

Where is the LORD, God of Elijah?

(2 Kings 2:9-25)

This sermon was preached last Sunday, March 06, 2011, as the fifth in the sermon series on, “God, Israel, and Elisha.”

The writer of 2 Kings brings us to the time when Elisha, Elijah’s long time servant, is about to take over prophetic leadership from Elijah. God has called Elijah to his heavenly retirement. God has called Elisha to take his place. This is a time of transition for Elisha, who will step into the shoes of the most celebrated star in the Hall of Fame of Yahweh’s prophets. It is a time of transition for the sons of prophets, the student prophets, who will now follow a new leader, mentor, and head prophet. It is also a time of transition for the northern kingdom of Israel, as they see God’s ways and learn to obey God’s Word through the prophet Elisha.

Today, I’m going to expound from the text Elisha’s question, “*Where’s the LORD, God of Elijah?*” According to the context of the story, it is a test question, really—a question of confirmation, whether the God of Elijah is now truly with Elisha. When Elisha asked, “*Where is the LORD, God of Elisha?*,” he is asking whether the spirit and power of God upon Elijah is now truly with Elisha. When Elisha asked, “*Where is the LORD, God of Elisha?*,” he is asking whether the blessing and authorization of Yahweh is now truly with Elisha.

That is a good question for us today. When we ask, “*Where is the LORD, God of Elisha?*,” we are really asking whether the Spirit and power of God is upon our lives, our church, our work, and our ministry. When Elisha asked, “*Where is the LORD, God of Elisha?*,” we are asking whether the blessing of God is upon us.

I’d like to point out three things about the power of God upon Elisha. As we learn these three things, I hope and pray that we will also learn how we can appropriate and apply God’s power upon our lives. God’s power is there for us, but how do we utilize it for His glory?

Divine Power Tested¹

(READ 2:13-14) Elisha wanted a token, a sign, or proof that God’s power upon Elijah is now also upon him. Recall that it was Elijah who called down fire from heaven. The fire came down from heaven and consumed all the water on the altar and around the altar, including the offerings on the altar. It was Elijah who pronounced judgment against King Ahab and his wife Jezebel for their sins. It was the same Elijah who confronted several hundred prophets of Baal at the confrontation in Mt. Carmel. This is the spirit and power of Elijah.

Elisha wanted a token, a sign, and a proof that the same power of God on Elijah is also on him. To test the power of God, he takes the cloak of Elijah and stands at the bank of the river Jordan. Then he strikes the water with the cloak. The water parted to one side and to the other side, producing dry ground in the middle. Then Elisha walked over the dry ground. This is exactly what Elijah did in v. 8. God manifested His grace, blessing, and power upon Elisha by causing the water to part before him.

And so we learn two things here about how to prove the power of God in our lives, in our church, and in our ministries.

First, if you will prove the power of God’s grace, use whatever spiritual gifts that you have.² Paul wrote Timothy, “*Do not neglect the gift you have*” (1 Tim. 4:14, ESV). What spiritual gift has God given you? Some of you have the gift of encouragement, the gift of giving, the gift of leadership, the gift of exhortation, the gift of teaching, the gift of preaching, or the gift of helping. Each one of you has received at least one spiritual gift. Use that for the building up of the body of Christ.

Do you wonder why you don’t see the power of God sometimes? Maybe you’re not using the divine gift of God in you. It’s not because God is not working. It’s because you are not using what God has given you. If you will use that gift, then you will see the power of God working through you!

Don’t just sit there doing nothing for the Lord! Do something with your divine abilities. Find a way to serve the Lord with your divine ability.

¹ I have adapted the three-point outline from H. D. M. Spence, ed., *The Second Book of the Kings* (TPC; London: Funk and Wagnalls, n. d.), 29.

² Spence, *The Second*, 29.

Second, do all things by fervent prayer. Serve God as you pray, and pray as you serve God.

Elisha knew that the cloak of Elijah is useless, unless God is with him. And so he sought the Lord and expected the Lord's answer. When he asked the question, "*Where is the LORD, God of Elijah?*," he was already expecting an answer from God.

I heard a story about a little agricultural town that survived by reaping a good harvest every year. For many months, there was no rain. So the town leader called on everyone to go to the town plaza in the early morning and pray for God to send rain. Everybody went, including a little girl. Everybody arrived carrying nothing. But the little girl arrived at the plaza carrying an umbrella in her hand. Who do you think expected an answer from God?

Jesus said, "If you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matt. 21:21-22, NKJV). I tell you, if you want to see the power of God, better pray and expect God to do mighty things. Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be yours.

If we desire the blessing of God in our lives and the power of God in our ministries, we must seek God in prayer, and expect God's answers by faith. Our church theme from 2010-11 is, "*Build His House.*" But Ps. 127:1 says, "*Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain*" (Ps. 127:1, ESV).

Divine Purposes Doubted

In v. 15, when the sons of prophets saw the parting of the waters, they recognized that Elijah's spirit now rests on Elisha. So they bowed their heads down to the ground before Elisha, out of reverence for him. But it seems that they doubted Elisha (READ vv. 16-17). They wanted Elisha to send 50 strong men to go and find the body of Elijah. They thought that the Spirit might have deposited Elijah's body somewhere in the hills and valleys. Elisha said, "*No, you shall not send these men.*"

But the sons of prophets kept urging Elisha. The verb, "urged" (Heb. *patsar*) means, "push, press" (BDB). They kept pushing and pressing Elisha till he was ashamed. And the verb, "ashamed" (Heb. *bosh*) means, "be disconcerted" (Holladay) with their psychological pressure. They pressured Elisha for a long time that Elisha felt confusion in his mind and emotions. That's what the word, "ashamed," means here.

