

Elisha: Building a Spiritual Legacy

August 27th, 2017

When the Olympic games originated back in ancient Greece in 776 B.C., athletes from all around the country **reached their unlit torches into the flame** at the *Altar of Hestia in Olympia*.

- And with those torches in hand, those first runners ran until they reached another altar in Greece.
- And, after they ignited the flame at that altar, **another group of runners** would then reach their unlit torches into that new flame... and run to the next altar...

Lighting the flame there **so the next group of runners could carry that torch to the next altar**.

- These runners, called “Heralds of Peace,” did this until all the altars around Greece were lit.
- The **symbolism was very clear & very sacred** to them... representing the life & knowledge that gets passed down from one person to the next... from one generation to the next.

You see, in ancient Greece, these Olympic runners, these Heralds of Peace, were the keepers of the flame... the passers of the torch.

- And, as I shared two weeks ago, God’s people have been given this same assignment...
- To pass on the torch of faith **that started with Abraham** back in Genesis 12.

That’s why it was so important for **Abraham** to light the torch of faith to **Isaac**...

- Who would then **ignite the torch of faith in Jacob’s life**, then **Joseph’s**.
- You see, we read what may seem like endless genealogies through the Old Testament.

But these genealogies represent the passing along of faith from one person to the next, from one generation to the next.

- **Moses**, for example, will pass the torch on to **Joshua**... and **Eli** will pass the torch on to **Samuel**...

- **Samuel** will pass the torch on to **David** who will pass the torch to **Solomon**.

In fact, so much of the drama found in the Old Testament has to do with **whether the light of faith will actually continue** to the next generation...

- whether that light of faith handed down from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob **would continue...** or be lost forever.
- But even after Israel is nearly destroyed, that torch is passed down... from **Jeremiah** to **Ezra** to **Nehemiah** to the **Maccabees** to **John the Baptist**.

Jesus will, of course, light torches of faith amongst His disciples.

- **Peter** will pass the torch to the **house of Cornelius**.
- **Paul** will then pass his torch on to **Timothy**. In fact, **Paul** writes, in **2 Timothy 2:2**,
- ***“You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.”***

We can't ever forget that we're all here today because someone gave away what was given to them.

- We're all here because, from the Day of Pentecost and that first group of Jesus-followers... till today,
- **someone chose to pass the torch of faith** from one person to the next... from one generation to the next.

But it didn't have to be that way. As I said, ***there's a sense in which*** God's dream of building this rich community of faith is at risk every generation.

- Just as it was in Olympia, the question is, *“Will there be someone to keep the torch lit? Will somebody pass the torch?”*
- Because, it doesn't happen automatically.
- Everybody in this room this morning is here-- you are here-- because you, to some degree, had someone hand the torch to you.
- Maybe it was your **parents**. Maybe it was a **teacher**. Maybe it was **somebody in ministry**, maybe it was a **friend...**

Whoever it was, **somebody nurtured your faith**. Somebody **saw gifts** and potential in you. Somebody **took the time and prayed** for you.

- Somebody **gave you responsibility**. Somebody **cheered you on**.
- In every generation, from Abraham's to ours... in every generation... somebody passed the torch to somebody else.
- **Not a single generation was skipped**. That's why we're here today.

And, one of the great examples of this comes out of the story we focused on two weeks ago when an amazing prophet of God named **Elijah...**

- **passed the torch he was handed** to a green-thumbed rookie, named Elisha.
- So, as we look into the **life of Elisha** this morning, I'd like for you to be thinking about two questions:
- *"Who has invested in my life?"*
- **And**, secondly, *"Do I have people in my life that I'm passing the torch to? Who am I investing in?"*

So, if you have your Bibles, go ahead and **turn to where we finished up a few weeks ago, in 1 Kings 19**.

- Before Elisha even enters into our story here, we saw **Elijah not only defying Ahab**, the wicked king of Israel...
- but how he stood up against **450 prophets of Baal** and another **400 prophets of Ashura**.

It was the **ultimate showdown...** where the power of God puts, to utter shame, the so-called power of Baal.

- But when **Ahab' wife, Jezebel** hears what Elijah did in defying all of their prophets of Baal,
- she sends a messenger to Elijah saying, in **verse 2-3**,
- *"May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."*
- And then we're told that *"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life."*

In fact, Elijah becomes so afraid that he ends traveling all the way down to Mt. Sinai where he hid in some caves.

