

TRANSITIONS "MOVING ON WITH GOD"

1 KINGS 19:19-21
2 KINGS 20:1-14
2 KINGS 13:14-20

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*All scripture from English Standard Version
(ESV) unless otherwise noted.*



INTRODUCTION

We gage and measure our lives oftentimes by transitions. Call it a change, a fork in the road, a milestone, a move, or a metamorphosis. These are moments in time that mark a change. At times, moments of great joy and great reward, and conversely, at times moments of great pain and great loss. These events are marked by a day, hour, minute, or even second at which the course of our life changes. Moments in time after which our lives will never be the same. Some of these moments are welcome: Graduations, marriage, and birth of children. Some of these moments are dreaded: Divorce, discovery of disease, and the final transition: death. The importance of these moments in time are worthy of our attention.

Although some transitions come without warning, many transitions are things prepared and planned for. They act more as a confirmation of what lay before, good or bad. The "golf injury" (never had one by the way)-
-may have come as a result of years of inactivity and a sedentary job.

This morning I want talk about transitions in the life an Old Testament prophet, Elisha. He was a prophet to Israel in the time of the kings. He was God's spokesman to Israel, delivering his messages. His miracles were numerous, and his influence great.

Scripture shows us three major transitions in his life. My intent is to draw seven illustrations from these moments in Elisha's life.

1 Kings 19:19-21

19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

1. ELISHA WAS READY

The end of verse 19 states, ***"Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him."***

Nobody had to explain to Elisha what was happening here. Notice Elijah doesn't say a word. There is no explanation given. To an outsider this event would look downright strange.. Remember what Elijah was like? Animal skins, dreadlocks, fed by ravens... Imagine the scene, This was not some guy throwing a random animal skin over his back and walking away. But to Elisha, the significance was not lost. Elisha knew who Elijah was, he knew who he served. Paul said in Ephesians 5:17: ***"...do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*** (Eph 5:17) Clearly, Elisha understood there was an invitation. Do we know God's invitations when they come?

Most of the time, for me, getting the mail is an adventure only in annoyance and boredom. 50% of everything I get goes straight to the trash. 50% of what I get is an updated version of what I got last month. But, have you ever had that *important* letter come that you mistakenly threw out or never opened? The letter contained *that* invitation, *that* bill, or *that* message?

At one point in his ministry, Jesus criticized his listeners' inability to understand him: ***You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky. Why don't you know how to interpret the present time?*** (Luke 12:56)

These people knew, quote, "*how the world works*".

They were happy with their ability to plan and prepare for what lied ahead, predicting the weather, when to sell stocks, and when to change jobs.

They had plenty of understanding the ways the world works, but lacked spiritual insight.

What a tragedy when a child of God

Elisha's simple words belied his simple, attitude: one of readied obedience.

And I do not think he is without companion.

When God first spoke to Abraham in Genesis, his simple reply was, "***Here I am***". (Gen 22:1)

When God called Isaiah, his reaction was, "***Here I am! Send me.***" (Is 6:8)

We sing that worship song "*I call, you answer*", and no doubt this has truth in it.

I wonder if we are prepared to answer when the ***Lord calls us***.

And I'm not just talking about the big-ticket things.

I'm talking about cultivating a life of obedience.

A preparedness, a readiness, a willingness in the small things.

Elisha seemed to have what we could call a *quiet readiness of soul*.

I wonder if Elisha was praying Old Testament version of what Jesus told those who followed him in Mt 9: ***37b "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.***

In any case, it seems that Elisha's mind was really made up before the decision had to be made.

His decision was to follow God on whatever path he presented.

His character was proven when it came time to evidence this decision.

And this leads us to our second point:

2. ELISHA DID NOT DELAY

Verse 20 states, "***And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah...***"

Have we delayed?

Have we "put off" the things repentance, obedience and holiness?

Have you delayed in doing *something* that God has clearly shown you to do?

Have you delayed in stopping to do something that the Holy Spirit has told you to stop?

We may fear leaving what we know and what we can control for what we feel is uncertain.

There will be the inner voice that says, "*You don't have to do that today - there is time.*"

Or, "*Don't be so harsh on yourself, God has blessed you in your current position - why would you give that up?*"

Maybe he has, maybe he has not.

Elisha did not delay his decision. After some brief housekeeping, he was on with the call that God had for him.

It's been said that, "*Those who agonize fail to act but those who act fail to agonize.*"

Delay will bring a restlessness.

- An inability to be "fully present" where one is.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of the importance of response:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (Heb 3:15)

and

"my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." (Heb 10:38)

"shrinks" back means to step back, to stop, to delay.

Have you delayed your response to God?

Has Elijah effectively passed by with an invitation to follow, but you are still standing in the field?

Or perhaps you have gone back to plowing because you know it well, because it brings you security and you know you are safe there.

