

~Other Speakers G-L: Denis Lyle:

2 Kings: 13:14-19

#### ELISHA'S LAST SERMON

Elisha was ill... terminally ill. "Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died". (13:14) And by that statement the writer of this Book has skipped many intervening laps in Elisha's long race with the baton of spiritual anointing which he had seized from Elijah, to bring us, in effect, directly to the last few hundred metres and the finishing tape. A long time had elapsed since Jehu had been anointed King over Israel (9:6).

Jehu reigned over Israel 28 years (10:36) and during his rule, Hazael of Syria had taken part of the land of Israel, which lay east to the Jordan. (10:33) Jehu, was followed by his son Jehoahaz, and he ruled for 17 years.

(13:1) Times became even worse for Israel, for

Ben-hadad, the son of Hazael, now took part of the land of Israel, which lay west of the Jordan. (14:25)

My, so weakened was Israel, that of his whole army

King Jehoahaz was left with only "fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen". (13:7) But God had compassion on His people and He "gave Israel a saviour", (13:5) in the person of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, who on three occasions defeated the Syrians and re-took the cities west of the Jordan, which his father had lost. (13:22-25) Now what has all this got to do with Elisha Just this, for at least 45 years from the accession of Jehu to that of Joash, the history of Elisha is blank. His ministry to Israel as a nation had ceased, and even his more private ministry during this long period of time was unnoticed and unknown. So for 45 years we hear nothing about Elisha, until now the time of his illness and death.

One commentator suggests that by now Elisha was 120 years of age. Can you picture this scene Here he lies, his breathing is laboured, his arms are weak, his hands are heavy, his cheeks are sunken. Here is the man who once restored the dead to life, and so often spoke words of fire which had kindled all Israel. My, have you ever stood by the bed of a dying saint There is something sacred about it, life and death contending over the prostrate form, time and eternity meeting. He who lies on this bed, is soon not to be one of us. The light of another world, will soon burst in upon him. My, to stand by the bed of a faithful minister: an honoured servant: a dear saint is solemn and yet sad.

This was a touching death-bed scene. The King Jehoash came to pay his last respects and Elisha came to deliver his last sermon. As we enter this death-bed scene, what we want to do is listen to the exchange which takes place between these two men. Joash was clearly moved at the sight of the dying prophet. He could not help acknowledging Elisha's true worth to the nation. "My father! My father! The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof". (13:14) In these words Joash not only expressed his own personal sense of grief but he acknowledged his loss to his country.

He would have remembered the help which in the past,

Elisha had rendered to the nation, and he may have hoped that in the present crisis with Syria knocking at the door that more help might be forthcoming. At the Kings words Elisha's strength seem to have revived. He was a true patriot, and his supreme concern in the hour of his death was the future of his nation. It was not in vain, therefore that Joash had come to him in his distress. He had a message to deliver to the King with regard to Israel. So in this strange scene which took place in Elisha's bedroom, the dying prophet becomes the central figure, and issues to his visitor commands that suggest that he, and not Joash, is the real possessor of royalty.

Lets enter into the bedroom of the dying servant and notice:

#### (1) THE TASK TO WHICH JOASH WAS CALLED

Look at (13:14-17) Now what is this business with the arrows all about Well, lets remember that in Eastern Lands instruction by means of symbolic actions was common. Do you recall that when Samuel told the self-willed Saul that "the Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day", he "laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle and it rent". (1 Sam 15:27 Acts 21:10) You see this was a symbolic action. Elisha was symbolically urging God's people to victory over God's enemies. Elisha was being removed from the scene of battle but the fight would still go on. Through this symbolical action, Joash was being called to execute a specific task. In effect this was a call:

#### (a) TO PUBLIC WARFARE:

" Take bow and arrows". (13:15) The cities which Syria had taken from Israel (13:3, 25) must be recovered. The king was to act and act decisively.