- But before getting there, he begins crying out to God in despair...
And **what does he pray?**

- Well, the same Elijah who had **just prayed** and **saw fire come down** from heaven...
- Who prayed for rain and saw a drought ended... prays for one more thing:
- But this time, he prays, *“I’ve had enough, Lord, I can’t do this anymore... **God, please just let me die.**”*

You see, part of the **Good News** is that sometimes God loves you so much that he **doesn’t** answer your prayer.

- Instead, in **verse 15**, *“The Lord said to him, ‘Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus.*
- *When you get there, anoint **Hazael king over Aram**. Also, anoint **Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel**,*
- *and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.”*

So, God calls Elijah to go and anoint new kings over Aram and Israel (which certainly speaks to the authority he had).

- But then He tells Elijah to go and anoint a man named Elisha who would eventually be his successor.
- And so, in **1 Kings 19:19**, we’re told that, **“So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were 12 teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing the 12th team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away.”**
- *“Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, ‘First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!”*
- *Elijah replied, ‘Go on back, but think about what I have done to you.’ So, Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast the meat. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elisha as his assistant.”*

So, Elijah goes to the field where Elisha is plowing. And **as he approaches Elisha**, he **takes off his cloak and drapes it** around Elisha’s shoulders.

- Now, the old King James Version refers to this “cloak” as his “**mantle**”— “Elijah put his mantle on him.”
- which is a very **visible way for Elijah** to say to Elisha, “*I want to give away to you what God has given to me.*”

The **meaning of what Elijah had done** was so clear that, without further explanation, Elisha begins to make arrangements to leave his home and follow him.

- But Elijah stops Elisha, encouraging him to count the costs here... “*I want you to **think about the implications** of carrying this mantle God has given me.*”
- I mean, this was a **huge moment for Elisha**. Everyone knew who Elijah was... it was an extraordinary honor.
- But, in spite of Elisha’s enthusiasm, following Elijah would not come without a price.
- **Did you notice the number of oxen** Elisha is plowing with?

In that day, a typical family might own a few chickens at best. To own one ox was quite rare.

- To have **twelve yoke of oxen**—which would be 24 oxen—was almost unheard of.
- Clearly, **Elisha’s family were people of wealth**. They might as well have had a mansion in Hollywood, a big summer home on Lake Geneva. They’re wealthy people.
- So, what Elijah is asking of Elisha involves an **enormous sacrifice**.

Truth is, the Bible says almost nothing about Elijah’s background. Most likely, he was from a poor family.

- So, **accepting his calling** may not have seemed, at least upfront, to be such a difficult choice. He didn’t have a lot of job alternatives.
- But Elisha is another story since, **if he would stay with his family**,
- would inherit a way of life that would keep him comfortable throughout his life.

You see, Elijah knows that he's asking Elisha to give all that up for a job that **will likely involve the rejection & opposition** of stubborn kings who will want him dead.

- You see, it **would've been** very easy for Elijah to say, "*God, you must have made a mistake. Elisha is not going to walk away from a future like he's got... to follow a prophet like me! He's got too many attractive options. You've got the wrong guy. I'm not even going to ask.*"
- But Elijah **does ask**. "Elisha, **I want us to walk together**. I want you to watch what I do, and then I'll have you do it with me at your side."
- "I want to teach you and invest in you... And **then, one day**, you'll do this on your own. ***I want to pass the torch on to you!***"

You see, **in terms of passing the torch...** in terms of living out our Kingdom lives... **don't ever say "no" on behalf of anyone.**

- Never *assume* that somebody doesn't want to get involved.
- Don't ever assume they don't want to learn or grow or belong or serve.

In his book, **Bowling Alone**, Robert Putnam addresses the issue of "volunteerism" where he writes,

- "*When volunteers are asked how they happen to get involved in their particular activity, the most common answer is, 'Somebody asked me.'*"
- When people are asked why they didn't volunteer or donate, guess what the number one answer is? "***Nobody asked.***"

Now, this word we use, "volunteer," actually comes from a Latin word ***voluntus***, which means "will" or "choice"—"to choose."

- You see, we often think of a volunteer simply as somebody who is not getting paid.
- But at its core, volunteer means something much deeper.

