

Elisha 14 - The Joy of Ministry

We have been learning about serving God from the ministry of Elisha. We have considered in the previous sermons:

- How a calling to ministry can sometimes look merely like a promotion. Only *sometimes* does God move in spectacular ways to bring people into ministry.
- How faithfulness and personal involvement are significant in ministry.
- How a balanced ministry ranges from blessing to cursing, or judgment, in rebuke, reproof, and exhortation. Ministry is not just all Polyanna positivity.
- How ministry has to be unbiased, ready to bless whoever God brings to us with what they actually need, not just what they *think* they need based on their appetites or, worse, lust.
- How we always minister out of the sufficiency of Christ to what people *truly* need.
- How the ultimate and highest priority ministry is soul winning.
- How we minister within whatever circumstances we find ourselves.
- How we must maintain a purity of ministry with integrity.
- How we must not abuse ministry either directly or by neglect.
- How the fruit of ministry is not just the salvation of a soul. The fullness of the born again child of God as he, in turn, becomes a minister of God
- How we need to be voluntarily responsive to the administration of ministry
- How we need to communicate the vision we have received of God to others by our direct witness and the testimony of our lives
- How we have to live with the frustration that sometimes people don't listen and miss salvation and/or subsequent blessings

We are moving on to the next message on ministry in 2 Kings 8:1-6. You might remember how the Shunemite

woman had been blessed first with life and then with new life in chapter four. God had blessed her with life when He gave her a son. Then, when the boy was older, God blessed the woman with new life when the boy had died and was brought back to her. In the passage we are looking at today, the same woman is going to get another blessing. The ministry principle we are going to look at today involves how God is faithful to bless us, but we have to be willing to wait on the Lord.

2Ki 8:1-6 Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years.

2And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.

3And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land.

4And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.

5And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this *is* the woman, and this *is* her son, whom Elisha restored to life.

6And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that

was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.

1. Hope deferred -

At first glance, what stands out is how this woman came back to the land after a seven year famine and was blessed with the restoration of her property she had lost after such a long time. If we focus only on the blessing in the end, we will miss an important principle.

As we consider this woman, we have to look beyond the fact that she had a promise that everything would go well. Just like us, we know that everything is going to turn out well in the end because in the very end we are in heaven. But that doesn't diminish the fact that we can go through times of frustration as we wait for the hopes that lie ahead of us. This woman was promised that in seven years the famine was going to end. We also know that as we are faithful to the Lord, He also has plans for us. The problem that I would like to address is how the assurance of God must carry us through the *hard* times. There are many people Christians who give up too easily. We have the example of Demas whose love for this present world kept him from seeing the reward that God had ahead for him.

2Tim 4:10 Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

Do you suppose she was only living the joy filled life for those seven years? She might have had some joyous times, no doubt. But, make no mistake, leaving your home for a strange place is no picnic. You have to consider her experience to truly identify with it. At first you might be able to console yourself that it might not be long that you will have to endure. But then one year passes, then two and three with all the day-to-day struggles. When we go for

such a long time, struggling, our hopes tend to dim. She went *seven* years in her trials. Speaking *prescriptively*, we can trust in the Lord. Speaking *descriptively*, we find that this is often very hard.

Prov 13:12 Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but *when* the desire cometh, *it is* a tree of life.

Hope deferred can have an effect on us in ministry. When we go through long periods of time and it seems like we might not be making a difference, we ask ourselves if the blessings will ever show up. My concern is that people know the way things are supposed to be, but to own the hope is difficult and could cause some to lose sight of the end.

Heb 12:1-3 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, [**We have the testimony of all the Old Testament saints to challenge us to keep on going.**]

2Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. [**But even greater is the testimony of Christ who had the greatest goal to look forward to.**]

3For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

We are told that Jesus was able to go through the greatest judgment of all eternity which can also be attributed to what He knew what God laid ahead for Him. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of the Father. We work somewhere

between the despair of today and the joy of tomorrow. What enables us to press on in ministry is knowing that we shall reap if we faint not.

Gal 6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, **if we faint not.**

2Thess 3:13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

1Cor 15:57-58 But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

2. Misplaced hope -

While we speak of the joy of hope, we have to be careful to not have the wrong kind of hope, a misplaced hope. For too many people, hope is just presumptuous wishful thinking. If you are going through a hard time, don't just presume that things have got to get more comfortable. Notice that I didn't say get better. Better does not necessarily mean comfortable. We have to be careful to not be presumptuous, but look for God's plan for how what we are going through will be used for His glory.

The foundation of our hope is in knowing Jesus Christ is our Savior and serving according to His will. A favorite scripture to quote is Romans 8:28.

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

It is not just that all things will work together for the good. The woman's hope was in the promise that she received from the man of God. She had served him, she had trusted him, she had been blessed by him, and now she had

followed his directions and come back from the famine. She was not presumptuous, as some are, thinking that everything is going to just somehow be better. It has been said that everything depends on luck and hard work, but that the harder you work, the luckier you seem to be. Just because some good things seem to happen in your life does not necessarily mean that God is smiling down on you. Just because you go through some hard times does not necessarily mean that God is frowning on you.

Matt 5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

The special blessings of God come as we serve God and do His will.

A mistake that someone could make at this point is to think that God is someone Who is used to merely get us what we want. Notice from Romans 8:28 that His all things work to the good *to those who love Him* and who serve Him according to the *purpose* that He has for them. He is guaranteed to bless. Sometimes God calms the storm and sometimes He gives us *strength* to go *through* the storm. It is very possible and often true that when you live righteously you will receive blessings. But what if the blessings that God has for you is to be able to go into a war-torn district and do a powerful work for him? Whether it is a blessing of a good life that is comfortable or a good life that is difficult either way it is still a good life when it is lived for God. I was talking to one person just yesterday and explained the importance of merely going to church. Don't go to church just in order to get something out of God. Again, the blessings might come as God rewards you for your faithfulness in the usual way that we think about reward. But more importantly, there is a reward in what going to church will do to you and the person that *you will become* as you

serve God.

3. Our joy and hope is in God -

We do not just have wishful thinking, but the assurance of knowing God and that we will fit in His kingdom.

Matt 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Prov 3:1-6 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

2For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

3Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

4So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

5Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

2Thess 2:15-16 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

16Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,+

What is it that you are trusting in?

What are you trusting in to get you to heaven? Just that God is good? God's plan for goodness for you starts with accepting His salvation and turning your life over to God.

Are you serving God and feel like you are spinning your wheels? Don't stop. Keep going. Your blessings might be seven years down the road like the Shumamite woman. They could actually be longer...but the joy of the Lord in ministry will come.

Rom 8:18-25 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

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24For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

Christian history is rich with believers who had difficult co-workers, neighbors, and family members. It is filled with people who served God and were never known beyond their lifetime. The blessings will come as we are faithful. Sometimes we get to see the blessings after such a long time, but we will surely see them in glory!

2Ki 8:1-6

1. Hope deferred - 2Tim 4:10, Prov 13:12, Heb 12:1-3, Gal 6:9, 2Thess 3:13, 1Cor 15:57-58
2. Misplaced hope - Rom 8:28, Matt 5:45
3. Our joy and hope is in God - Matt 6:19-21, Prov 3:1-6, 2Thess 2:15-16, Rom 8:18-25