

## Elisha 15 - The Bitterness 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
- How there is certain joy to come in ministry

# 1. The joy vs. the bitterness of ministry -

Last week, when we looked at the joy of ministry, we considered the fact that if we faint not we shall reap in due season. (Gal 6:9). In fact, even when we endure God's chastisement, we know that it is not forever, just for a purpose. In the end, we have the joy that comes from our restoration.

Ps 30:5 For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favour *is* life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning.

And then, we also have the joy that comes from the fact that since our salvation is secure in Christ, we will have the ultimate joy of the glory of eternity.

Eph 1:5-7 Having predestinated us unto the adoption [**the resurrection**] of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

I say all this in order to *contrast* the message about ministry in today's passage.

2Ki 8:7-15 And Elisha came to Damascus; and Benhadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither.

8And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?

9So Hazael went to meet him,

and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Benhadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?

10And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the LORD hath shewed me that he shall surely die.

11And he settled his countenance stedfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept.

12And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.

13And Hazael said, But what, *is* thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The LORD hath shewed me that thou *shalt be* king over Syria.

14So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me *that* thou shouldest surely recover.

15And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped *it* in water, and spread *it* on his face, so that he died: and Hazael reigned in his stead.

The story line here is very straightforward. Benhadad, the king of Syria, is likely much older at this point. He has attacked Israel off and on, but should have figured out that this has not been such a good idea as he has gotten defeated often enough. This might be especially so since Elisha has been involved in foiling his attempts several

times. Perhaps this is why he next sent word out to Elisha to find out if he is going to recover from being sick. He sent word by Hazael, but God revealed to Elisha that even though Benhadad would not be killed by the sickness he had, he was not going to survive because Hazael was going to kill him.

As Elisha saw what God showed him, he began to weep. When he told Hazael, Hazael practically denied that he was going to attack Israel, but Elisha revealed that it would be entirely possible because he was going to be the king in Syria. Notice that Elisha did not tell him *how* he was going to become king by regicide, or assassinating Benhadad. This might have created a sense of permission for the assassination because he could say it was God-ordained.

This brings us to the theme of the message for today. Just as there is joy in ministry because we know that we shall reap if we faint not, there is going to be a sense of bitterness in ministry. Solomon wrote about this:

Eccl 1:13-18 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

14I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

15*That which is* crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

16I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

17And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

18For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

We might be confident about what we see people facing based on their decisions and attitudes, but they, like Hazael, will resist and deny what is so obvious to us. We might not have the benefit of revelation from God like Elisha, but that does not mean that we have *no* insight into what will happen in the future. Sometimes people's insights are built more on bias than experience which makes us cautious to accept what they say. But as we gain experience in life watching sadness and pain due to resisting God's Word, we also often discover that our judgments are more accurate than people will admit to when the failure and judgment comes into their lives. We can see the failures in the long term. We know *how* the future will *probably* go. But there are too many times that people will not even admit it when all is said and done.

Keep on drinking and drugging and it will ruin your testimony and take you further away from God. No good comes from allowing that in your life. Keep on sleeping around and you will wake up one day alone and twisted. Stay away from church but don't wonder why you are not blessed of God in your life.

## 2. Reaping -

We read last week from Gal 6:9 that we shall reap if we faint not, but the verses that come before also speak of the negative reaping that is possible.

Gal 6:7-8 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Hos 8:7 For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the

whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.

People will sow empty philosophies and worldliness in their lives. When they reap, they will not just reap the wind, but the whirlwind. Just like a seed multiplies, the wind of worldly philosophies multiplies into a whirlwind, a tornado of destruction, in their lives.

Prov 1:20-32 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:

21She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying*,

22How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

23Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

24Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

26I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

27When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

28Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

29For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

30They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

31Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be

filled with their own devices.

32For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

Rom 1:28-31 And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;  
29Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,  
30Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,  
31Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful...

It will bring us no joy to be able to say, "I told you so."

George Bernard Shaw is perhaps most renowned as a free thinker and liberal philosopher. In his last writings we read, "The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led, instead, directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith." Nobody talks so constantly about God as those who insist that there is no God.

— Heywood Broun.

THOMAS PAYNE — Leading atheistic writer in American colonies: "Stay with me, for God's sake; I cannot bear to be

left alone, O Lord, help me! O God, what have I done to suffer so much? What will become of me hereafter? I would give worlds if I had them, that The Age of Reason had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! No, don't leave; stay with me! Send even a child to stay with me; for I am on the edge of hell here alone. If ever the Devil had an agent, I have been that one."

DAVID HUME – Atheist philosopher famous for his religious skepticism ... He cried loud on his death bed "I am in flames!" It is said his desperation was a horrible scene.

ANTON LEVEY – Satanic Bible author and high priest of the Satanic worship religion. ... His dying words were: "Oh my, oh my, what have I done, there is something very wrong."

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<https://gospelway.com/god/atheists-death.php>

### 3. Our commitment -

Sometimes we grow weary, but we get back up and preach. Noah preached for 120 years but all those who were alive on that day of the flood did not listen.

2Tim 4:1-5 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4And they shall turn away *their*



ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

5But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

The final words of the Bible close with the plea of Christ:

Rev 22:17-20 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

18For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

20He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

1. The joy vs. the bitterness of ministry - Ps 30:5, Eph 1:5-7, 2Ki 8:7-15, Eccl 1:13-18,
2. Reaping - Gal 6:7-8, Hos 8:7, Prov 1:20-32, Rom 1:28-31,
3. Our commitment - 2Tim 4:1-5, Rev 22:17-20,