Jesus said: ***"32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."*** (Luke 17:32-33)

3. ELISHA RESPONDED WITH RESOLUTION.

Verse 21 "***And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen...***"

We may be prone to at first glance criticize Elisha's request to "return" before following. We may be tempted to compare Elisha to the uncommitted character that told Jesus, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." to which Jesus replied, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." In truth, I believe this reveals a deeper understanding of what it means to respond. Elisha's desire was to follow, and he he knew what it meant to do so. He knew that to move forward unhindered, he needed to cut his his ties. As a boat would undo the ropes that tied it to shore before setting out to sea. There would be no longer be the need for the *former* things. here would simply no longer be the need for distractions. The bridge is an appropriate symbol of transition. You cannot go from the left to the right while on a bridge, you can only go forward or go back. To find ourselves in these moments of confrontation with the call of God means that we go one way or another. There is no question after that moment which way you have gone and which way you have chosen. You have crossed over or you have gone back.

In Mark 10, when a young ruler looked for answers, Jesus told him:
21 "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.
At this moment, there was only two ways to go - to go sell his possessions and to follow OR to go back - to stay where he was.
In 1 Kings 19:16 we find out that Elisha lived in the valley of *Abel-meholah*.
That is, "*The Valley of the Dance*"
Sounds like a nice place doesn't it?
Maybe somewhere people tried to retire too.
Remember verse 6? Elisha was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen.
If you have 12 tractors, you have a big farm.
His dad was likely a man of means, and Elisha was as well.
So it's not as if Elisha was walking away from a minimum wage job.
He was doing well, not doubt quite well for himself.
Yet there was resolve to be done with it.

He didn't just park the plows in the shed.
He destroyed them with fire.
Jesus said "**No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.**"
Elisha was now to take his hand from his own plow and put it to another.
He was to move from cultivating, planting and tending his earthly father's fields
To labor in the field of his God.

4. ELISHA BLESSED OTHERS BY HIS TRANSITION

Verse 21 states, "**He...boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate.**" and I emphasize the last line, "**and they ate**".

Here the rare quality of Elisha's character is shown.
Although one may have certainly have argued that it would be warranted, Elisha does not simply *cut and run*.
He thoughtfully considers his influence, responsibilities and his resources.
His family and friends are not left in the dark or worse yet abandoned for some holy call.
Even in his moving on, he stewards his possessions well and he blesses those who are near him.
In a God led transition, a certain confirming grace should be found.
This is not to say transitions are "easy", but that where God's hand is at work, he evidences himself.
Are you blessing others blessed by your transitions?

I do want to point out one caveat here.
There are certain situations in which our ability to leave in peace is hindered.
Often at the point of salvation there are things which we need to not just leave but to run from.
If so, do this, run... and run fast.
There are situations of sinfulness where mutual forgiveness and repentance are not possible, in these, we should do what we can and move on.
Be saved from the sinking ship, do not go down with it.
Remember that Jesus did say:
So, do your transitions make peace? Do they promote the kingdom? Do they bless those of God's household?
Or do they cause confusion, disorder or cause schism with those who serve God?
Let us not just run this race, but run according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5).
For ultimately, we are called not just to *finish*, but to *finish well* (2 Timothy 4:6-8).
The way we do things matters.

5. ELISHA BECAME A SERVANT.

Verse 21 finishes with the statement: ***“He arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.”***

Elisha knew that his call was to serve.

Elisha knew that his call was not one to lead, but to assist.

Note that Elisha did not know what lay ahead of him, other than to *follow*.

There were no promises for the future here.

No indication of power, prestige or influence.

No promise that some hidden dream of his was going to blossom into a reality.

Elisha apparently knew that the best place he could be was where God wanted him to be.

The best assignment he could have was the assignment given him.

And right now in his life, his opportunity - his assignment - was to be with this man of God, Elijah.

Do you have a heart of service like Elisha?

A simple question is to ask yourself, *“What things are beneath me?”*

I don't just mean to ask if there are things you would or wouldn't do.

I'm asking if there are things you would not do with *committed passion*.

Are there things you would not do with a whole heart?

Another simple question to ask yourself is, *“What people are beneath me?”*

That would be to say, have you lifted yourself above anyone else in your pride?

Are there people that you would not serve passionately?

Maybe they are simply too low for you.

Or maybe you simply are too high for them.

These issues of our service reveal our heart.

Maybe there are people or ministries that are worthy of being served.

Serving God means serving his people.

Paul said, ***3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,*** (Phil 2:3-7)

Some care must be given in how I say the following so it is not misunderstood, but *Elisha was called by a man*. Yes, it was God's plan for Elisha to be in this position, but God did not speak to Elisha, he spoke to prophet of God, Elijah:

1 Kings 19:16 ***And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.***

The Christian life is not a call to independence.

And there is a clarity of scripture that not just God, but God's servants are to be followed.

Are you ready to say “yes” when someone proven in their godliness and their position with God?

There are times when, like Peter, we must say, ***“We must obey God rather than men.”***

I fear the issue is oftentimes not that we must obey “God rather than men”, but that we must obey “ourselves rather than men.”

You will not proceed with God without faithful service amongst God's people.

