

Kings and Prophets 13-12-27a

This is Friday, the 27th of December, 2013. We pick up after a few weeks of hiatus in the book of 2 Kings. As we prosecute our study of kings and prophets, we're looking at the initial days of the ministry of Elisha.

Let's take a moment as we begin to dedicate our time and our fellowship to the Lord. It gives us an opportunity to focus our concentration and cultivate the conditions in which God the Holy Spirit can be our teacher and we can not only see the truth of God's word, but have it make a difference within us. Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege it is as we come to the close of another year to look back over the weeks and months and see the manifest ways that you have provided for us.

You have protected us. You've blessed us. You've granted us so many great opportunities, not only to learn but to put into practice and to exercise the wisdom that comes to us through your word and in the presence and power of your spirit.

We thank you for this portion of your word. We ask your blessing on us as we study it together. May each of us find in these things that we study tonight truth that will transform, that will renew our minds, that will motivate us and encourage us to live the life that remains to us in that light, that we may reflect the light of your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus our Savior.

We pray it in his name. Amen. Well, I trust everyone looks like more or less survived the holiday season intact.

This will be our final Friday study of 2013 and it is fitting that we are looking at the inception of a new ministry, the exchange of the mantle of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. We have spent several weeks looking at this because it is just such a fascinating insight into the church age of all things. Who thought the church age was going to be showing up and manifesting itself in the ministry of Elisha? But as we see the new ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ foreshadowed in the law and the prophets and then fulfilling at the crux of the ages his mission and his pinnacle role in the plan and purpose of God and the inception of a new age and new things.

Elijah representing the law. John the Baptist is going to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, be the last great Old Testament prophet. Why doesn't he come in the spirit and power of Elisha? Why isn't that the prophecy? Elijah represents so many things.

He is the most referenced prophet of any Old Testament figure in the New Testament. He is the guy that is most often mentioned because his ministry is relatively short. It is not nearly as long as Joshua or Moses or John the Baptist or you don't have as much detail about him as we have about Daniel or Joseph or many other figures in Scripture and yet he is so emblematic.

He sums up the exposure of sin and the necessity for judgment. Nobody personifies pointing

out sin and announcing the judgment of God better in actions than Elijah. You have Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah doing it in written form but nobody acts it out.

Nobody comes on the scene and reflects the presence and power of God in condemnation and judgment than Elijah. Elisha is going to have double the spirit but he is going to represent the double portion, the blessing portion of the spirit. So we saw this in particular at the point of handing off the mantle, the baton if you will of prophetic authority and the office and function and we have been looking at the consequences since.

I have had questions from almost everybody about the Jericho incident. After Elijah is off the scene, I don't think he is off the earth but he is off the scene, Elisha comes back across the Jordan River and the first episode that takes place is recorded for us in that same chapter, 2 Kings chapter 2. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the strange sort of dance that takes place, the travels, the sayings back and forth. You essentially have three actors.

You have Elijah, you have Elisha and you have the sons of the prophets as sort of a singular actor. They don't split up and do different things. They speak with one voice.

They act in unison if you will and we have seen that in great detail. We have seen the symmetry, the structure here that centers on verse 11 with the appearance of the fiery chariot, the fiery horses and what it does. It separates the two of them.

What does fire universally represent in Scripture? Judgment and judgment separates. What separates the Old Testament age characterized by ritual and the law and the shadows of animal sacrifices? What separates that from the age that the prophet 40 days after his resurrection? What separates the age of Israel and the age of the church? It is the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and this fiery chariot with the fiery horses that separates the two of them in many ways suggests to us the cross. You can't see what's going on in the fire.

It's opaque. It's obscure at this distance. You don't see the Lord Jesus.

You don't see the details. It is just judgment. It's the black box if you will, the fiery box of judgment.

But these two that have been united because what does the law do? The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It pictures, it foreshadows, it elucidates, it elaborates the work and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything from the construction of the tabernacle to the details of the Levitical offerings, the details of the rituals and the sacrifices without the shedding of blood is no remission.