Do you see what Elisha was doing He was trying to stir up the sluggish, compromised young king with some enthusiasm to fight the enemy! In effect he say, "be up and doing, smite the enemies of your country". (a)

" Take bow and arrows". Do you know what that is

That's the Lord's call to every Christian! Do you know what's wrong with so many of us For too long we've been on the DEFENSIVE. My, we need to get off the DEFENSIVE and onto the OFFENSIVE and attack the fortified places of error and sin. Ill: Some years ago in the USA there was a football player known as Mike Cohen, he had played for the Miami Dolphins. He was asked on one occasion by a coach to do some recruiting and he agreed. He said, "What kind of player are you looking for coach" Well, he said, " Mike there's a guy when you knock him

down he stays down". Mike said, "We don't want him do we coach" He said, "No, we don't". But he said, "Mike there is that player when you knock him down, he gets up and then when you knock him down again he stays down". "We don't want him either coach". But he said, "Mike there's a man you knock him down and he gets up, you knock him down and he get up, you knock him down and he gets up..." Mike said, "that's the guy we want coach" He said, "No, we don't want him either I want you to find the man who's knocking everyone down, that's the man I want."

My, wouldn't you like to get off the Defensive and onto the Offensive Wouldn't you like to do a little knocking yourself Would you not like to be a force for God Instead of a casualty. Well here's a call (a)

(b) TO PERSONAL WARFARE:

As we're going to see in a moment Elisha was angry at Joash's response, when he told him to smite the ground. Notice what he says in (13:19) "Thou shouldest have."

I wonder will God say that to us when we stand in His presence "Thou shouldest have kept on praying: thou shouldest have continued to intercede". Perhaps some of us will realise the power of prayer in Heaven only by way of retrospect, but then it will be forever too late.

You see some have suggested that Joash failed because he was Fearful and Faithless. My, how are you doing personally as you wage war with that powerful inward foe, the flesh Do you recognise that you have a battle-field within your own breast and your hand must never leave the bow How are you getting on daily as you wage war with sexual sin, gossip, an unbridled tongue, pride, jealousy, envy, bitterness Tell me: are you walking in the Spirit, and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16) Are you mortifying (putting to death) your members which are upon the earth (1)

(2) THE TOUCH BY WHICH HE WAS COMFORTED

Look at (13:16) The trembling hands of the monarch are covered with the rugged hands of the man of God. The hands of a powerful man are upon the hands of a political leader. And My, is there not a need for us to repeat this act today Do we not need to lift up holy hands in prayer "for kings and all that are in authority,"

(1 Tim 2:1) "And Elisha put his hands upon the kings hands". (13:16) How much there is in the touch of a hand... whether it be the fatherly hand of blessing laid upon the head: or the symbolical joining of hands in holy matrimony of those who are to be made man and wife. The contact implies not only sympathy and identity of purpose, but also real living union. Joash experienced the alliance of the supernatural.

You see this joining of hands on the one bow sets forth the alliance between the Christian and His Lord. We are on His side. He is on our side. We may " boldly say, the Lord is my Helper and I will not fear". (Heb 13:6) Joash is not only summoned to act he is now equipped to act. What did this joining of hands signify That:

(a) GOD'S PRESENCE WOULD BE WITH HIM:

What an encouragement for Joash to know, that the Lord of Hosts would accompany him to the field of battle! My, this joining of hands was a message from God. It simply said to Joash, "Fear thou not for I am with thee". (Is 41:10) Can you imagine how the disciples felt when the Saviour placed before them the responsibility of world evangelisation They were to go into the devils territory and deliver souls for the Lord's glory! But not only did Christ instruct them, for He encouraged them, He said, "Lo I am with you."

(Matt 28:20)

Do you need to be reminded of that this... My, you are alone. God is with you! With you in days of blessing and barrenness: of storm and sunshine: progress and opposition. Indeed He himself "hath said I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". (Heb 13:5) (a)

(b) GOD'S POWER WOULD BE UPON HIM:

For as the prophet's hand closed over the kings hand, so the might of the Lord of Hosts would accompany his efforts against the forces of Syria. My, by symbolic action Elisha was saying to him, "The battle is not yours but Gods". (2 Chron 20:15) God's hands of strength would be upon the kings hands of weakness, enduring the fearful king with power. Oh, the touch of that Hand ever conveys strength, and peace and courage. It was because of that Hand, that Gideon long ago faced the hosts of the Midianites with his three hundred unarmed men (Judges 7:7)

It was because of that Hand, that weak, timid, men of Galilee were transformed into the lion-hearted heralds of the cross. My, what can we not do when His Hand is upon us What can we not accomplish when His power is upon us Like Paul, we can say "I can do all things through Christ..." (Phil 4:13) But there was something else conveyed by this joining of hands. (a)(b)

(c) GOD'S PURPOSE WOULD BE FULFILLED THROUGH HIM:

Look at (13:17) What was God's purpose for Israel

Victory! Victory over Syria! God was going to work, yet by, and through a man. Do you know what all this tells us It assures us that if we are really engaged in the Lord's work, we are on the winning side. Do you recall that wonderful promise of victory that Christ made concerning His church He said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

(Matt 16:18) My, do you realise this... that you are on the victory side Oh, I tell you though the church is pressurised: criticised: and ostracised it will never be brought to an end and every member of it will be brought safe to glory.

