

“Elisha’s Call to Service”
1 Kings 19:19-21
(Preached at Trinity, September 19, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Elijah fled from the presence of Jezebel after he learned she had ordered a hit on his life. That was the natural response to hearing there’s a hitman on the way. The text tells us he was despondent, not because of the threat upon his life, but because of his passion to see Israel return from idolatry to covenant faithfulness. The steadfast commitment of Jezebel to maintaining Baal worship as the official deity of Israel left Elijah with little hope of any lasting change. He cried out for God to end his life. From his prospective he had failed as a prophet and was alone as a servant of God.
1 Kings 19:10 NAU - "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
2. God graciously receives Elijah’s complaint, reminds him of His sovereign control over the affairs of men. God is at work, sometimes through earthshaking means, and sometimes through a gentle blowing.
3. God then sends Elijah on the next phase of his mission. He was ordered to anoint Hazael king over Aram—Israel’s worst enemy among the neighboring powers, Jehu king over Israel—to put an end to Ahab’s dynasty. We should note Elijah didn’t personally anoint these kings. He was then to find Elisha and anoint him as his successor. This he did do.
4. God encourages Elijah that he was not alone in his faithfulness. God had 7000 faithful in Israel.
5. So, Elijah departs in obedience and sought out Elisha.
 - A. He was found doing the work of a common farmer.
1 Kings 19:19 NAU - "So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth"
 - B. Elisha was of the Shaphat family. Nothing else is known of his parents, although they must have been a family of wealth. There is no indication of his age, but most likely he would have been very young. He was a stark contrast to Elijah who was described as: **2 Kings 1:8** - "a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins."
Elisha was much more conservative.
6. Elijah passed by the farm and found Elisha working a team of oxen. He laid his mantle upon him. Elisha understood the significance of the act and immediately made preparations to leave his parents and follow Elijah as his successor. He slaughtered the oxen and prepared a feast for friends.

7. These few verses serve as an introduction to the life and ministry of Elisha. Elijah is a mighty figure and is large in his significance in the New Testament as God's prophet. But Elisha's life and ministry are no less significant. Where Elijah was sent by God to pronounce judgement upon Israel's idolatry, Elisha's ministry would be much more nuanced.

The International Bible Encyclopedia describes Elisha:

"His character was largely molded by his home life. He was friend and benefactor of foreigner as well as of Israelite. He was large-hearted and generous, tolerant to a remarkable degree, courageous and shrewd when the occasion required, a diplomat as well as a statesman, severe and stern only in the presence of evil and when the occasion demanded. A home-loving and social man, his real work was that of teaching and helping, rather than working of miracles. He continually went about doing good. He was resourceful and ready and was gifted with a sense of humor. Known as 'the man of God,' he proved his right to the title by his zeal for God and loving service to man."¹

I. Elisha's calling was all of God

A. God commanded Elijah to seek Elisha

1 Kings 19:15-16 NAU - "The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; ¹⁶ and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."

1. God commanded Elijah to seek out and anoint Elisha as his successor. It wasn't left to Elijah's discretion. He didn't choose his own successor.
2. Elisha wasn't among the school of the prophets. He wasn't well known.
2. It also wasn't left to Elisha's discretion.

Elisha was doing what he did every day. He was working on the family farm. He was laboring alongside the other laborers. There were twelve pair of oxen. There was much to do. The last thing he considered was leaving this work behind.

B. The same is true with all of God's people

1. It was true of Christ's disciples.
 - a. Simon and Andrew were busy fishing when Jesus came and said, "Follow Me."
 - b. Matthew was busy collecting taxes when Jesus came and said, "Follow Me."
 - c. And in each case, they immediately arose and followed.

2. God has chosen us as His own

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 NAU - "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. ¹⁴ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, volume II.* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), page 937.

Acts 2:39 NAU - "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

3. Even while we were engrossed in our sin Jesus came and delivered us. We love Him and choose Him because He first loved and chose us.

Romans 5:8 KJV - "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

4. God chose us in spite of who we are, what we are, or our abilities.
1 Corinthians 1:26-30 NAU - "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus"

C. God's calling is a lowly calling.

1. Elisha was basically being called to be Elijah's servant.

Verse 21 - "Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him."

2. Elisha was a person of means. His family had wealth. He had servants working under him. One commentator suggests it was neighbors plowing twelve yoke of oxen in a common field ² but more likely, Elijah was plowing the family farm.

There were 12 pairs of oxen at work. There was major work at hand, and yet, he was prepared to humble himself in service under Elijah.

3. Years later he would still be remembered as Elijah's servant.
2 Kings 3:11 NAU - "But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?" And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah."
4. The Christian calling is a calling to service. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master.
Mark 9:35 NAU - "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

II. Elisha's response in unambiguous – he obeyed

A. There is a sense in which God's call is a universal call

1. God is calling all men generally but working effectually in His elect.
2. God's call must be accompanied by His powerful work upon the heart. God convinces us of the need, the urgency. We call this the effectual call of God.

² Simon J. DeVries, *Word Biblical Commentary, 1 Kings* (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 239.

Matthew Henry – “An invisible hand touched his heart, and unaccountably inclined him by a secret power, without any external persuasions, to quit his husbandry and give himself to the ministry.”³

3. Elisha was one of God’s faithful remnant, one who had not bowed the knee to Baal.
- B. Elisha received God’s call.
1. Elisha’s calling was from God, but he had to answer.
He made a complete break with his former work and life.
He was willing to leave everything behind.
 2. He slaughtered the oxen and burned their yokes
 - a. They were no longer needed
 - b. He understood the spiritual nature of his call – he sacrificed the oxen.
 3. His words might seem counter to the idea of an immediate response to follow. “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you.”
Elijah responds: “Go back again, for what have I done to you?”
In other words, “I haven’t done anything to stop you.”
 - a. Elisha’s response was voluntary.
 - b. God’s effectual call makes us willing.
 - c. Elisha’s desire to kiss family goodbye was not a sign of wavering but of familial love. It wasn’t an excuse to delay but a token of respect for his parents.
 - d. This was different from the man Jesus called who wanted to delay following Christ.
Luke 9:61-62 NAU - "Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."
⁶² But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."
 3. He bid farewell to his family—the comforts of home.
 4. He apparently also turned away from his family’s wealth—
That there were twelve yoke of oxen suggests it was a large field. Leaving behind wealth is difficult. In fact, Jesus said it would be impossible without the power of God.
 5. You might say he burned the bridges to his past
Dale Ralph Davis reminds us: “We must consider the hindrances, obstacles, and difficulties that may or do stand in the way of whole-souled commitment to Jesus.”⁴

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 513.

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 275.

Conclusion:

1. We also find in Elisha the importance of mentorship in the service of Christ's Kingdom. Too many are too proud to spend time learning under those more mature.
 - A. Elisha humbly served with Elijah before finally becoming Elijah's successor. When Elijah departed Elisha called out "My father!"
2 Kings 2:12 NAU - "Elisha saw *it* and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces."
 - B. We saw this with Joshua, who was the servant Moses.
Exodus 24:13 NAU - "So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God."
Joshua 11:15 NAU - "Just as the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses."
2. Paul stressed this with older women mentoring the younger women.
Titus 2:3-5 NAU - "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored."