

~Other Speakers G-L: Denis Lyle:

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-18

REQUIREMENTS FOR SERVICE

Foreign tourists in Britain are said to be amazed by the amount of time we are prepared to spend in that great British institution... the queue. Of course this must not be mistaken for patience for it not patient queuing. I cannot speak for you but I get really frustrated when I have to wait for anything. Whether it is sitting in an airport waiting for a plane, or sitting waiting for the traffic lights to change, or waiting for a slowcoach in front of me to give offside. I hate waiting. Indeed if the truth were told most of us are the same! Think about it. Nine months is a long time to wait for a couple who are expecting the birth of their first child. Or take those engaged students whose wedding may have been planned for after their graduation: a year is a long time for people who are in love. The examples are endless: apprenticeships: training programs: they all test our patience, our ability to endure, our commitment to the goal, and the genuineness of our call as we wait for the desired end.

But there is probably no wait so testing as the wait we endure between the onset of a genuine call from God and its actual implementation in active ministry. My, there are occasions when the Lord seems to be really taking His time. And the reason for this is simple. During this time gap, the Lord is preparing us for what He has in mind for us. It takes time for us to made ready. It can take years to shape our personality and gifts to fulfil the role God has for our lives, years in which we foolishly moan, whine, complain, and perhaps resist God's dealings with us.

Now the chronology in the two Books of Kings suggests that it took around ten years from the incident when Elijah threw his cloak over the shoulders of Elisha, to the next episode recorded for us here in (2 Kings 2)

Ten long years! How long might it take for you If you think in terms of multiples of ten years you'll be pretty close to the mark. Do you recall that Moses was forty years old when the stirrings began in his heart to act as liberator in Egyptian slavery His rash attempts to begin that ministry by killing an Egyptian taskmaster where premature. It resulted in fleeing from Egypt, with another forty years yet to elapse while Moses worked in obscurity as a shepherd before his call was reiterated at the burning bush. (Exod 3:1-2)

My, God is never in a hurry. God takes time to prepare us, and while this preparation goes on we must learn to trust Him! God is in charge of our promotion. When it comes it will neither be too late, nor too early. Like all God's dealings it will be right on time. Preparing for that time, however is a complex process. All kinds of factors and testings are brought to bear on our lives. Ills: I'am told that the beautiful orange groves near the town of Jaffa are so sheltered that for some part of the year the perfectly ripe fruit of last year is seen hanging side by side with the blossom of this year.

My, blossom and fruit were side by side on this journey: Elijah so fully matured that he was ready for translation, side by side with Elisha who was just blossoming out, ready to begin his public ministry.

But would Elisha be able to carry on, without Elijah

Would he be able to follow in the footsteps of his eminent predecessor What were and are the requirements for the service of the Lord Well, notice there are three. There is:

(1) THE RECOGNITION OF ELIJAH'S GOD

Look at (2:14) This is not a cry of despair or unbelief. It is the cry of dependence which rises from the depths of Elisha's soul. Right at the beginning of his public ministry Elisha calls on the name of the Lord for he was so conscious of his own unfitness for the task that God had called him to do. Elijah had been translated to a higher sphere of service, but the God of Elijah had not left the world. Elisha's task depended not on the REPUTATION of Elijah, but on the RESOURCES of the living God! Elisha recognised that the God of Elijah was His God also. He recognized that the God who:

(a) DEFEATED ELIJAH'S ENEMIES WAS HIS GOD ALSO:

Do you recall that memorable scene on Mount Carmel

(1 Kings 18:21) One of the most dramatic acts in Israels history was about to take place. There was a public contest between the forces of good and evil. On the one hand was Baal and his hundreds of false prophets, on the other hand was Jehovah and his lone servant Elijah. The challenge was issued, "the God that answereth by fire let him be God". (1 Kings 18:24) Do you recall what happened The prophets of Baal cried to their god, but there was no response But then Elijah prayed and what a masterpiece of precise praying it was. "Lord God of Abraham... then the fire of the Lord fell", (1 Kings 18:36-38) And the false prophets were defeated and destroyed! Now Elisha recognised

that the God who defeated Elijah's enemies and revealed His Power was His God also!

