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Date: 11/07/2021  
Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-25  
Title: Elijah: God's Not Done

## Introduction

What a great text, hey? As soon as I heard that Murray and Jacob were going to be baptized this morning, I knew I needed to choose a really appropriate text. And so of course 2 Kings 2 was the obvious choice. A lovely story in which a bunch of kids are mauled by a couple of bears. I hope you know I'm kidding! We've actually been working through a sermon series on the prophet Elijah for the past 7 weeks, and today we come to the end of this series because in this *passage Elijah comes to the end of his ministry.*

Over the past seven weeks, we've been following the life of this extraordinary prophet, Elijah. His ministry has been like a Hollywood action movie - dramatic and confrontational and fiery. Elijah first burst onto the scene out of nowhere to confront wicked King Ahab, and he declared war on the false god Baal. Elijah's name says it all: 'my God is Yahweh.' Elijah has shown us that Baal is a useless false God, while Yahweh is thoroughly alive and glorious. *He has been on a mission to call out the rebellion of God's people Israel, to call them back to their loving God, because otherwise judgement is coming.*

Through the power of the Spirit, Elijah has done some incredible things: he caused a drought for three years, he created a never-ending supply of flour and oil for a widow, he raised her boy from the dead, and he called down fire from heaven on multiple occasions. No wonder in verse 12 of our text Elisha refers to Elijah as, 'The chariots and horsemen of Israel.' When Elijah is around, you can leave your chariots and horses in the garage. Elijah is the champion of Israel, a warrior, a legend, a one-man army.

But now look at how our passage begins in verse 1. **It's a sad day.** God is about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind.

When I was a kid, I used to love watching cricket... and it wasn't hard to enjoy, because Australia had a bit of a dream team in the 2000s. It was the golden age, with names like Shane Warne, Ricky Ponting, Adam Gilchrist, Mathew Hayden, Brett Lee, Glenn McGrath. But now, sadly, they've all retired. It's the end of an era.

Maybe you have a favourite team that fell apart when a legendary player retired. Or maybe you still remember when your best employee left for another job. Or when your pastor left for another church. Or when a relationship with a loved one came to an end. It's the end of era, and it brings with it a deep sense of sadness... and also apprehension. Our lives are full of these moments. Moments when we don't quite know how we're going to continue. Moments when the work isn't done, and it's daunting, and we can't help thinking the old days were better.

This is where we find ourselves in verses 1-6 of our passage this morning. God seems to have made it known to everyone that Elijah is going to be taken up to heaven soon. And so as Elijah and his protégé Elisha walk along, these different companies of prophets come and talk to Elisha in hushed whispers. 'Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?' And Elisha says, 'Yes, shhhh, I don't want to talk about it.'

The mood is nervous, and awkward, and sad. Like when you're wandering around the shops at the airport for half an hour, making chit-chat and killing time before you say goodbye to your loved one. 'Elisha, do you know what's happening? What's going to happen when he's gone?' And Elisha says, 'I don't know!'

Maybe it's a feeling you can relate to. Those moments when the future seems so unsure. When we can't help but wonder if God has stopped working. When you have one of those conversations about how the church is going, and it just spirals from one problem to the next until you feel totally daunted by how much needs to be done. When a relationship in your life seems beyond repair. When a loved one grows increasingly cold to the gospel. **Is God still at work? What's he doing?**

Well, in our passage today God shows us three things that we desperately need to know at times like these. He reminds us of his plan, his power, and his promise.

## 1. God reminds us of his plan.

The question hanging in the air is, What's next? The era of Elijah is ending. What now? And the answer this chapter gives us is that *the era of Elijah will be followed by the era of Elisha*. **God's not done.** God has a plan, and it's a plan with a grand span. It's a plan that began long before Elijah and will continue long after him.

We see a hint of this in verse 8, as Elijah and Elisha arrive at the Jordan river. "Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground." We've seen this before. This is what Moses did at the Red Sea as God rescued his people from Egypt. And it's also what Joshua did at the very same Jordan river, when he replaced Moses as leader and led God's people into the promised land.

And so as the era of Elijah ends, God gives this powerful reminder that he will provide a successor, and that his enormous plan of salvation will never fail. We sometimes call this plan *the covenant of grace*. It's God's enormous plan to save and bless the world... and it's been unfolding ever since Adam, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Joshua, and the Judges, and the Kings, and the prophets like Elijah and Elisha.

All these eras came and went, but God's one great plan of salvation has remained unchanged, building and building towards the glorious climax when Jesus broke into human history, the long-awaited Saviour who died for all our sins and rose again. And then as Jesus ascended into heaven, he ushered in the Last Days, the era that we live in now. These are the days of the Spirit, the days of the church, the day when salvation goes to all the nations.

Growing up as a kid, the Harry Potter books were my favourite. There's seven books, and the thing I most love about them is that you start to realize that the author, J.K. Rowling, had the *whole* story planned out from the beginning. And yet it's not till you get to the seventh book that all the lights come on, and you start to realize how it all fits together, all these parallels, and character developments, and loose ends that get tied together.

And that's also what makes the Bible such an incredible book. Because every time we meet a new character and read a new story, we see again that none of it is random or accidental. The way in which Joshua succeeds Moses, and then Elisha succeeds Elijah... these are patterns that are ultimately fulfilled in the New Testament.

In Matthew 11, Jesus calls John the Baptist 'Elijah'. And there are actually a lot of similarities. Both were prophets who wore hairy cloaks, lived as nomads, and had wilderness ministries of calling people to repentance. But John knew that he was just preparing the way for someone else. Just as Elisha came after Elijah, so Jesus would come after John. In both cases, an era of judgement would be followed by an era of grace. If you look ahead at Elisha's ministry in 2 Kings, you'll see that it's full of grace and healing – more so than Elijah's. The dead are raised to life, a leper is cleansed, the blind are given sight, the poor receive good news. And all of this points to the greater Elisha, Jesus, whose miracles were strikingly similar.

Now what's the point of all this? Maybe your head is spinning a little bit right now, and that's okay. All I want us to grasp is this: *through all the ups and downs of the Bible, of human history, of your life... through all these ups and downs, God has a plan.* One enormous plan to bring sinners like you and me back into relationship with our loving God.

And actually, that's what we've just acknowledged through the baptisms of Murray and Jacob, isn't it? As we baptize them, we remember that God is still alive, still at work, still faithful to his covenant. So Ben and Hannah, Mark and Michelle, Riverbank church: this is what you need to share with these children as they grow up. Teach them about God's plan, that nothing is random, and that God is not distant... but that he is doing amazing things, pouring out grace, actively seeking and saving sinners who trust in Jesus.

That's the first thing we see in this passage. God reminds us of his plan. But now we need to ask, *how will God execute this incredible plan?* The brings us to our second point.

## 2. God reminds us of his power.

In verse 9, just before Elijah goes up to heaven, Elisha asks that he might inherit a double portion of Elijah's spirit. It sounds kind of greedy, like he's saying, 'Elijah, your ministry was pretty good... but I'd like mine to be twice as awesome!' But actually, in Jewish families the double portion was the inheritance of the eldest son. So Elisha is really saying, 'Elijah, I want to be your successor, your heir, the one who inherits your ministry. And to do that, I need the Holy Spirit.'

Elijah responds, 'You've asked for a difficult thing.' It's not his job to give Elisha the Holy Spirit. He can't empower him for the difficult work of being a prophet. So he leaves it in God's hands: 'If you see me when I'm taken from you, it will be yours.'

And that's exactly what happens. Elisha sees Elijah get whisked up to heaven. And then Elisha picks up Elijah's hairy cloak, the uniform of a prophet, and goes back to the Jordan river. Here's the test, the moment of truth. He repeats what Elijah did just before: he rolls up the cloak, he strikes the water, and then he says, 'Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' This is the big question! Elijah is gone... now what? Has God left too? As the waters of the river peel apart in front of Elisha, he steps forward and walks down a hallway of water and arrives on the other side without even wetting his socks. And in verse 15, the group of prophets watching from a distance understand exactly what is happening: 'The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.'

It's such an exciting moment. That feeling of sadness and fear that we saw at the start... it begins to melt away as a golden beam of a sunrise bursts over the hills. **God is still with us!**

The Bible is full of different eras, different leaders... but one thing holds them all together: *the Holy Spirit*. The very same Spirit that rested on Moses, and Joshua, and Elijah, and Elisha... that same Spirit appeared at the Jordan river again when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Just like in our text, something descended from heaven: the Spirit of God descending like a dove to empower Jesus for his ministry. And just as Elisha asked for the inheritance of the firstborn, so the Father's voice boomed from heaven, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'

But then, a few years after this, there was another day of sadness and fear. After three years of amazing preaching and miracles, after dying and rising from the dead... Jesus went up into heaven just as Elijah did. And he left behind him a group of terrified men, cowering in a lounge room, feeling utterly useless for the task that lay ahead of them. 'Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' The answer came a few days later when fire came down from heaven again. The Holy Spirit! The Spirit of Jesus Christ, given to the church, given to us.

In John 16:7, Jesus said, It's a good thing that I'm going away, because I will send you the Holy Spirit. The all-powerful one who is everywhere at once... in every church, in every believer... God with us every single day, strengthening us for the daunting work of evangelism, helping us change as we battle against our sinful flesh, giving us love and patience when we feel empty and angry, melting hearts that seem as cold and hard as ice.

Without the Spirit, little Jacob and Murray will never love and trust God. But *with the Spirit, nothing will be able to stop them from loving and trust God*. This is what we place our hope in. This is what we pray for. This is what gives us confidence. The Spirit is with us, and moving, and powerful.

We began by talking about things that daunt us and scare us. I wonder what that is for you at the moment? I know I wrestle with so many fears. Fears about the future, about my family, about the church, about my ministry, about my sinfulness. But here's the amazing news God has for us this morning: We have the Holy Spirit, and so we can have absolute confidence that *nothing* can stop God's plan. Not a vacant pulpit, not a hostile world, not a stubborn heart.

So far we've been reminded of God's amazing plan and his comforting power. Now, third and finally...