All of these things are sprinkled with blood, dedicated with blood. And all of that is in summary a very detailed picture of the coming of the Lord Jesus. And so you have Elisha and Elijah walking together because they are inseparable at that point.

Where is the point of separation? It is judgment. It is the fire of God's judgment. And verse 11,

right at the center of this wonderful symmetry that we've detailed in past weeks separates them.

The main verb here is separated them. It happened as they continued on and talked. Suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire and separated the two of them.

Now Elisha is distinct and independent and the spirit in double form is going to come upon him. The mantle is going to descend upon him. And everything after this you see doublings.

He is going to strike twice. We saw all of those things in great detail. But what I want to do is review beginning at verse 19, the men of the city said to Elisha, please notice the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord sees, but the water is bad and the ground is barren.

He said, bring me a new bowl and put salt in it. Salt like fire has pretty much a universal and singular meaning in Scripture and it is covenant. Even when Jesus was speaking to the disciples, if the salt of lots is savor wherewith can it be salted? And if people who have entered into covenant relationship with God do not abide by the terms of the covenant, then the blessings of the covenant, that saltiness, that seasoning, that preserving benefit will disappear.

And he says, have salt in yourselves. What does he mean? Pay attention to your relationship with God. Honor it.

Reflect it. Be salty is the idea. So he says, bring a new bowl and put salt in it.

If it is a new bowl of salt, what kind of covenant are we talking about? There's no accident. He didn't say, bring me an old bowl. He didn't say, you know, let me wave Elijah's old mantle over this water.

Couldn't he have done that? Wouldn't it have been an interesting significance if he had, and behold Elisha rolled up the mantle and whacked the water and it became, but that's not what happened. Why? This is a new thing. You get a bowl, a new bowl and put salt in it.

It doesn't say new salt, does it? I mean, what's such a thing? I mean, you know, we talk about old salt, the old salts, but it doesn't say, bring me some new salt. I mean, that would be kind of silly. Any salt that you have has not really been used yet.

If you used it in cooking, it's used. If you sowed it into the ground to punish somebody that that salt is, I mean, salt, you can't really say, bring me new salt, but you can put it in a new bowl. And what's interesting about the salt is salt is always essentially one thing and that's sodium chloride.

Salt is salt and God's character and his expressions of grace, his expectations, his righteousness, his character in dealing with man is always the same. It's of a timeless quality. NaCl has always been NaCl.

It will always be NaCl as long as the universe exists. When you put a sodium ion and a chlorine

ion together and you make a molecule of sodium chloride, that's salt. Ever has been, ever will be.

You take two things that by themselves are deadly. If you've ever played with sodium in its pure form, if you've ever seen chlorine or thought about chlorine in its pure form, chlorine gas is deadly. Sodium is a poison.

You put them together and it is an essential for life. And when you put the righteousness and the justice of God together, nobody can stand in the righteous presence of God and live. Nobody could survive and abide the glory of God's righteousness by itself.

And you have the justice of God which must condemn sin. But when you put those two things together, there's many other dual characteristics of God you could think of. His righteousness and justice come to mind in a judgment context and this impurity, this bad water and barrenness all around Jericho is the result of a curse.

It was the judgment of God on that place. But now here is the grace of God. Here is the mercy of God.

Here is the benefit of the righteousness of God coming to the fore. So he takes the salt, he puts it in a new bowl. It foreshadows the new covenant, which by the way includes pouring out the Spirit.

And Elisha represents the presence of God's Spirit. He says, get me a new bowl and he puts the salt in it, representing the covenant. And the covenant overcomes the curse.

You've got cursed land, you've got cursed water, but the covenant promises of God break the curse, expunge and eliminate the effects of the curse. In the same way that we who are conceived in iniquity, born in sin, exist in a cursed creation, the ground itself is cursed because of the sin of Adam and Eve, thorns and briars that it brings forth. But that curse is broken in the presence of the covenant of God, in the presence of the Spirit of God, in the power of God.