Some three thousand years have passed since those good old days! Does the God of Elijah still live Is He still ALL - POWERFUL Is He still able to make the impossible possible Is He still on the Throne Yes, He is still THE GOD OF POWER! Do you feel that your problem is too complex for God Do you feel that your family is too hard for God Do you feel that your temptations are too much for God My, "is anything too hard for the Lord" (Gen 18:14) "Where" (a)

(b) SUPPLIED ELIJAH'S NEEDS WAS HIS GOD ALSO:

Did God provide for Elijah Yes! "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee THERE ..". "I have commanded a widow woman THERE to sustain thee."

(1 Kings 17:4, 9) The will of God will never lead me, where the grace of God cannot keep me. Ills: When you go abroad you're always anxious about your accomodation. What will it be like Can you imagine what it must have been like for Elijah to stay in the RAVEN HOTEL Have you experienced any of God's ravens Oh, be thankful for Gods natural supply (the brook) for the Lord does not always send ravens. He expects us to scoop the water out of the brook through our own effort. But sometimes its not the BROOK its the BIRDS, He sends the ravens and how thankful we ought to be. Our God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills will take care of you and me! "Where is the Lord... Elijah" He is the God of POWER: He is the God of PROVISION. But then Elisha recognised that the God:

(c) ANSWERED ELIJAH'S PRAYERS WAS HIS GOD ALSO:

The God of POWER: the God of PROVISION and now the God who answers PRAYER! Do you recall what James says about Elijah "He prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it rained not... and he prayed again and the heaven gave rain". (James 5:17) "Where is the Lord God of Elijah" Where He always was and is On the Throne in Control waiting to be implored by His people. Do you believe that the God of Elijah still lives Some of you must have doubts, for the Lord never see's you at the prayer meeting! Either on a Friday or Sunday ...! My, do you no longer believe in the power of prayer Do you no longer value the place of prayer Do you no longer plead the promises of prayer Is your absence from the public place of prayer, evidence of your neglect of the private place of prayer "Where is the Lord God of Elijah" The God of Elijah still lives... His character knows no change. His resources cannot be exhausted... the God of Elijah, of Paul, of Luther, of Whitfield, of Moody, of Spurgeon of Nicholson is still the same. (1)

(2) THE RECEPTION OF ELIJAH'S SPIRIT

The only possession Elijah left behind was his mantle. The mantle or "aba", is more than a piece of clothing. Its part of the very personality of the prophet. Elijah's mantle has spiritual significance. It was the symbol of spiritual power (2:15) and speaks to us of the Holy Spirit. (Jn 15:26-27 Acts 1:8) Ills: F.B.Meyer says:

" There is no work to which God calls you for which He is not prepared to qualify you". Now its interesting to notice the circumstances in which Elisha received this equipment, this power from above. Indeed if you look at this chapter you'll notice that Elisha faced a series of TESTS before he possessed this power. There was:

(a) THE TEST OF LOYALTY:

What was the purpose of this long walk that took them from Gilgal to Jordan via Bethel and Jericho Why did Elijah say three times to Elisha, "Tarry here I pray thee". (2:2,4,6) Did he want privacy Did he wish to spare Elisha the pain of parting Possibly, but more probably it was to test Elisha's resolve, loyalty and fidelity! My, we live in an age of rank fickleness and fragile commitments. Obligations are loosely held and CONVENIENT LOVE (as long at it suits me) rather than COVENANT LOVE (whether I feel like it or not) marks what ought to be the most binding relationships like friendship: business: marriage: church life! Some people even spiritualise their unfaithfulness. "The Lord told me to leave... I had a word from the Lord to indicate that I should change churches... God has removed my burden for this place". That may be so in some cases, in most cases it simply amounts to "I just feel like going! I'am through with all this! I'am out of here!"