It means somebody who freely embraces a task, even though **they don't have to**—even though they have other options.

- A volunteer devotes him or herself **willingly**, voluntarily... It **flows out of the nature of a God** who voluntarily gives himself to his people...
- And he invites his followers to do the same thing...
- to give, to serve... to step into the game... to SERVE, *as Jesus said*, **not** to be served.

So Elijah asks Elisha... and, perhaps to his surprise, Elisha actually says, “yes!”

- His life was going well... the status quo of his everyday life was one that anyone else could only have dreamed of.
- And yet, **when Elijah said, “Come, follow me,”** Elisha chose to give his everything to God.
- I mean, what an introduction into the heart of Elisha!

But Elijah did more than just go and say goodbye to his parents. In verse 21 **Elisha slaughters his entire team of oxen**... and throws a huge BBQ for all the people.

- It shows Elisha’s heart of compassion and generosity for the people around him.
- But it also shows his immense faith in letting go of his wealth, which would have been **a pretty awesome safety net** in case the whole “*Prophet thing*” doesn’t work out.

And so, after all that, we read in verse 21: **“Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.”**

- He gives up a privileged position as a wealthy heir... to become a **volunteer**, a **servant**, a **learner**, a **follower**.
- **We see Elisha’s humility**... and his heart to serve.

Now, the next time we read about Elijah and Elisha is in 2 King 1.

- We don’t know exactly how many years have gone by... except, by this time, Elijah and Elisha have been together for a long time.
- Chapter 1 gives you an idea of what an adventurous journey Elisha has been on as Elijah’s assistant!

But, then, in 2:1, we’re told that the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind.

- I'm sure that both Elijah and Elisha knew that he wasn't going to be around all that much longer.
- So, it was probably a bit of a shock when Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind in Gilgal... that he would be traveling alone to Bethel.
- But, in verse 2, Elisha gives a very strong response. He says, *"Nothing doing!" "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you."*

And so, they end up traveling together to **Bethel** where God lets Elisha know that today was the day.

- And so, **it was an even bigger surprise to Elisha** that, once again, Elijah tells him to stay there in Bethel while he travels alone to Jericho.
- *"Nothing doing, Elijah, I will not leave you."* But while in Jericho, Elijah tells Elisha to stay there while he travels to the Jordan River.

But once again, Elisha refused to leave his side. And so, they travel together all the way back to the Jordan River.

- I mean, this is some rough riding even for a 4-wheel drive **let alone a few aging, sandal-clad feet!**
- So then, **why is Elijah taking Elisha on this strange journey?** I think Elijah is just trying to release Elisha... As if he were trying to say,
- *"Elisha... you're ready now... I need to go so that you can begin what God has for you."*

And yet, I think the reason the writer includes this particular story here in 2 Kings 2 is to show us the character of Elisha...

- to demonstrate Elisha's unshakable loyalty toward Elijah...
- That whatever Elijah has to face, the **two of them** will face it together.

Through this whole story, you can see **the kind of loyalty that develops between the one who's passing the baton, and the one who is grabbing a hold of it.**

- You see, Elijah and Elisha are not just devoted to their task. They're devoted to one another as well.
- Maybe some of you are in a relationship with someone like that— If so, don't ever take that for granted.
- It is a gift from God... that needs to be guarded and valued.
- Elisha says, *“Where you go, I go. What you face, I face.”*

Elijah and Elisha's relationship is much like Ruth and Naomi's in the Book of Ruth.

- In this case, Naomi asks Ruth to go back to the safety of her people.
- But, because of what Naomi deposited into her life, Ruth responds saying,
- *“Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go I will go, and wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.”*

But the truth is that **most aren't experiencing this kind of community...** where relationships run deeper than the task at hand...

- where we genuinely care for one another... and **that care gets expressed in tangible ways...**
- from a phone call... lunch together... just getting together to pray.

You see, Elisha **didn't just make time to serve...** he **made time for community.**

- It's God's heart that we serve. Jesus said that He came not to be served but to serve.
- But it's also His heart that our relationships run deep... that our **love, compassion, generosity, gentleness**... get expressed...
- both in the context of one's **spiritual family** as well as their **natural family.**

Then, in verse 8, **Elijah & Elisha arrive at the Jordan River** knowing that their time together is about the end.