God's grace, as the hymn says, is greater than all our sin. So they brought it to him. He went out to the source of the water, the source of the water, the springing place.

Not down at the end. Well, it's bad water for the first 300 yards of the water course. He went to the source.

The source of the problem is treated with this covenant salt. He cast the salt there and said, thus says the Lord. This is a fiat declaration of God.

When God says, let there be light, there is light. When God says, let the earth bring forth, it brings forth. When God says, I have healed this water, that's it.

It is a declaration of God. From it there shall be no more death or barrenness. So the water remains healed to this day.

It's no accident that it says that. It's not just talking about Jericho. When God breaks a curse, the thing is broken.

When God forgives our sins, they are forever and eternally forgiven. They are separated from us as far as the east is from the west, which is an infinite distance. There's no unringing of that bell in the presence of the covenant.

You think about some of the parables that Jesus told, like the unforgiving servant whose master forgave him a great debt, but he had a servant who owed him a small debt that he would not forgive. When the master, the Lord of those servants heard about it, he unforgave the debt of that unforgiving servant. Why? Because there are covenant terms involved here, and inside the covenant, within the covenant, the curse is broken.

But there's no one passage that we go to and derive a truth that doesn't have other passages, other truths that balance and center it and keep us from taking it to an extreme. We've seen this over and over in scripture. And yes, the waters are healed.

Yes, the curse is broken. But the context is the salt of the covenant. The idea is that salt goes down into the source and heals the water.

Something you wouldn't think would cure water. Salt, nobody wants to drink salty water. I might gargle it, I don't want to drink it.

Salt water, everybody knows, you go to the coast, you're not sowing wheat on the beach because the salty water is so good for it. It is counterintuitive. It's unexpected that something you think would make the problem worse actually solves it.

Many people think that religion is a curse and God belief is a bad thing and all these Abrahamic religions, what they don't realize is covenant relationship with God. And inside that covenant, there is tremendous blessing. There is tremendous release from the curse and the effects of the curse.

So the water remains healed to this day according to the word of Elisha, which he spoke. What word did Elisha speak? What's the previous verse say? Thus says the Lord. So it's the word of Elisha, but it's the word of the Lord.

And once again, you have a doubling of that idea of the word. The word is spoken. It's the word of Elisha, but it's the word of the Lord.

Well, then he went up from there to Bethel and as he was going up the road, he is still in the environs of Jericho. Youths came from the city. These are young men.

This term, by the way, without going into all the detail of the Hebrew, if you go back to the book of Genesis, this is the same word that is used to describe Joseph at the age of 17. It doesn't mean little six and seven-year-olds. They're not 10 or 12-year-olds.

These are young men. This term is used to describe young men all the way up to about age 30. In this crowd, we know there are at least 42 in this crowd, and since it says 42 of them later on, this is a large crowd.

It could have been 100, 150, 200. We don't know how many, but it's a large crowd. In many cases, we know that Elisha, by the way, is going to live another 50 years after this, so he's a relatively young man.

They like to picture this, that the old, bald prophet is staggering along and these little 10-year-old kids are mocking him. He's got a 50-year ministry ahead of him, so he's probably not more than 25 or 30 at this point. Is he prematurely bald? Perhaps, or as I've talked about in the origins of that Hebrew word, they may not be mocking him because he lacks hair.

There are bald men all over the place in Israel. Mocking baldness is kind of silly, but if they're saying, this is sort of like saying, go up you toenail or go up you, we used to have a hairy prophet and you're not him. In any case, they mock him and say, go up you beard clipping, go up you hank of hair, you bald head, but this is never natural baldness.

This term is never used of natural baldness. It's used of shaved head. It's used of shaving.

Go up you, what they used to call new officers, shave tails. It's sort of like calling somebody a plebe. If you're a shave tail, you're wet behind the ears.

At any rate, he turned around and looked at them and pronounced a curse. This is very significant. He has just in their town broken a curse.