Finally, Elisha gave in to their pressure. They sent out 50 men to search for Elijah's body. But after three days, they came back with nothing. Elisha said to them in v. 18, "*Did I not tell you, 'Do not go'?*" In effect, these prophets doubted the word and wisdom of Elisha.

When they doubted the person of Elisha, they also doubted the purposes of God behind Elisha. Because under divine guidance, the words of the prophet are the words of God. When you doubt the words of God, you are actually doubting the will of God.

Do you find yourself doing the same thing? Sometimes, we question the Word of God in a sermon. Sometimes, we doubt the will of God in a word of advice from godly people. If you question the Word of God for your life or for your ministry, then you question the purpose of God.

Brethren, you must learn to submit to God's purposes in your life. If God wants you to give 10% of your income to the Lord's work, then give that 10%, for obeying God's Word fulfills God's purpose to glorify God in your life of giving. If God wants our church to plant daughter churches, then we must plant daughter churches, for obeying God's Word fulfills God's purpose to go and make disciples for Christ. You must learn to obey God's Word; for in God's Word is to be found God's purpose to glorify Himself.

Where is the LORD, God of Elijah, in your life and our church? If you are to prove the purposes of the Lord in your life and ministry, you'd better obey God's Word, for in God's Word is God's purpose.

Divine Presence Demonstrated

To show Israel that Elisha is now God's prophet, the writer of 2 Kings includes three miracles performed by Elisha to three groups of people. The first miracle is the miracle of partition before the sons of prophets (v. 14). In this miracle of partition, Elisha struck the water of the river Jordan with the cloak of Elijah, and the water parted. Then Elisha crossed over the dry ground in the middle. The sons of the prophets saw it. God confirmed His presence upon Elisha before them.

The second miracle is the miracle of purification before the men of the city of Jericho. (READ vv. 19-22). The water was so bad that the land was “unfruitful.” The word, “unfruitful” (Heb. *shakal*), is a participle which means, “make childless; cause barrenness, or abortion” (BDB); “cause miscarriage” (Holladay). The water was so bad that it caused mothers to miscarry their babies, causing death and childlessness. The land was like a mother without children.

But Elisha performed a miracle of purification. He asked for a bowl of salt and sprinkled the salt over the contaminated water. Salt was rubbed on meat offerings, to make it holy for God. Salt symbolized the covenant of salt between Israel and the Lord (Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; Ezek. 23:24).³ Thus, Elisha’s use of salt here seems to symbolize Yahweh’s renewal of his commitment to heal Israel. Elisha then declared the word of the LORD that from now on, the water shall cause no death or miscarriage anymore.

Notice that the waters were healed not because of the salt, but because of the word of the LORD. Rather, the waters were healed by the use of salt as a symbol of God’s renewed commitment to heal Israel. So we see here a demonstration of divine presence to Israel.

Brethren, God has entered Himself into a covenant with you who call on Christ. “*Where is the LORD, God of Elijah?*” The answer is that His blessing is upon us in Christ. He has chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world, that you should be holy and blameless before him (Eph. 1:3-4). “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*” (Eph. 1:7, ESV). He lives in you by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s seal, guaranteeing your future inheritance.

Do you know this in your heart? Paul said, I pray that God “*may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, [1] that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, [2] what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and [3] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe*” (Eph. 1:17-19, ESV).

Do you know and experience this power? Live for God for then, you shall see the power of God.

The third miracle is a miracle of destruction before the “bad boys of Bethel.” (READ v. 23) The word, “boys” (Heb. *naar*) can mean a young boy, lad, or youth. (BDB) In Gen. 37:2, Joseph was already 17 years old, but he was called a *naar*, a young boy or “youth.” Paul R. House writes that the phrase, “small boys,” “can refer to youths from twelve to thirty years old (cf. 1 Sam 16:11–12; 2 Sam 14:21; 18:5), i.e., old enough to show respect for God’s prophet.”⁴

But these youths insulted the prophet Elisha. They said to him, “Go up, you baldhead!” Maybe they’ve heard of how Elijah went up to heaven. Now, they want Elisha to do the same. Why did they insult Elisha?

Bob Deffinbaugh writes that Bethel was one of two cities (the other was the city of Dan) where King Jeroboam established false worship. Jeroboam placed one of the golden calves for the people to worship. Bethel became a place of idolatry and contempt for God’s Word. The people became anti-Word of God and anti-prophet of God. The bad boys of Bethel reflected the kind of anti-prophet attitude that prevailed among the people of Bethel.⁵

What happened next? Elisha turned to them and cursed them. Then two-she bears came out of the forest and tore forty-two of the boys (v. 24) Boys, never ever insult a bald man! The word, “cursed” (Heb. *qalal*) means, “declared cursed.” Elisha declared that they are cursed and judged by calling on the name of Yahweh. Elisha was actually calling on the authority of Yahweh to judge them. The basis for this call is found in Lev. 26:21-22: “*Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins. And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted.*” (ESV)

It was not a magic formula. Rather, it was a declaration of God’s judgment against them. By this miracle of destruction, God once again confirmed His presence and power upon Elisha.

³ J. Gray, *1 and 2 Kings* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 427.

⁴ Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC 8; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 260.

⁵ Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Life and Times of Elisha the Prophet— Elisha’s Accreditation (2 Kings 2:19-3:27). Cited March 5, 2011. Online: <http://bible.org/seriespage/life-and-times-elisha-prophet%E2%80%94elisha%E2%80%99s-accreditation-2-kings-2198211327>

“Where then is the LORD, God of Elijah?” God’s presence goes with those who proclaim His Word. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations; and I am with you always to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, ESV).

God’s power goes with the proclamation of God’s Word. That’s why I’m always excited when we go church planting or evangelizing. Because as we proclaim His Word, we shall see His power.