- We're told here that ***“Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it.”***
- He **takes his mantle...** the same one that he spread over Elisha some time ago... wraps it up, and strikes the River Jordan.

- And then this **amazing thing happens**. Just as the water separated for Moses and for Joshua,
- now it's separating for Elijah. And the two of them cross over on dry ground.

I love how the text reads here. We're about to be invited into an extraordinary event.

- As they're walking across the dry ground of the Jordan River, **Elijah's fatherly heart** is put on display.
- In verse 9 he turns to Elisha with something to say. But he **doesn't give him an order**. He **doesn't offer him a lot of advice**.
- He simply asks Elisha a question. Verse 9 says: **"Tell me, what can I do for you before I'm taken from you?"**

What a great question! Torch passers need to ask this question on a regular basis, *"What do you need in order to soar?"*

- *"What's lacking for you to be really effective? What can I do for you?"*
- When the guy who just parted the waters of a river **asks you what he can do for you...**
- you basically have a wide range of choices to pull from... money, a relationship...

But look at what Elisha asks for in the last part of verse 9. He says to Elijah, **"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit."**

- Through the OT, the **laws of inheritance** are made so clear... that, according to **Deuteronomy 20:17**, for example, the **firstborn son is to receive a double portion** of the inheritance.
- But, Elisha isn't asking to have twice the ministry of Elijah.
- Instead, he's crying out to Elijah... expressing his sole desire to be his **spiritual son...**
- And that his life and ministry would honor him long after he's gone.

Wow, what a thing for Elijah to hear. It must have meant so much to know that...

- *“There will be a human being on earth, after I’m gone, who has this longing to serve God and is willing to sacrifice so much to devote himself to that one task.”*
- **So, how will Elijah respond?** Well, in **verse 10**, Elijah tells Elisha that *“If you see me when I’m taken from you, it will be yours--otherwise not.”*

And so, in verse 11, we read, **“As they were walking along and talking together”** remembering what God had done in their past...

- Thinking about all the mighty things that God had accomplished, and wondering what God might do in the future...
- *“As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.”*

Elisha saw this and **cried out in verse 12**: *“My father! My father! I see the chariots and horsemen of Israel!”* And as Elijah disappeared from sight, *Elisha tore his clothes in distress.*

- Can you imagine this moment for Elisha? He sees it. **He sees that whole thing.**
- And he realizes that the very fact that he’s seeing all of this means that he will carry on the work of his mentor.
- **The torch will keep burning...** And yet, Elijah is gone.

The man who changed his life... who placed his mantle on him years earlier... who believed in him and taught him and loved him, he’s gone.

- And so, **in an expression of unbearable grief & sorrow**, *“He tears his clothes.”*
- Then, in verse 13, Elisha picks up the *“mantle that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.”*

He then struck the water with Elijah’s mantle and cried out, *“Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?”*

- And suddenly, the water parts for him... just as it did for Moses and Joshua and Elijah.
- And from here, he goes on to have an extraordinary life... wearing the mantle given to him by Elijah...

- That cloak that represented the authority that God had now placed on him.
- And with that authority, He continues the work his mentor had begun.

Almost immediately, **Elisha prays over the water supply around Jericho**, which had gone bad... And, in verse 21, the water was purified.

- In 2 Kings 3, he dictates a battle strategy to the kings of Israel and Judah.
- And like Elijah, he both **challenges** and **provides** for kings and generals.

In fact, we read about how **Jehoram** (the Baal-worshipping king of Israel) had asked **Jehoshaphat** (King of Judah) to join him in defeating the Moabites.

- But along the way toward southern **Moab** (in Jordan), they realized that their water supply was completely empty.
- So... they called for Elisha to help them.

Elisha first asks them to have their worship leader lead in worship so he could really *seek the Lord* regarding his.

- But before he did this, like his mentor Elijah at Mt. Carmel, Elisha leads in some prophetic trash talk...
- **asking Jehoram** why he hadn't gone to the prophets of Baal for help (since Baal was supposed to be the god of nature)!

As he was worshipping, he gave them instruction to dig ditches in the valley and to wait.

