

## **Will God's Work Continue?**

1 Kings 19:15-21; 1 Corinthians 15:58

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At times when it appears so dark with unfaithfulness to biblical and reformation truth, we may be tempted to wonder whether it will all stop with our generation. Will the generation of our children and grandchildren take up the banner of Christ's crown and covenant and carry it forward or will they allow it to fall from their hands to be downtrodden beneath the feet of those who hate it? Will the testimony we have borne for Jesus Christ fade into oblivion or will it be remembered and embraced by future generations?

The older we get and the less time we have here upon the earth to bear a faithful testimony to the beauty of holiness and to the mercy of Christ in rescuing undeserving sinners (like you and me), the more we tend to reflect upon what we have accomplished for Jesus Christ and what will happen after we have breathed our last breath. That is not for us to know. Our calling is to be faithful to the gospel and commandments of Jesus Christ while the Lord yet gives us breath. Will God's work continue to future generations? The Lord Jesus promises, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That work is the Lord's, and He will complete what He has begun. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (25:5) teaches:

. . . there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to his will.

Will there be persecution? Yes. Will there be backsliding? Yes. Will there be divisions? Yes. But in spite of whatever the enemy brings, the Lord's covenanted reformation will continue, whether by few or by many until "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). Let us consider the following main points from our text today: (1) God Left in Israel a Faithful Remnant (1 Kings 19:15-18); (2) God Left in Israel a Faithful Minister (1 Kings 19:19-21).

### **I. God Left in Israel a Faithful Remnant (1 Kings 19:15-18).**

A. As we consider how the Lord did not leave Elijah in the dark cave of great discouragement but displayed before him the glory of the gospel to underserving sinners (like Elijah and like us) in a still small voice, let us also remember that the Lord did not now leave Elijah with nothing to do for His kingdom (even though Elijah had fallen). Elijah's fall did not end his usefulness for the Lord, for the Lord recommissions him to further service which we considered (in part) last Lord's Day (1 Kings 19:15-17). Having considered the two kings that would be God's scourge upon a rebellious Israel (Hazeal and Jehu), let us take up now Elijah's commission to anoint his successor as God's scourge upon Israel.

B. When the Lord asked the dejected Elijah why he was there on Mt. Horeb (Sinai) instead of in Israel leading the reformation and return to Jehovah, Elijah complained to the Lord twice with the following words found in 1 Kings 19:10,14. These words were indeed factual and true, but Elijah was excusing himself and blaming Israel for his fear, desertion, and great discouragement.

1. The Lord in His mercy recommissioned Elijah to appoint two kings to be the rod of His anger against covenant-breaking Ahab, Jezebel, and Israel (though it was actually through Elisha).

2. The Lord also commanded Elijah to go and anoint Elisha to be his successor (1 Kings 19:16b). Elisha would slay with the prophetic word of his mouth all those in Israel that escaped from the sword of Hazeal of Syria and from the sword of Jehu of Israel. That sword that proceeds from the mouth of God's prophet and minister in revealing God's just judgment upon sinners is a far more devastating and destructive sword (Hebrews 4:12; Hosea 6:5; Revelation 19:15). The sword of the Spirit is more fearful, for it

announces everlasting judgment. My friend, despise not the preaching of the gospel today, for on the one hand it is a savor of life to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but on the other hand it is a sword of death to those who will not believe alone in Jesus alone as Savior and Lord.

