, Levi? Why wasn't it Thaddeus? Why wasn't it James the Less? Why wasn't it the other Simon? Any of these guys that are going to last and go, why didn't Jesus invest in them? All of this training, all of this revelation, all of this investment into James and he dies immediately.

The guy does nothing, writes nothing, visits no one, evangelizes no one. He's killed immediately. So think about it.

The man's name is Jacob. That's his name. It's Jacob and John, the sons of Zebedee.

But he is cut off with all of that advanced investment from the Lord Jesus Christ personally, cut off at the beginning. Well, I was turning this over in my mind, thinking, suppose that James and John are the two witnesses. Okay, fine.

But did he need all of that training and investment from the Lord Jesus just to be one of those witnesses that's going to operate for a time and then be slain and then be raised and removed? Really? Still? Gethsemane, transfiguration, upper room, private Bible classes, the advanced class, the extra credit questions, all of that just for that role? I suggest this to suggest that James has future service opportunities that will require the training he received from the Lord Jesus. It's not just for this life. It's not even just for this age.

It isn't for a comeback appearance for James and John. I don't think that Jesus invested in those two just so they could fulfill the witness function, if they are in fact those two individuals. There is future service.

There is future opportunity. And the training that you and I are getting now, like the training that was given to the apostles, like the training that was given to the prophets, like all the saints of God have received in their life, struggling to be faithful and obedient, prepares us for future opportunities, future service. Elijah is not done.

You and I at the end of our lives are not done. James wasn't finished. Do you seriously think the

Lord Jesus kind of wasted his time on James? There's no way.

James is going to need that training and that experience and those insights and that special cultivation by the Lord Jesus for something that is beyond this life. And I think that is true for you and me as well. We sometimes think, well, what's the point? Why am I enduring? Why am I carrying on? Why am I going to Bible class? I'm getting along okay.

I don't think I'm coping necessarily any better or worse than anyone else. Why not just, you know, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die? Because this is such a small sample of the totality of our existence. This is our preschool.

This is our, I was thinking, you know, everybody that's old enough remembers where they were on this day 50 years ago. Well, I was in half day kindergarten and my day was done and I had stopped off at a friend's house up the hill from where we lived, got off the bus, went to his house, playing in the backyard. His grandmother stuck her head out and said, you better run home, sonny.

President's been shot in the head. Shocked me and I ran home and there was my mother and a neighbor lady watching the TV and we were glued to it for the whole afternoon, black and white. It didn't look much different than these films they show now.

That's pretty much how all television looked back then. But everyone remembers where they were and I think, well, kindergarten, how much do I remember? That's one of the few things I can even remember from kindergarten. It's such a small portion of life.

I did kindergarten for four months. I was in kindergarten four months, half day kindergarten for four months. I remember practically nothing about it.

It seemed big at the time, just like this life to us seems big now. But in the scope of our existence, which is eternal, which is everlasting now in Christ, the things that we learn are going to be important. We learn a lot of things when we first start going to school and they are skills that we cultivate and develop and expand upon later.

So in looking at this verse that this chiasm focuses on, they continued on and talked. Elijah didn't say, yeah, what's the point? You've been with me these years. If you don't know it by now, there's nothing I can tell you here at the end.

They continued on. They didn't know when and we don't know when either. What we do know is that every day God gives us is precious.

Every day God gives us is an investment in us that He makes and we are to redeem the time, to invest the time in something that will pay dividends and returns later on. And that is converting mundane daily chores, daily tasks, daily experiences into eternal benefit, into eternal opportunities because this life is not over when we die. And the benefit of the training and the investment God makes in us does not end at our death.

And I think this is one of the most overlooked truths in modern Christianity. Everyone wants skills for today. How can I be happy? How can I be successful? How can I maximize my witness or whatever it may be? And it's so short-sighted.

It's so nearsighted. It's so how can I make kindergarten the most pleasant experience that kindergarten can possibly be? Instead of recognizing that we are building, we are investing, we're taking what God gives us and if you only pour a 10 foot by 10 foot foundation, how big a house can you build? We are building the foundation in this life for what God is going to do all throughout eternity. Don't make a small foundation and don't think that this is all you need.

We want to be building on the rock. We want to be laying on that foundation the gold and silver and precious stones they're going to carry over into eternity and have a vast platform on which to build. I promise you, James the Apostle has a big foundation.

It's no accident that Jesus chose him for all of that special training. And the fact that he got cut off early is a powerful reminder to us that it ain't over when it's over from a human point of view. It is just beginning.

So when you see this picture that this verse paints for us, the very first part of it, just that phrase, they continued on and taught. Just remember, it's everything. It's everything.

Elijah and Elisha are not done. Elijah at a minimum is going to be coming back and standing on the Mount of Transfiguration. How big of a thrill do you think it is for him to talk to Moses and to the Messiah after his career, after his previous mountaintop experiences of Mount Carmel, Mount Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration? Which one do you think Elijah is going to pick as the best mountain standing moment of his life? Well, it's going to be the last one.

But he wouldn't have been there and he couldn't have appreciated it if he had not had those previous successes and failures. Moses and Elijah flanking the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration represent something, unfulfilled potential. The law and the prophets couldn't get it done by themselves.

They are from God. God provided all of it. It was a gift to His people.

It was Holy Spirit powered, but it wasn't enough. If you do not have Jesus Christ to pull those things up and beyond, it's never going to happen. By the law comes the knowledge of sin.

By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. All the law and the prophets pointed to Christ, illustrated and in many ways exceed the teaching of the New Testament in telling us who Jesus Christ was and what His work actually accomplishes. They are wonderful foundations upon which God can build the work of Jesus Christ.

If you don't have that foundation, how could anybody appreciate Jesus? But the foundation by itself isn't much. I had a grandpa who built a great foundation and wasn't ever able to put anything on it. He wasn't even able to seal it up, so it rained in there and the water came up and

stuff in there got ruined.

If you've ever seen the jukebox at my house, that's where it came from, sitting in six or eight inches of water down there. And half the records didn't survive because they were sitting in that same water. It was a foundation on which nothing was built.

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it with a view toward the day of Christ Jesus. You know what it says? Unto? You know what unto means in Greek. Any time you're talking about intangibles, what does eis mean in Greek? He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it with a view toward the day of Jesus Christ.

He's building us and completing us. We are walking and talking with a view toward the day of Christ because that's when we will finally be qualified to really begin serving, really begin doing fantastic things. So why the chiasm? Why the emphasis on verse 11? I think every word in the verse is significant.

Every word in the verse has applicability for you and me. These things are written for our instruction and that's the first point from this verse is we are to keep on walking and keep on talking until the Lord Jesus calls us to himself. Until our chariot arrives to take us to our next phase of service, that's what we should be doing.

We don't stand still. We don't lay down and fall asleep. We don't rest our head on our forearm in the garden while the Lord is praying.

We're alert. We are moving. We're watching but we're availing ourselves of the opportunity.

It's the last time these two men can talk. They're making the most of it and that's what we ought to be doing. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, I'm going to point out a few things about the career of Elijah that I think really illustrate why this event occurs.