Are you like Elisha or Demas For Elisha leaving was not an option. "I will not leave thee". Of Demas Paul said, "Demas hath forsaken me having loved this present world". (2 Tim 4:10) So he left his Christian work and his association with Paul. Now are you like Elisha or Demas (a) Are you loyal in your friendships, loyal to your marriage, loyal in your place of work

Are you loyal to this church and its leaders When the testings come and you hear those voices, "You'd be much happier with her... they don't love you any more you're not important around here... they'd love to get rif of you", God is allowing your loyalty to be tested. Pass the test and God has many wonderful things in store for you. (a)

(b) THE TEST OF LONELINESS:

Look at (2:3) I wonder was there a little hint of jealousy there Were they glad that a relationship they had seen but never shared would be over Perhaps they were implying that Elisha's greatness would be shrunk when he no longer lived under Elijah's shadow! Or maybe they were bringing home to Elisha that he was truly on his own. "The Lord is going to take your master from you today". The prophets were saying, " Can we expect a lead from you Are you up to the task Where do we go from there" There is a correct emphasis today upon teamwork within the service of the Saviour! We are DIFFERENT from each other, but we are to be DEPENDENT on each other and we must work hard at that.

Yet ministry can be a very lonely calling! We may be shunned, or criticized or misunderstood. Painful isolation often comes because of faithfulness to God.

A position of responsibility is a lonely place to be, yet we must be prepared to face this kind of loneliness!

(c) THE TEST OF LOVE:

" Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee". (2:9) It sounds as if Elijah was giving his associate a blank-cheque. What would Elisha write in the box What amount would he fill in What was his heart

really set upon What did he desire above all

else "What can I do for you before I am taken from you" Well, Elisha did not ask for fame, travel, financial security. He did not want a "double portion", of Elijah's air-miles, salary, royalties or tape sales... only a double portion of his spirit. Now when Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he was asking for the first-born's portion. (Deut 21:17) In other words what he had in mind was that he might be equipped to fully represent his ascended master.

Elijah was soon to depart, Elisha was to carry on his work and he wanted to be regarded as Elijah's heir or successor! He wanted power to do what Elijah did.

He did not want to be a SENSATION, he wanted to be a SERVANT. He was putting first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. (c) Can I ask this... would you pass this test What is your heart really set upon What do you desire above all else What would you write in the box this... Fitness: Family: Fame: Fortune: Future My, the Lord is asking you,

" Lovest thou me more than these" (Jn 21:15) Do you long to have spiritual power in your ministry Well, would you pass the test of (a) (b) (b) We're thinking about the REQUIREMENTS FOR SERVICE. (1) (2)

(3) THE REVELATION OF ELIJAH'S POWER

You see Elisha lost no time in putting to the test the endowment which he had received. Following the example of Elijah he turned to the Jordan and smote its waters with the mantle. And in his hand also it became an instrument of power as "the waters parted". Would anyone question our need for the power of the Holy Spirit today My, our lives are barren: our churches dead: our service ineffective and we desperately need the power of the Holy Spirit for our:

(a) PERSONAL WALK:

Where did Elisha get this power At Jordan. And in the Bible Jordan is symbolic as a place of death. (Matt 3:16) Do you recall that Israel had to cross Jordan before entering Canaan (Joshua ch 3) In the language of the NT this is entering the truth that Paul expressed,

" Not I but Christ". (Gal 2:20) Ills: Someone has said,

" When Christ is on the throne, self is on the cross, when self is on the throne Christ is on the cross". Which is with you Is your daily prayer "May this poor self .."

(b) PUBLIC WITNESS:

Many who hanker after power fail to realise that power is not an end in itself but is simply a means to an end... the Glory of God and the Good of others! Power is not given to make us famous but fruitful, not eminent but effective. Elisha didn't want the cloak for show but for action. He wanted this power to get the job done.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SERVICE (1) (2) (3)

" Where is the Lord God of Elijah" (2:14) My, Elijah may have gone, but Elijah's God is still here.

This is what the company of the prophet's recognised.

" The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha". (2:15) The question is do you recognise this Are you available to God Will you let God take you: cleanse you: fill you: use you for His glory the good of others