3. What an act of the Lord's kindness in appointing Elijah a co-worker at this time of greatest discouragement in Elijah's ministry.

a. The Lord did not come down on Elijah: "Man up, you wimp!" "Stop feeling sorry for yourself, you coward, you deserter!"

b. **The Lord in love** revealed to Elijah his unworthiness in the wind, earthquake, and fire. **The Lord in grace** revealed to Elijah the gospel of restoration in the still small voice. **The Lord in mercy** revealed to Elijah the encouragement of a faithful co-worker in the calling of Elisha to stand with Elijah in facing the opposition of the enemy.

c. **O the blessedness of those** ministers to whom the Lord gives faithful elders or faithful ministers or faithful members of the church to stand with them and to hold up their arms when they grow weary (Paul had his Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:9-10). **O the blessedness of those** to whom the Lord gives a faithful husband or faithful wife to raise up and educate a mighty army for Jesus Christ—who are not rivals—who are not competitors—who are not adversaries—but who are one flesh, working together to advance the kingdom of God (Ecclesiastes 4:9). **O the blessedness of those** who have faithful Christian friends who will pray for them, help them when they are weak, and love them enough to admonish them when they err from truth and righteousness.

d. How thankful to the Lord are you in expressing to Him your deep gratitude for the safety net He has provided for you? Elijah had cried out to the Lord that he was all alone in standing against the foes of the Lord, and the Lord hears Elijah's desperate cry, and mercifully gives him a faithful co-laborer whom he can train as his successor. What a merciful Savior is Jesus whose sympathetic heart knows what it is to be alone and deserted by disciples and friends, and who is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24).

C. Elijah had fought so hard and faithfully for the Lord as the lion of God's covenant, but would all of his work for the Lord be for nothing? Would there be no fruit at all that the Lord would bring forth after he left this world? As I said in the introduction, we may wonder and even pray for lasting fruit in our children and grandchildren, in the Church of Jesus Christ, at work, and among extended family and friends, however, our present calling is to be as faithful and diligent as we can and to leave the results of our work with our merciful Savior. But our ever-faithful God has left us with great hope in the words of encouragement that He gives to Elijah (1 Kings 19:18).

1. "I have left me". This is the sovereign Lord declaring that He Himself was the power and force behind there being left 7,000 that had not worshipped or honored Baal by bowing or kissing his blasphemous image. The Lord does not simply say that "there are left 7,000" as if He were simply a spectator or secretly knew of this faithful remnant. The Lord literally tells Elijah, "I have caused to leave me 7,000 who have not worshipped Baal (that is the force of the Hebrew Hiphil form of the verb). The 7,000 is likely a figurative number representing all of God's elect in Israel (the 144,000 of God's elect in Revelation 7).

a. God caused (or will cause—KJV marginal reading) there to be a division between the elect and the non-elect, between the faithful remnant and the idolatrous majority. This division between the elect and the non-elect was originally caused by the Lord from all eternity in grace choosing His elect in Jesus Christ and in justice passing over and foreordaining the condemnation of all others for their sin (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3:7). This division between the elect and non-elect was then realized by God in time and history (Ephesians 1:4; Acts 13:48).

b. God has a remnant according the election of grace (Romans 11:4-5). There was a time in Paul's ministry in which the Lord likewise encouraged him with similar words about an elect remnant

that would be brought to saving faith through Paul's ministry (Acts 18:9-10).

2. Dear ones, here is such a great and comforting truth to Elijah who cried out to the Lord that he was all alone.

a. Even if there were not 7,000 who had not worshipped and honored Baal, Elijah was not alone—for the Lord Almighty had entirely encompassed him in His love, mercy, faithfulness, and power. But God reveals that Elijah was not alone among those in Israel. Where were they, we are not told. But they were there. They were praying. They were serving the Lord. They were faithful to the covenant of the Lord. Elijah did not personally know the fruit and effect of his ministry in Israel, but God knew and encourages him and us as well.

b. None of us knows what effect our words and deeds have had or will have in the lives of family, friends, co-workers, students, or strangers. Nevertheless, we must be diligent, faithful, patient, and persevering knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is the enemy that tells you, you are wasting your time as a faithful witness for Jesus Christ; that tells you, no one is listening and no one cares; that tells you there is no fruit from your labors for the Lord because you are such a lousy witness in word and deed. Satan is a liar. If the enemy can lead Elijah to believe there was no fruit from his ministry, the enemy can do the same with you and me. Let us trust the word of the Lord over the lies of the enemy.