- Suddenly rain from the mountains poured into the valley and filled the ditch so that they had water again.
- The battle between Israel, Judah, and Moab is recorded on what's known as the **Moabite Stone dating back to 850 BC, which can be seen at the Louvre. [SLIDE]**

But as you read into the life of Elisha, **you'll also soon discover** that, as much as Elisha walked in Elijah's authority,

- The **way he expressed that calling** was much different.

- **Whereas Elijah lived somewhat of an reclusive life**... showing up at critical moments of time... speaking more into the lives of kings and generals,
- Many of **Elisha's miracles were about helping the everyday people** around him.

In chapter 4 he ministers to a powerless, impoverished widow in the city of Shunem.

- Her two sons are about to be sold into slavery because she can't afford to pay her debts.
- She has nowhere to go. She has **nowhere to turn, nobody to help her**. So, she runs to Elisha.
- And **Elisha says to her**, "*God will miraculously give you oil and you can sell it and you can pay off your debts... God will provide for all your needs. He will fill all the jars you set before him with oil. You can sell it and have money.*"
- So, in 2 Kings 4:3 Elisha asks her to **"Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars."** And then he adds, **"But don't ask for just a few."**

And there's this **unforgettable lesson** Elisha gives widow (and us)... **Give God a few jars; he'll fill a few jars...** Give God a lot of jars; he'll fill a lot of jars.

- God will give so much if you allow your trust in Him to raise your expectation.
- And so, **when you're serving**, do so with expectation. When you're **giving**, do so with expectation.
- When you're **waiting**, do so with expectation. God is saying, as many jars as you bring me, I will fill them up.
- If you bring me two, I will fill two. If you bring 50... well, who knows!

In **2 Kings 4:38**, we're told that **Elisha returned to the city of Gilgal** where there was a famine. While there, he met with a group of prophets

- Well, everyone was hungry, so they went out into the fields to gather some herbs and gourds (which happened to be poisonous) and made a stew.

- But, as the men started eating the stew, they cried out, “there’s poison in this stew!”

And so, Elisha commands some flour to be put into it... and it’s miraculously made OK.

- I love that this story is include here because it reminds us how God is not only in the big things, like parting rivers,
- But in all the little things, like **turning bad stew that could harm them into something that could now nourish them.**

But notice here, in verse 38, that the group of people he is feeding is actually a company of prophets **whom Elisha himself serves as leader.**

- In other words, just as Elijah built into Elisha, **now Elisha is building into another generation.**
- So, once again, the **torch of faith is being passed!**

Through his life, kings and widows and orphans and prophets and armies are changed, and it all happened because...

- one day... a poor prophet stopped to offer his mantle to a wealthy, young farmer plowing in his fields.
- Somebody passed the torch to another... who then passed it down to another... and, because of it, the whole world changed...
- Because of it, we’re here today!

And so, as an invaluable link in a chain that spans centuries, I want to ask you... **are you willing to be a torchbearer?**

- Are you willing to pass on to others what has been passed down to you?
- Who can you build into? Who can you pray regularly for? Whose faith are you encouraging?

You don’t have to part rivers... but you can give away to another what God has given to you.

- You can **pray...** you can **write notes...** you can **encourage...** you can **laugh with them as they laugh** and cry with them as they cry.
- Whose life are you building into? Who are you encouraging & standing alongside of?

- Who gets your mantle?

You don't have to show up at someone's house like Elijah did, but you can **attend a home group...**

- And choose to bless someone as they walk out their calling...
- You can **teach Sunday School** once a month and give away to the next generation what God has given to you.

Seriously, there is **no more practical way to serve this church...**

- There's **no more important way** right now in our church... than to volunteer to teach in one of our Sunday School classes.
- What better way to give away what's been given to you?
- (*Write on the connection card*)

You see, **God's dream really does rest on this—it really does.**

- Have you said "yes" to God... to **be a more generous giver of your time?**
- Have you said "yes" to God... to **embrace His servant heart...** to see church, for example, as a place to serve, not to be served?

You see, **we can't ever take it for granted** that the next generation will be sitting in these chairs one day.

- In a sense, God's whole dream is one generation away from extinction... unless somebody chooses to give away what was given to them.
- We're all here because, **in every generation before us**, somebody made the decision I'm challenging us with this morning...
- To pass on the torch... to **pass along the torch of faith...** to **offer to someone else the mantle once handed them.**