### 3. God reminds us of his promise.

At first glance, the last two stories in this passage seem totally random. But there's a clue here that we should read chapter 2 as one whole... and *the clue is in the geography*. Notice in verse 2, Elijah and Elisha go to Bethel. Then in verse 4 they go to Jericho, and then to the Jordan river. But then notice how this is reversed late in the chapter. From the Jordan River, Elisha goes to Jericho in v18, where he heals the water, and then finally he goes to Bethel in v23 where we get the incident with the bears. So the story moves from Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan, and then back from the Jordan to Jericho to Bethel. What's going on here? What's the significance of this pattern?

Remember we said that Elijah's ministry has been about judgement. And now, as his ministry comes to an end, he actually crosses the Jordan and *leaves* the promised land. It's a reversal of the conquest when Israel first came into the land as God's covenant people. It's a symbolic warning of what will happen if Israel keeps rejecting God and turning to other gods... they will be exiled and cast out of the land.

But then, as Elisha comes back into the land, we get a glimmer of hope. This is a new conquest, a promise that those who are faithful to God will survive the exile and come back into the land. There are days of grace ahead... but only for those who remember God's covenant promises and come back to him.

And this is really what the last two stories are about. We get this strange story about the people of Jericho coming to Elisha in v19 and saying, our water supply is poisoned. And so Elisha takes a bowl with some salt in it, throws the salt into the water... and God heals the water. It might be a bit strange, but *it's a beautiful picture of what happens when we cry out to God for healing*. The city of Jericho used to be cursed, but now it's healed and blessed by God's grace.

When we come back to God, relying on Jesus, longing for his Spirit... he delights to heal us, and forgive us, and comfort us. Can I invite you to do this right now - maybe for the first time, maybe for the thousandth time? In your heart, come back to God. 'I need healing, I need your Spirit, I need your grace. I've been wandering, and worrying, and sinning, but now I'm coming back to you again through Jesus. I'm repenting, and trusting, and I want to find all my hope and strength in you.'

That's the story of the healed water. But we also have to pay attention to the sobering story in verses 23-25. **This is the flipside.** Those who turn to Jesus will find living waters and streams of grace, but those who say to Jesus 'get out of my life' will experience the judgement of God.

It's hard to know exactly how old these kids are... the Hebrew word could refer to young people aged anywhere from 12 to 30. They're definitely old enough to know better. Elisha is minding his own business, walking along the road, when this mob come after him and start yelling, 'Get out of here, baldy.' Literally, 'Go up, baldhead.' Maybe they're saying, 'Go up to heaven like Elijah did, we don't want you', or maybe they're saying, 'Go up the road, get out of here.' Either way, they aren't just being a bit disrespectful. By insulting God's chosen prophet, they're rejecting God himself. They live in Bethel, a wicked town that worshipped at a golden calf shrine. *They represent those people in Israel who continue to hate and reject God...* and so Elisha curses them.

And actually, their punishment isn't as random as it might seem. In Leviticus 26:22, God promised that if his people rejected his covenant of grace, they would be cursed. Listen to this: 'I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children.' So, as one commentator put it, these are 'covenant bears.'

Imagine you get home this afternoon and find a fancy envelope in your letter box. It has your name calligraphy on the front, and a red seal on the back. Inside you find a letter from her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. Written with her own hand, she tells you that you've been chosen for a trip to London. You are one of just 10 members from the entire kingdom, randomly selected to spend a week with the Queen at her palace. Don't worry about COVID stuff... she's chartered a private jet. And don't worry about money... all costs are covered.

Now I'm not a big fan of the royals. I don't tend to follow the drama or get very excited about the monarchy. But if I received an invite like this, it would be a *big deal*. I'd be on Google, checking out photos of Buckingham Palace, planning what you're meant to wear when you meet the Queen, working out how to hold my teacup and my cutlery.

This invite is a much bigger deal than a mate asking you round to watch the game with a few beers.

Why? Because the person is incredibly important, and because the invite is incredibly generous. *The very thing that makes the offer so wonderful is also what makes rejecting it... if you chose to do that... such a big deal.*

When the great God of the universe says, I have a plan that I've been unfolding for thousands of years, a plan to save the world and I've sacrificed my previous Son to make it possible, and I've sent the holy spirit to help you and heal you and live with you... Then it is a very big deal, in fact, it's a terrible thing, to say, *Nah*. Go back to where you came from, God. Take your Son, take your Spirit, take your offer of total forgiveness, take your grace and love, take your promise of a new world with new bodies that never ache or break... Take it all. I'm not interested.

Do you see how the very thing that makes the offer so wonderful is also what makes rejecting it so serious? Our hope and prayer is that as Jacob and Murray grow up in Christian homes, and in this church, they will come to realise just how privileged they are, just how glorious God's promise are... And they will never know a day -when they did *not* know and trust and love our wonderful Saviour.

Well, I really hope that you find this passage to be a comfort and encouragement... Because through Jesus, God is unfolding an incredible plan of salvation. He has given us his Holy Spirit. And this morning again, he promises healing and grace to us as we come to him.