

Pastor Ben Libby
Sermon
6/5/2019

To Jesus Christ, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification, be glory forever Amen.

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from the second book of Kings, chapter 2, starting at verse 5:

2 Kings 2:5-15 ⁵ Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" ⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on. ⁷ And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing *them* at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. ⁸ Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled *it* up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹ And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." ¹⁰ So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me *when I am* taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." ¹¹ Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. ¹³ He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where *is* the LORD God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over. ¹⁵ Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him.

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

It is hard to believe that we are already in the month of June. Last weekend was Memorial Day weekend, and it is nice to have a three-day weekend and remember the armed forces who defend our country. Memorial Day also marks the unofficial beginning of summer. Summer does not in fact for another 3-4 weeks, but it is often viewed as the beginning of summer. The days are now longer, and the temperature will no doubt start to rise.

But this time of the year also has other meanings to those who are in school. This is graduation time. Out here, graduation takes place a little later than it does where I am from. But now is the time when people start being done with school. For some, it means graduating from a school and leaving that place to go on to careers or other opportunities to continue that education.

But graduation can be a bitter-sweet thing. Perhaps you might've experienced this you're your graduation. This is, of course, a joyful time. You just went through 4 years of Highschool or College, and you should be glad that you have graduated. You're finally done. But it is also sad. Those who remain at school might miss your presence, and you theirs. Also, there is a certain level of comfort you attain going through a schedule that you know, and once you graduate, you will be soon doing something that is very unfamiliar. Also, while it is nice that you are moving on, but it's sad that you are leaving a place that has been like a home for you. But you can't just stay there forever, you need to graduate! Departure is part of graduation and part of growing up.

We see a certain departure in our text this morning. This is ASCENSION Sunday, and this is the day that we remember that Jesus departed and ascended into heaven. In our sermon text, we see a different ascension, one of the prophet Elijah. No doubt when it came to both ascensions, it provided a time of bittersweetness. For the disciples, Jesus was gone. For Elisha, his master and mentor Elijah was gone. While this was sad, it also provided them an opportunity, and it is also one that we have before us here today as well. We can stand around feeling sad about their departures or, we can pick up the mantle and carry on the mission they left behind. The Gospel succeeds. It has won the ultimate victory, and in that victory, we continue to do what is provided for us, to preach Christ crucified to all nations. And so, we pray **MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.**

⁵ Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

It was Elijah's time to go. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets that the LORD ever sent to the nation of Israel. God sent him to preach to a people who, despite being His chosen people, were worshipping false idols and Baal. Perhaps one of the most well-known accounts of the prophet Elijah was the "showdown" with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. It was there when the challenge was issued. Who is the real God? Was it Jehovah or was it Baal? The worshippers of Baal cried out, cut themselves, and prayed to Baal to accept their sacrifice by consuming it in a fire. Nothing happened for 450 Baal worshippers. But when it came to Elijah's offering, it was consumed in fire from heaven even though it has been drenched several times with water. This proved the Jehovah was the real God, and Baal worshippers were rounded up and executed.

All throughout the history of Israel, Elijah the prophet was one of the most highly esteemed prophets. At the time when Jesus walked the earth, this was also the case. There was also a rumor based on a prophecy that Elijah would come back. This is why some people thought that Jesus himself was Elijah returned. Of course, they were off about this, as that prophecy spoke of John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah.

But Elijah's time as a prophet had come to an end. This was apparently well known. The group known as "the sons of the prophets" knew that Elijah was about to be taken away. They pestered Elisha, Elijah's student and successor about it. Elisha told them that he was aware of this and commanded that they remain silent. Elisha too was aware the Elijah was about to be taken away. These last moments with his master were precious. He wanted to make sure there would be no distractions from this most important moment.

Our sermon text paints a very interesting picture. We all have to leave this world at some point or another, but Elijah's transition into heaven was different. He would not experience physical death like most of us do. He instead was taken to heaven personally by the LORD. ¹¹ **Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.** Now that is not your typical exit of this earth. It was because of Elijah's special relationship with the LORD that he left in this manner.