Christ's comments in Mark 10:43-45, ***“but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son man did not come to be served, but to serve.”***

THE SILENT YEARS

Elisha apparently embraced the opportunity to become background support.

In fact it is the next time he is mentioned in scripture, which is a full 4 chapters after the first time we meet him.

I pause before moving on to consider the silence the scripture has concerning Elisha during these years.

What of these years of silence in Elisha's life?

I presume that he continued much as he had started.

-His readiness, his resolution, his servants heart were lived out day after day.

We are reminded that when God himself was on earth, he spent 30 years of his life in relative obscurity.

That's a good ratio.

A lot of time in obscurity before time on the pedestal.

Don't be like the software that gets rushed to release that is full of bugs.

One who want to serve God must be ready to serve faithfully in obscurity.

Now let's turn to the second major transition in Elisha's life.

Please go to 2 Kings chapter 2 with me...

2 KINGS 2:1-14

2 Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet."

⁴ Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet."

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." ¹⁰ And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." ¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. ¹³ And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

6. ELISHA WAS FAITHFUL TO GOD AND MAN

In verse 2 he says, *"As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."*

Elisha was faithful to God, and faithful to who God had placed over him.

He stuck with him throughout the previous chapters of ministry-

-and now, close to the end his master makes what appears to be a random set of Elisha moves from Gilgal, to Bethel to Jordan to Jericho.

These towns were not right door to each other.

(while there is certainly meaning behind each of these city names and places, this is beyond the scope of this study)

This travelling from one town to the next without any apparent business.

Elisha was on the track to maturity and following was the path.

Ephesians 4:11-13

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

In order to lead, one must first learn how to be led.

In order to give directions, one must first learn how to receive and follow directions.

In order to be faithful, one must first learn faithfulness.

Elisha seemed to be one of the lessons of Luke 16:10, *"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much."*

We can delay or even forever put off our transition into things God would have us do if we are unfaithful.

What very little things do we have to be faithful in?

Elisha's final act of faithfulness was to simply stay right where his master was.

He was faithful.

This brings us to our final point...

7. ELISHA'S GOAL WAS GOD

Verse 9 and 10: *9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so."*

Much has been said about this *"A double portion"*

Elisha, in Elijah's word asked for "a hard thing".

Meaning that this was something Elijah could not give of his own will.

This would be up to God whether it would be so.

This is difference than the attitude that says, if everything else fails, I still have God.

- If the things I am pursuing don't work out, I have God.
- If I get sick, I still have God.
- If everyone else leaves me, God will be there

This is a disposition that says, I have God, I know God, and I want more of Him.

Lam 3:24 says:

The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Psalm 73:26 says:

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Ultimately Elisha got what he sought because it was God.

Elisha went on to have twice as many recorded miracles as Elijah did.

A W Tozer said: "Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to his people. He waits to be wanted."

Elisha wanted more of God's Spirit

He was saying, I want twice as much of God's powerful Spirit working in my life...

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EPILOGUE

After his great ministry throughout the early chapter of 2 Kings, the Word goes silent on Elisha for what appears to be 40 years.

There is an epilogue however.

In the twilight of his life, we have one last snapshot

He makes one last appearance before making his final transition from this world.

Please turn with me to 2 Kings, chapter 13.

2 KINGS 13:14-20

14 Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash king of Israel went down to him and wept before him, crying, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" 15 And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows. 16 Then he said to the king of Israel, "Draw the bow," and he drew it. And Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. 17 And he said, "Open the window eastward," and he opened it. Then Elisha said, "Shoot," and he shot. And he said, "The LORD's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria! For you shall fight the Syrians in Aphek until you have made an end of them." 18 And he said, "Take the arrows," and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground with them." And he struck three times and stopped. 19 Then the man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times."

20 So Elisha died, and they buried him...

We see the Elisha's dramatic symbolism, as only a prophet could demonstrate.

He told him to throw down the arrows...

You might ask how would he know how many???

Elisha called for a passion from this man.

Elisha remained strong till the end.

On his way out he was still leading,

He was still challenging others to press forward to God

Where will you be at the end?

CONCLUSION

Firstly, I want speak to those who have not made the first step.

Have you been throwing out God's invitations to you?

Have you "put him off"?

None of this really matters unless you understand that one has gone before you.

Have you made the first step of coming to Jesus for salvation?

Do you understand that his death and resurrection means your life?

His suffering and sacrifice means your adoption as a child of God?

your release from the things that bind you?

God has: ***delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:*** (Col 1:13 KJV2000))

1 Peter 2:9 says, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The road to Christ is not complex, he has made the way simple:

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 10:28-30)

Secondly, I speak to those who have received the invitation to servanthood and discipleship.

Have you refused to move on with God?

Does your conscience bother you?

Are you working hard, but at the wrong things?

Again I remind you of Jesus words

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 10:28-30)

He says come to me, but he also says, "take my yoke upon you.

Lastly, I speak to those who are in the middle

You are in those "in between chapters" of 1 Kings - the ones where we don't hear about Elisha.

In first 1 Peter 5:5-6 the apostle says:

5 you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you