## II. God Left in Israel a Faithful Minister (1 Kings 19:19-21).

A. Here we see the calling of Elisha as we are introduced to him for the first time. Elisha was God's called prophet at just the time that Elijah needed an Elisha in his life to be a help and encouragement to him. God raised up Elisha to succeed Elijah. They ministered together for about 10 years. Elisha was to be trained by Elijah as his intern (in times when there were not faithful seminaries that were available to men preparing for the ministry, they came under the instruction and oversight of a faithful minister). Let us consider here the calling of Elisha.

1. It would appear that Elisha was a farmer (likely the son of a wealthy farmer), for there were 12 yoke of oxen plowing the fields that the Lord had recently watered. Elisha was unmarried and living at home when he was called. Here was not a lazy man, but one who was diligent in whatever he was called to do—whether as an obedient son—whether as a hard worker even in the fields that likely could have been plowed by hired servants. He was not a leader that led from behind, but one who led by example. He was not a mere talker, but a doer. All good leaders set an example for others to follow in word and deed. All good leaders are doers, not mere talkers. Before they lead, they have learned how to submit to the supreme authority of God and then the authority of others.

2. Elijah passed by and cast his mantle upon Elisha. A mantle was like a cape worn over the outer garments to provide warmth in cooler temperatures and to cover one's face in windy conditions of blowing sand. This act of casting his mantle upon Elisha indicated that the Lord was passing on to Elisha the prophetic office given to Elijah—Elisha was to be Elijah's successor ("passing the mantle of power").

3. Elisha knew immediately what Elijah had done to him, for he requests a brief time to bid his parents farewell (1 Kings 19:20). Elisha was not making some excuse for not following Elijah (like the man in Luke 9:61-62). Elisha was fully committed to the call of God on his life—the man in Luke 9 was not. The man in Luke 9 was like Lot's wife, looking back with regret at what he would have to give up in order to follow Jesus Christ. Elisha was not looking back with regret, but was looking back with a willingness to sacrifice all to follow Jesus Christ (1 Kings 19:21).

B. Dear ones, what do you see when you look back to what was once yours before coming in faith to Christ and following Him?

1. **Do you look back with regret**—"I had it so well, but now I have all of the hardships in following Christ." **Do you look back with a desire to have what you left** like the children of Israel who wanted

their leeks, garlic, and melons? **Do you look back with love for the world and anger toward God and others with a chip on your shoulder? Or do you look back and say, "I would sacrifice it all a million times over again to gain Jesus Christ.** Regardless of what I have suffered, or endured, or sacrificed, or lost, it was infinitely worth what I have gained in Jesus Christ." Only if that is true in your heart will there be joy, peace, contentment, and thanksgiving abiding in your life. This was the way Paul looked back at his past as well (Philippians 3:7-8).

2. Elisha and Paul were not super-saints. That is simply the response of saving faith in the life of a Christian (Matthew 16:24). If there is anything or any person that we regret having lost or sacrificed in order to gain Jesus Christ or to faithfully follow Jesus Christ, we have a very low view of the Lord Jesus Christ, His glory, His riches so freely bestowed upon us. If you had \$100, but you had to give it up in order to freely receive a million dollars, would you be filled with regret over having to leave behind that \$100? What is keeping you from following Jesus with all your heart (family, friends, job, riches, music, pleasures, sports, etc.)? Whatever it is, you have made it a god. You have made it your first love. Jesus is the pearl of great price that we must be willing to sell all in order to gain (Matthew 13:46). If you look back more than you look forward, something is wrong, for nothing in the past can possibly compare to the heavenly glory that awaits the child of God in the future. When we look back, let's look back, saying, "Look what the Lord Jesus mercifully saved me from", and not with regret say, "Look at what I had to sacrifice in order to come to Jesus and follow Him."

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