You can see why this text is relevant on Ascension Sunday. Jesus ascension into heaven is very similar to Elijah's. The similarities between Jesus and Elijah are quite striking. Both Jesus and Elijah raised the dead back to life. Both men were heavily persecuted by the various powers of their days. Elijah faced all kinds of opposition from the idol worshippers, especially the idolatrous King Ahab and his Queen Jezebel. Jesus faced opposition from the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees. Both men were also "ahead of their time" if you will. Elijah, who was relentlessly persecuted in his life, even to the point of despair, was highly regarded by all after he left earth. The same is true about Jesus. Both men had followers, but both were viewed very negatively by the most powerful people in the land at the time of their lives.

And yet, both men had to leave. For Elijah, it was simply time. For Jesus, He needed to leave as well. Jesus and Elijah no doubt had similarities, but not even Elijah could truly compare to Jesus. **Matthew 16:13-16 (Jesus) asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"** ¹⁴ **So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."** ¹⁵ **He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"** ¹⁶ **Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

Jesus was better than Elijah or any other prophet or any other human being ever. Why? Because He is the Christ, the Son of the LIVING GOD! No one else could ever do the things that Jesus did. I am not talking about miracles. Other men of God had supernatural acts, both in the Old and New Testament periods. But Jesus did the impossible. He was both true God and true Man at the same time. He lived a perfect life here on this earth. Then He went to the cross to pay for the sins of the world. When He cried out "It is finished", the payment for your sins was 100% complete. Other prophets and apostles did many great signs and wonders, but only Jesus loved us so much that He died for us!

You could say that both Elijah and Jesus graduated from this world. Jesus died, but then He rose triumphantly from the dead. The salvation of the world was finished, Jesus successfully accomplished it. But even though He defeated death, that did not mean that He was going to stay here on this earth forever. Both of these men were finished, they had graduated from all the things that God wanted to be accomplished through them. They both ascended into heaven to be with the LORD. This was a sad and uncertain time for both the Apostles and for Elijah's disciple Elisha. But, it was also a time

that these men had been prepared for, whether they knew it or not.

⁹ **And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?"** Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." ¹⁰ **So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so."**

Elisha was not Elijah. He knew this. He had followed this man ever since the day when the LORD called Elijah to anoint him as a prophet in his place. It had all led to this moment. When it was time for them to be finally separated, Elijah told Elisha to ask for something before they would be separated forever. He asked for a double portion of his spirit.

The double portion concept is one found throughout Israel. It is typically an inheritance term. The oldest heir would get a double portion of the inheritance upon his father's death, while everyone else would get a single portion. You could see why it then would have been advantageous to be the heir. But there were no doubt extra responsibilities that came with it. Elisha was asking that he would be able to be like Elijah was. Elijah acknowledges here that what Elisha asked for was "a hard thing". But Elisha did receive what he had asked for. The proof of this gift was that he actually saw Elijah ascend into heaven on fiery chariots upon a whirlwind.

The disciples also witnessed Jesus ascension. Our Epistle reading describes this event. They didn't really know how to even react to Jesus ascension into heaven. All they could do was just stand there and stare up into the sky. They needed angels to break them out of it. **Acts 1:11 "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."**

The thing that must have been hard for both the disciples and for Elisha to see at the time was that these departures were good things. Elisha now had the great opportunity to put all that he had learned from Elijah into practice. He too did some great things in Israel. Likewise, just like Elisha received the spirit of Elijah, the disciples received the gift of The Spirit. 10 days after this event would be the Pentecost, where the gift would be given, and everything that Jesus trained the disciples for would be realized.

That is the thing about our God: Not only does He save souls, but He also calls us to spread that same soul-saving message to others. He prepares us

for our future. Just like you attend school to prepare for your career, we get schooled in the Bible early in life. That is why Christian education is so important! It is preparing us for a life of being ambassadors for the gospel! **2 Timothy 3:15** and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

And yet, at the time when these graduations happened, at the moment, there was uncertainty. Elisha was not sure if he would get that great gift for which he had asked. But after he saw Elijah go up, he had to go back... **So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces.** ¹³ **He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan.**

Sometimes, the uncertainty of the future is almost too much to bear. Just think of the disciples when Jesus ascended. They had just experienced the separation from their master when He was arrested and died on the cross. But then He returned! They were so overjoyed; they could not believe their eyes when they saw Him again. But now He was gone again... Right before He left them, they asked Him **Acts 1:6** "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They didn't understand what the plan was. But God had a plan, and He would carry it out with these same seemingly clueless men!

