**February 11, 2024 2 Kings 2:1-12**

***In the Whirlwind***

**Scripture:** *2 Kings 2:1-12 NRSV*

*(1)Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. (2)Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. (3)The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." (4)Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. (5)The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." (6)Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. (7)Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. (8)Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. (9)When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." (10)He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." (11)As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. (12)Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces*.

**Notes:**

1. It’s not ***IF*** but ***When***.
   1. It's not ***IF*** the Lord was going to take Elijah, but ***WHEN***.
   2. We do not have to wonder about the ***IF***, only the ***WHEN***.
   3. The Bible ***affirms*** the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
   4. We know will all ***die***.
   5. Faith gives us confidence, we just don’t know ***when***.
2. We need to ***be*** ***there***.
   1. Elisha has to ***be*** ***there*** at the right time.
   2. The timing is not by ***chance*** but more of persistence.
   3. We need to be at the ***right*** ***place***.
   4. Be where ***God’s*** ***spirit*** is so God can pour the spirit on us.
   5. When we are in the Spirit, we are kept burning ***brightly***,
3. ***Passing*** the ***mantle***.
   1. Here we have the transition from ***Elijah*** to ***Elisha***.
   2. The church must ***cultivate*** such ***transitions*** well.
   3. The ***leadership*** of the church must raise up new ***leaders***.
   4. ***Encourage*** young people to step up and ***lead***.
   5. ***Encourage*** young people to listen and ***respond***.
4. “***Numb***-***Struck***.”
   1. The ***whirlwind*** takes Elijah up into heaven.
   2. Elisha stands there ***numb***-***struck***.
   3. Be numb-struck by the ***presence*** of ***God***.
5. The Lord, God ***loves*** each of us.
   1. Nothing you could ***do*** would make Him love you ***less***.
   2. Nothing you could ***say*** will make Him think you are ***lost***.
   3. ***Turn*** from our evil ways and follow the Lord.

**Script:**

Our passage for today has inspired some great spiritual songs. I remember in elementary school we would sing the song “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*”. And I have to say that this song has stuck in my mind ever since. But one of my favorites is the song “*Let Thy Mantle Fall On Me*”. I think that in this song we are reminded of God’s faithfulness throughout the scriptures, and even with us here today.

You probably recognize the tunes I mentioned and even the passage I am referring to. But are you able to tell me what these songs mean to you? Are you able to explain what exactly is going on in the passage? And what can we learn from them?

Today I would like you to turn with me in your bibles to 2 Kings 2:1-12. As We share in the reading, I want you to visualize what is going on; and what impact this story holds for you. Stand with me as we read this passage from 2 Kings.

*(1)Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. (2)Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. (3)The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." (4)Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. (5)The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." (6)Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. (7)Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. (8)Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. (9)When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." (10)He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." (11)As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. (12)Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces*. *2 Kings 2:1-12 NRSV*

There are a few things that I would like you to consider as we read this passage; first is the fact that Elijah instructs his intern to stay where he is. Elijah knows that the Lord is coming to take him to heaven, but I tend to think that Elijah may want to spare his disciple the pain of losing his mentor. We all have had to say goodbye to friends, to loved ones, and even to times in our life that were good. And yes, we do encounter a little pain in these times but if we are following the Lord, He will see us through it. However, Elisha is persistent, maybe he feels he would rather deal with the pain of losing his mentor than to allow his mentor to feel abandoned in this time.

Next, I want you to consider the distance that Elijah and Elisha travel in this one day. They start in Gilgal and travel to Bethel. From there they travel to Jericho, and then on to Jordan. Each time Elijah would tell Elisha to stay, and Elisha would refuse to allow his mentor to go it alone. Each time the prophets they encounter would ask the same question and each time Elisha would answer the same way. From Gilgal to Bethel is about 7.44 miles; from Bethel to Jericho is close to 11.57 miles; and the distance from Jericho to the Jordan River is 5.92 miles. If you add these together, we would come up with just short of 25 miles. Walking at 4 miles per hour, which is a pretty quick pace, this would be done at 6.25 hours. However, knowing that this walk would consist of uphill walking I would estimate a considerably longer time, more like 10 hours. And along the way they make stops to speak with prophets and such; so, this trip will be an entire day trek with very little time to rest.

