

February 19, 2012
Transfiguration Sunday

“Elijah and Elisha’s Grand Encounter with God’s Glory”

2 KINGS 2:1-12

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. ³ The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” Elisha replied, “so be quiet.” ⁴ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho. ⁵ The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” he replied, “so be quiet.” ⁶ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them walked on. ⁷ Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. ⁸ 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. ⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied. ¹⁰ “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not.” ¹¹ As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more.

My brother and sister and I were sleeping in the back of the car on the way home after a birthday party. Dad stopped the car on the long drive way that led up to our farm. He woke us up and told us to look outside. The sky was shimmering with multicolored lights. At first we started to cry in fear because we had never seen anything like this in our lives. But then my father said, “Don’t be afraid. It is the Northern Lights. Just look at how beautiful they are.” If you have ever seen a grand display of the Northern Lights you know what I am referring to.

Imagine for a moment what it must have been like for Elisha to watch Elijah being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with fiery horses and a fiery chariot. Elisha shouts out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” He carried this grand encounter with God’s glory with him for the rest of his life.

Peter, James and John never forgot that amazing moment when they were with Jesus on the holy mountain. They saw Jesus transfigured before them. “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” Later on Peter would reflect on being eyewitnesses of Jesus’ majesty and hearing the Father’s voice from heaven

saying, "This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased." John would write "We have seen the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

When someone you love dies in Jesus, God sends his holy angels to take them home to be with their Lord. We don't see the angels come in fiery chariots with fiery horses, but we know the glory is there because of what God tells us here in his Word. Do we have to wait until our moment of death to experience the glory of the Lord in our lives? No, dear Christian, every moment of your life is lived with Jesus. His glory surrounds you and anchors your life. Let's take a closer look at the glory of the Lord that filled the lives of Elijah and Elisha. That same glory of the Lord is also present in your life and mine.

The glory that fills our lives now

Elisha did not want the prophet Elijah to leave him because of all the great moments they had together in the glory of the Lord. The Lord made it clear to Elijah that he was going to take him home to heaven. He told Elisha, "Stay here, the Lord has sent me to Bethel." Elisha could not bear the thought of losing Elijah. He says, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live I will not leave you."

You can relate to what Elisha is going through. You don't like it when the Lord calls people home to heaven that you dearly love. You don't like it when they pack up their belongings and move to a different part of the country. I am holding in my hand a cup that was given to my wife by one of her good friends. Inside the cup it says, "Forever friend." When you are connected to Jesus as a branch is connected to a vine, you are connected to something very special in this life and that connection continues forever on into eternity.

It must have been very special to be around a prophet like Elijah because of all the mighty miracles the Lord allowed Elijah to perform. Mention the name Elijah and you think of how he called down fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice and even burn up the stones and lick up the water in a trench to prove to the people that the Lord is God. Mention the name of Elijah and you think of how the Lord allowed him to stretch a small handful of flour and a little bit of oil into enough food to support Elijah, a widow and her son for a few months. Elisha was privileged to see the glory of the Lord shining through his close friend Elijah. When the sons of the prophets tell Elisha that the Lord is going to take Elijah home, Elisha says, "Yes, I know, do not speak of it."

It is a very touching scene as Elijah and Elisha pass through Jericho. Once again the sons of the prophets tell Elisha, "Do you know the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" Once again Elisha asks them not to talk about it. Elijah wants Elisha to stay behind as he walks to the Jordan River so he can be alone when the Lord takes him home. Elisha says again, "As the Lord lives and you live I will not leave." Then it says, "So the two of them walked on." They walked on together. I wonder what they talked about. Oh, I think we know what they talked about. They must have been talking about the Lord and his mercy and kindness and love that never fail. When two people love the Lord, they talk about the Lord with each other and share his glory with each other.

My dear Christian, pause and think of all the grand moments in life that you have enjoyed on this earth with people who know Jesus and his glory as you do. The miracles that

Elisha saw Elijah perform are small compared to the miracles that you and your friends in Jesus have seen with your eyes of faith. On the night of his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and side and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus spoke these amazing words that apply to us. "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed." It is all so real to you. You gather with your dear Christian family and friends around a manger in Bethlehem to worship a tiny baby as your Lord and God. You read about Jesus performing miracles and it is all so real to you. You see Jesus dying on the cross and you believe in the miracle that his blood pays for every sin you have committed. When you hear about Jesus being transfigured on the holy mountain, your eyes of faith see what Peter, James and John saw with their physical eyes. We walk down the road of life together with people who are 100% sure that there is nothing they can find in themselves to save themselves from sin and its consequences. We humbly confess, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We find our glory, our hope, our forgiveness and our peace with God in Jesus. With a little bit of bread and a little bit of wine, you receive the body and blood of your Lord.

Elijah and Elisha walked on together. They come to the Jordan River. Elijah rolls up his coat and strikes the water. The waters divide just as they did at the Red Sea and the Jordan River when the people entered the Promised Land. There is no squishy mud under their sandals as the cross on the river bottom. They walk across on dry land. So amazed is Elisha at this miracle, he boldly asks Elijah, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." We walk on together with Christian friends, praying as we walk along, "Lord, give me a double portion of your Holy Spirit. Lord, send me your Holy Spirit to comfort me. Send me your Holy Spirit to remind me I am your dear children. Send your Holy Spirit to help me see the depth of Jesus' love for me. Send me your Holy Spirit to help me bear witness to what I have seen in your glory." If we could only count how many times the Lord has given us a double portion of his Spirit as he did also for Elisha, we would be overwhelmed at the magnitude of God's love for us.

But now the end is near. It is time for Elijah to go home to be with the Lord. The time comes, it always does, when we have to say goodbye to people we love. Did you ever hear about Gordon and Norma Yeager? They were married for 72 years. Gordon didn't see the car coming when he pulled out from the stop sign. Both of them were together in the hospital emergency room on beds next to each other holding hands as they always did. Their son was there when Norma died as Gordon held her hand. An hour later he also died. It is not often that two people say goodbye to each other so close together in time.

The glory that fills our lives when Jesus takes us home

God's angels were there to take Elijah home. "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind." The Lord took Elijah home without having him go through the process of dying just as he did with Enoch of whom it says, "And the Lord took him and he was no more." If Jesus comes in clouds of glory to end this world in our lifetime we will be taken up to be with the Lord immediately without having to face death.

God's angels are also involved with taking people home to Jesus when they die and their

souls leave their bodies. When poor Lazarus died with his body covered with sores, Jesus tells us, "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side." When Stephen was about to be stoned to death he cried out, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." In one of our hymns we sing these comforting words, "Lord, let at last your angels come, To Abram's bosom take me home That I may die unfearing. And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep, Until your reappearing. And then from death awaken me That my own eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, your glorious faced, My Savior and my Fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise You without end." The Apostle Paul longed for that glorious moment when the Lord would take him home. He said, "I long to be absent from this body and present with the Lord."

Some of you sitting here this morning have been at the side of your loved ones when they were taken home to be with the Lord. As soon as they died, you lived with the comfort and peace of knowing their soul went home to be with the Lord immediately. It did not float around the faulted spheres of the universe looking for other people or even animals to inhabit as reincarnation teaches. We don't see chariots and horses of fire, but we know that Jesus who appeared in glory on the mount of Transfiguration is there with his angels to take us home. Stephen prayed as he died, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." When Jesus returns on clouds of glory, he will bring his angels with him to raise us our bodies back to life again and reunite us with our souls. "We will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." We walk on together with Elijah and Elisha praying as we walk together, "Even so Lord Jesus come quickly." Amen