Jesus was not going to restore the earthly glory of the nation Israel. These men would restore the glory of Israel, that is the spiritual Israel. They would do what Jesus instructed them to do here, **Mark 16:15** "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." God, through these men, would bring about the Church, by whom many souls would become a part of and continue the mission of the commission. We too have become a part of that, and that is still our mission today. That is why Christian education is so vital to the church: not only will it save our children's souls but it will also equip them to share the life-saving message to others sinners in need of a Savior!

Here we Elisha literally taking up the mantle. Our sermon text is where that phrase comes from. It means "To assume a role of leadership that someone else once held." I'm not sure about you, but when I think of a mantle, I think about a fireplace or somewhere you put trinkets and hang your Christmas stockings. But basically, a mantle is a cloak or a robe. This cloak of Elijah played a pivotal role in this reading. It was the only thing that Elijah had left behind. But it was also representative of the passing of Elijah's ministry to Elisha. When Elijah

first called Elisha to be a prophet, how did he do it? By putting a cloak on him! **1 Kings 19:19b** **So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.** It was also with this cloak that Elijah and Elisha got to where they were, standing in the middle of the Jordan river, on dry ground. Elijah ascended, Elisha tore his clothes, picked up Elijah's mantle, and went back. The conclusion of all those curious onlookers says it all, **2 Kings 2:15** "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha."

This is what God does. He provides! He provided Elijah with eternal rest. He provided Elisha with the same gift that his great mentor had. He provided the people with a replacement for Elijah. Elisha would have a big cloak to fill, but he would do so with the help of God!

And of course, that was what Jesus was doing right before He ascended into heaven as well. The disciples thought He might start back up His ministry and restore the glory of Israel. But His ministry was finished. He had completed the salvation of the world. But the world needed to hear about it. That was what the disciples would do. But He wouldn't just leave them. He would provide! **John 16:6-7** ⁶ "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

Jesus provides us with the Holy Spirit to help us carry out our mission. If our mission depended on us alone, it would be very doomed. But that is the power of the Gospel. It has the power to change hearts from disbelief into faith. Making disciples does not happen by us being persuasive or logical, rather faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. We have been giving a task that literally accomplishes itself. Preach the Gospel, and the Gospel by the Spirit will do ALL of the work!

But Jesus was not abandoning His disciples by leaving. He was going back to the throne of God, to plead for sinners like us before God on our behalf. Yes, His physical presence would be gone, but He is not gone. It is quite the opposite. He is always with us! The ascension was not a departure, rather it was Jesus going ahead to prepare a place for us! He will return just like He left. He is never gone. **Matthew 28:20** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The LORD will provide, so pick up the provided mantle of the Gospel. Those who came

before us preached Christ crucified. We will preach Christ crucified. Those after us will preach Christ crucified. This is the succession of the Gospel. It passes down from generation to generation, continuing to save sinners from their sin. And the Gospel will succeed. This will have nothing to do with us, but it will have everything to do with Jesus. We are provided with an opportunity to be a part of it. The Lord truly provides!

Our graduation days vary. I am not talking about the graduation days in the Midwest compared to the Pacific Northwest. I am not talking about high school graduation compared to College. Our graduation from this earth truly varies from person to person. We do not know how long we have here, we do not know when we are done. So how do go on? By preaching the Gospel! Preach it in season and out, preach it to your children so that they can preach it to theirs! This is how we graduate.

Graduation is bittersweet. We are sad to leave but excited to start a new chapter in our lives. Well just imagine the graduation from this earth. We leave behind these broken bodies of sin and receive perfect ones instead. We get to reign forever with our God and Savior Jesus Christ. There will be no hint of bittersweetness on that graduation day. It will just be pure joy! That is the effect of the Gospel succeeding. It sends broken sinners like us to eternal paradise with our God! Amen!!!