God has reversed a curse. Covenant salt sprinkled at the source of this bad water. Can the same fountain bring forth bad water and good? There are other episodes in scripture.

You can see Moses healing water in the power of God, but he has just reversed a curse. What are they doing? Are they in Romans chapter 1, when they see God's power, do they glorify him as God? They do not glorify him as God. Neither are they thankful, but they are vain in their imagination and their foolish hearts are darkened.

What happens when the truth of God and the power of God is revealed and people don't glorify God, neither are they thankful? Remember when the little children are saying, Hosanna, and Jesus is going down to Hosanna and throwing the garments and waving the palm branches and celebrating, is that what they are doing because the water is finally healed? It is the opposite. They are deriding, they are mocking, and they are ungrateful. God has manifested his power and this is ingratitude, bitterness, mocking.

And remember, we just saw, thus says the Lord, the water is healed according to the word of Elisha. So Elisha is God's representative. Elisha's word is God's word.

Elisha's presence with the double portion of the spirit is God's presence. So if you mock the

prophet as he walks along with the spirit of God and the word of God, who are you mocking? You are mocking God. This is as close as you can get to the tabernacle.

This is the word of God and the spirit of God in bodily form. Let me say again, this is the word of God and the spirit of God in your midst in bodily form. And what do you say? Go up old bald head, go up old bald head.

What is it they, what epithet do they hurl at Christ when he is raised up on the cross? If you are the son of God, come down, come down. Same thing, you know, change your elevation. It's a mocking.

So what happens? There is a curse. Now Jesus from the cross says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. What does Elisha say? He turned around and looked at them.

How many times when we went through the gospels did we see Jesus looked at them? Looking at them is an evaluation. This is a Holy Spirit filled prophet and he looks at them. Looking at them, what does this mean? There is an evaluation.

Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Remember where that is in Galatians? Be not deceived.

God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that sows to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life.

He that sows to the flesh reaps what? Corruption. He pronounced a curse on them. When Elisha speaks, who is speaking? God.

He is not speaking in anger. He is not speaking out of personal affront. He pronounces a curse because he is not speaking in anger.

These people are in the presence of the spirit and the word of God and they are not thankful. They are not glorifying God. They have become vain in their imagination and their foolish hearts are dark.

So he pronounces a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Cursed is he who mocks the presence and power of the Lord.

What did Jesus say? You will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Is that what these people are saying? No. And this is the opposite.

This is the flip side. And now Elisha did not whistle up these bears. He did not call for the bears.

He did not predict and say, behold, bears are coming. He says, in the name of the Lord, you all are cursed. Now, if he speaks in the name of the Lord, who is it that is being affronted here? You know how people say, nothing personal.

There really is nothing personal here. Elisha is not defending himself. He is not speaking in his

own name.

He is speaking in the name of the Lord. And when he says, in the name of the Lord, you are bringing a curse on yourselves or you have brought a curse on yourselves in the name of the Lord, two bears, two female bears came out of the woods and mauled for 42 of the youths. I have had probably half the congregation, both present and absent, ask me what is going on with the bears and the 42 youths.

So I had taken an initial crack at this and it was insufficient. So I have done a week's worth of work on the bears and the 42 youths. And I appreciate everybody asking because I have learned a lot since we last looked at this.

So, two female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the youths. Well, what is up with that? We are going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, given the context that we have just reviewed, what is the context? There is the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

There is the lifting of a curse by the grace of God. There is a rejection and a lack of appreciation for the lifting of that curse, very pointed, from our perspective, in the direction of the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ is either the rock of salvation on which we fall and are broken or He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense that falls on us and grinds us to powder.

The Lord Jesus Christ, same rock, just as this same prophet is either a source of covenant blessing, healing, release from barrenness and functional death, or He is the source of a curse. And the bears show up and you are mauled. Why bears? Why 42 youths? Why 42 youths? Why 42 youths? Why 42 youths? I will give you my suggestions on this when we come back from the break.