Let me bring it down to a personal level. You in spite of your fears: failings: falls: foreboding: in spite of the world: flesh and the devil you will never be cast away.

(Jn 10:28) For the VICTORY of the Church is not in doubt! Now oft times we fail: oft times we live in defeat: oft times we know nothing about the arrow of the Lord's deliverance! Why Why is it that we fail so often, when the power available is so unlimited Well, come back once more to this death-bed scene. (1) (2)

### (3) THE TEST THROUGH WHICH WAS JOASH WAS CENSURED

Look at (13:18-19) Joash meekly fired three arrows into the dusty earth around the prophets bed. Why didn't he fire the whole quiverful by faith Why didn't he get excited and let fly with six or seven arrows into the dusty floor beneath the bed My, this was a mock battle that would have predicted the outcome of the real thing. Why not let fly with all at his disposal

Did he feel silly Did he think Elisha was doting Did he really know what was going on Much more likely is the explanation given by Elisha. Joash simply didn't believe it. He didn't believe there could be any connection between firing arrows in private and later seeing total victory in public! My, has the Lord not got the same problem with us We limp in our prayer lives. We struggle to believe that a few words launched from our bedside can achieve anything in the "real world", out there in the public arena Like Joash we don't pray persistently enough to see the breakthrough come. We feel silly. We don't understand. We don't believe. So after two or three attempts we give up.

No wonder Elisha was angry with Joash. (13:19) You see this was simply a test for the King. He had been told his duty. He had received the promise of Divine help. The question was: would he steadfastly apply himself to his appointed task Had he faith and courage and stability enough to continue the conflict so long as there remained a single arrow in his quiver My, the fact that he smote the ground only 3 times revealed the type of man he was. Faithless: half-hearted: lacking in courage! And in "the good fight of faith", the faults of Joash must be carefully shunned. My, if we are going to succeed in the battle we need to:

#### (a) BE TRUE-HEARTED:

This was something that Joash was not. (13:11) Ill: During the USA a deputation came to see Abraham Lincoln, and in the course of their conversation they expressed the hope that the Lord was on their side.

"That is not the thing that I am most concerned about", was the President's reply. His hearers were astonished, what could be of greater importance than the question whether God was on their side They waited for an explanation. "What I am most anxious about", said Lincoln, "is whether we are on the Lord's side". And he was right, for that determines whether or not the Lord is on our side. My, are you on the Lord's side Are you personally loyal to the Lord Jesus (a)

#### (b) BE WHOLE-HEARTED:

Did Joash have any stomach for this fight Did he really want to see Syria defeated We have reason to doubt it. Do you recall on one occasion the Lord Jesus asked two blind men, "What do you want me to do for you" (Matt 20:32) This is a vital question. Most times we have not because we ask not. My, we are about as spiritual as we want to be. We have the kind of church we desired and asked for. Sobering thought, isn't it My, are you wholehearted in your service Are zealous in your prayer life Ill: Hindu "holy men", lift their hands aloft until the arm withers and dies through lack of circulation, but we give up after three times when God is looking for five or six. My, we will never succeed in the battle (a) (b)

#### (b) BE BRAVE-HEARTED:

It will never do to shoot two or three arrows and then leave the field: we must stand our ground and smite the enemy until the last arrow be discharged! Loyalty: zeal:

courage the very qualities Joash did not possess, these are the very requirements of the soldiers of the Lord!

Do you remember what Caleb said when he came back from spying out the land "Let us go up at once and possess it: for we are well able to overcome it... the Lord is with us fear them not". (Jos 14:9) My, the way of Joash is the way of Failure, the way of Caleb is the way of Faithfulness, which way marks your life

Are you willing to follow the Lord Faithfully Wholeheartedly Courageously Recognising that when His Hand is on the bow, victory is sure in the end.