Now when they arrive at the Jordan river, we see something that is reminiscent of Moses, when the Israelites cross the Red Sea. Elijah rolls up his mantle and strikes the water with it. The water’s part and the two cross over on dry ground. Elijah then asks Elisha what he could do for him before he is taken away. Elisha responds, “*Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.*” Elijah says that if Elisha is able to see him as he is taken away, then his desire will be granted. The chariot of fire comes and Elijah is taken away, and Elisha is able to see it all. Now many times when we envision this event, we imagine Elijah being taken up to heaven in this chariot of fire drawn by fiery horses. But that is not correct, Elijah is taken away by a whirlwind that accompanies the chariot.

Now as we consider all of these things that take place in this story; the travel, the discussions, the heartbreak of losing a mentor, and also the excitement of receiving your desire; there are four things that we can take away with us. First, it’s not IF but When. I want you to notice something interesting about this text. The narrator begins the story by giving away the secret of what’s going to happen. The first line of the passage is a giant spoiler alert. Usually, the story-teller will save the climax to the very end and keep the listener in suspense until then. But our story begins with these words, “It happened, when Yahweh would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven….” As the tale unfolds, everywhere Elijah goes there are people who already know what is going to happen. First in Bethel where he finds a company of prophets. They pull him aside and ask, “*Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?*” They already know that this is the day. Next, they go to Jericho and the same thing happens. The prophets take Elisha aside and say, “*Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you*” Each time, Elisha responds by saying, “*Yes, I know; be silent.*” In other words, I don’t want to talk about it.

Everybody knows what is going to happen, but they don’t exactly know when it will happen. The question was not IF the Lord was going to take Elijah, but WHEN. As I think about this, I realize there are certain things in life where the question is not IF but WHEN. When we have real faith in God, we do not have to wonder about the IF, only the WHEN. It is not IF God loves us and will be good to us, it is WHEN God shows his goodness to us. It is not IF God will show his grace upon us, but WHEN it will happen. The Bible strongly affirms the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Just as he departed, he will come again. It’s not a question of IF he will come again, it’s a question of WHEN he will come again. The Bible makes it clear that we will all die. It’s not a question of IF we will die, but only WHEN we will die. It’s not a question of IF we will receive eternal life, it’s only a question of WHEN. Faith gives us confidence about certain things happening. We just don’t know when they will happen. That was the case in this story as well.

The next thing I would like to emphasize is on being there, we need to be there. We need to be at the right place at the right time. Elisha has to be there at the right time in order to receive the blessing. Notice in verse 9 that Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. Elijah responds, “Well, yes, you can have it if you are with me when I am being taken up. If you happen to be there at the right time, then you will receive your request.” The timing is not by chance but more of persistence. This idea is predicted earlier in the text on three separate occasions. When they were in Gilgal, Elijah said to Elisha, “Wait here, for Yahweh has sent me as far as Bethel” (2:2). But Elisha responds, “As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you” (2:2). When they get to Bethel, Elijah explains that he must now go to Jericho. Again he encourages Elisha to stay behind, but Elisha makes the same promise again that he will not leave his master. He is testing Elisha. After they arrive at the Jericho, Elijah says, “Now I’ve got to go to the Jordan. Why don’t you just stay here?” Elisha says, “I’m not leaving you!”

It was very important for Elisha to be at the right place. He knew that he needed to be with his master in order to receive the spirit that would come through him. He knew that he needed to be at the right place at the right time in order to witness Elijah’s ascent into heaven. Only then would he receive the double portion of Elijah’s spirit as he had requested. There’s a lesson here for us as well. We need to be at the right place. That’s why it is important to go to church. It is important to be where God’s spirit is so that God can pour out the spirit on us. We cheat ourselves when we are not where God has called us to be.

There’s a wonderful story about a pastor who had a member of the church who had been a regular in attendance, but for some reason he had quit coming. The pastor went to visit one chilly night. He knocked on the door and the man greeted the pastor and invited him to sit by the fire. The man knew why the pastor was there so he decided to just wait and see what the pastor had to say. But he didn’t say anything either. It seemed they were both trying to wait out the other. Soon the pastor took the tongs from the fireplace, reached into the fire and picked up a burning coal. He put the burning ember on the hearth and watched. Soon it began to cool and the flame flickered out. After a while, it was cold. Then the pastor took the tongs again, picked up that same piece and put it back in the fire. Before long, the heat had returned the coal into a blazing ember again. The pastor put the tongs down and said, “Well, I guess I’ll go now.” When he got to the door, the man said to the pastor, “Thanks for coming by. And I appreciate that fiery sermon. I’ll be in church Sunday.”

When we are in the Spirit, we are kept burning brightly, but when we separate ourselves from the source of the fire, we quickly lose our flame and begin to flicker out. But when we return to the source, we are able to reignite and burn brightly again.

This story is about Passing the mantle. It is a story of passing of authority from one prophet to another. Elijah has been a mighty prophet performing miracles while Elisha has been the apprentice. Here we have the transition from Elijah to Elisha. In verse 9, Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit, which means that he wanted to be designated the one who would be his successor and inheritor of the spiritual gifts that Elijah had. We see in verse 13 that Elisha does receive the mantle of the Lord that was once possessed by Elijah. As the story unfolds, Elisha winds up doing even more miracles than Elijah. The mantle was passed from one prophet to the next.

Today, it is important for the church to cultivate such transitions as well. We need to focus on the calling of ministers in the church. It is important for new ministers to be trained and equipped to take the place of older ministers. It is important for the leadership of the local church to raise up new leaders to take their place. But the task is also the church’s responsibility. There are not enough pastors for all the churches that are in need. Right now, on the Mid-Atlantic District there are 6 churches in pastoral transition. The church is looking at a quickly aging clergy and the need for new pastors will be great when those retirements begin to take effect. As for us locally, We also see this when it is time for elections and we only have enough or maybe even not enough candidates to fill the seats that are open. Some of you have served on committees and know how hard it is to find candidates to serve. And it gets harder every year.

This is where I am placing a shameless plug for church membership; you cannot serve in many aspects unless you are a church member. Take the class and become a church member. Furthermore, you cannot serve in children’s ministries unless you have the required background checks. Some think that this is something that the leadership makes up, but if we allow people to serve without having proper clearances, I am held responsible. Even if you do not plan to serve at this time, get the clearances and when the time is right you are ready to serve. The church will cover any expense tied to it. We all need to be in the business of encouraging young people to step up and take the role of leadership. The Church needs to focus intentionally on passing the mantle from one generation to the next of stepping up and answering when God calls. We need to continue to encourage our young people to listen for the call of God and responding obediently to serve in leadership, whether it be as pastor, worship leader, piano player, guitar player, Sunday school teacher, children’s church leader, nursery worker; we need people to serve in these places so that we can supply the community with the needs they have.

The last point is the word “numb-struck.” At the end of this story, we find Elijah and Elisha walking and talking together. All of the story has led up to this climactic moment. Suddenly, chariots of fire and horses of fire appear along with a whirlwind. Can you even imagine this scene in your mind? The whirlwind takes Elijah up into heaven. The chariots and horses come between Elijah and Elisha. Elisha stands there numb-struck. While the Bible doesn’t use this word, it is clear that he has no idea what to say.

Elisha mutters words that hardly make sense. He says, “My father, my father,” which is a term of respect for his mentor. Then he adds, “The chariots of Israel and its horsemen,” the meaning of which is disputed in academic circles. Elisha’s response to this heart-stopping event appropriately demonstrates the human inability to grasp the divinity of God. No praises to God or shouts of glory escape Elisha’s lips, only a numb-struck descriptive statement. I guess we would be numb-struck too!

If we heed the lessons of this text, we too will find ourselves in places where we are struck numb by the presence of God. It may not be as dramatic as this story was. According to the Bible, this never happened again. But there are other ways in which God makes his presence known to us.

I know I was on the day that I was saved. After kneeling at the altar the Pastor asks me “Kevin, what has the Lord done for you today.” And the only words I could mutter were, “I am speechless” It was so unreal in my mind that I could not put a sentence together to describe what I was feeling. Even today I would have a difficult time doing so.

But this I know; The Lord, God loves me and he loves you. Even though I had done some very vile things he never loved me any less. Even though I had a foul mouth, he still loved me. Even though I had lied, and cheated, and broken every one of His commandments, he still loved me. And this applies to you as well. Nothing you could ever do would make him love you any less. Nothing you could say would make you think of you as a lost cause. But he will not rescue us from the perils of our sin unless we turn away from that sin and turn to him. He will not rescue you unless you ask him… Ask him to forgive you of your transgressions; ask him to redeem you from being lost; ask him to save you from and eternity in hell because of those sins.

If we will turn from our evil ways and follow the Lord, and respond to his call in our lives, he will bless us and take us to be with him in eternity. It may be for us something as dramatic as the chariots of fire, or it may be as simple as the whisper of the wind through a tree. But if we follow Elisha’s example, we can experience it. If we have faith enough to say, “It’s not IF but WHEN; God will come to me,” if we have determination and persistence to be in the right place at the right time, then we too may receive the mantle of God’s spirit, a double portion of His blessing and maybe, just maybe, we may even be struck numb by the presence of God.