

Elisha 3 - The Ministry of Blessing and Cursing

Today we are continuing in 2 Kings looking at the life of Elisha as it relates to the nature of ministry. We have been challenged by the fact that Elisha was one of those who entered ministry more by promotion than by calling. We then took notice of the heart of faithfulness and personal involvement of ministry. There are a bunch of stereotypical notions that people might have about what ministry is like. Comedians have presented caricatures of preachers as overzealous or hypocritical. When they are portrayed favorably in a TV show, they might be presented as weak or ineffective. When they *are* presented favorably, it is hard to show them in a realistic light because most problems ministers deal with take longer than two minutes in a 60 minute show. Young preachers gravitate to conform to the model of beloved pastors who trained them until they get more of their own experience. The two events that we're going to look at in the life of Elisha present two important basic characteristics of what balanced ministry looks like.

1. Two challenges -

Elisha has two challenges quickly presented to him in his ministry.

2Kgs 2:19-22 And the men of the city [Jericho] said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city *is* pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water *is* naught, and the ground barren.

20And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought *it* to him.

21And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren *land*.

22So the waters were healed unto

this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

This first challenge presents the opportunity to show the general character of what Elisha's ministry would be like. We could try to understand the "science" of how the waters were purified. Indeed, salt is used in modern hard water treatment. It is most significant to note that this first miracle characterized the blessing of life in his ministry, or the ministry of blessing.

Right after this, as Elisha next went up to Bethel, Elisha faces another challenge that reveals a different kind of character to ministry that is sometimes needed.

2Kgs 2:23-25 And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. 24And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. 25And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

This account has presented some trouble for people to understand and apply. It is actually a pretty good example of ministry moments because it is a very clear contrast between the kinds of ministry we have to be concerned with. A more careful examination of Scripture presents a better understanding of what was going on.

The first problem is that when the people of that day read "little children," they had a different picture in their mind than we do. The Hebrew word is broadly used. It was used to describe Jesse's grown sons when Samuel went to find David. It is the same word used to describe Isaac when he was 28, Joseph

when he was 39, and Rehoboam's counselors when he turned from the counsel of the older men.

The next problem is that these young men were coming out of Bethel. There were notable events that took place with God at Bethel, but by this time, it had become a chief place for pagan worship in Israel. In fact, the bones of the prophets of Bethel would be burned there because of their sinfulness. These young men were possibly the product of a school of false prophets as opposed to the sons of the prophets who learned with Elisha.

Then, their challenge was to not only mock him in some common way about the way he looked being bald, but to ridicule him spiritually. The news had gotten around that Elijah had been taken to heaven and they were mocking Elisha's report of this challenging him to also "go up."

Their judgment was severe as they were attacked by a bear. Society has been often plagued by youth growing up apparently unchecked until they face such dire consequences. Today, there is a great outcry over a new extreme leniency in the courts. Violence amongst youth is on the rise. We should not be upset by this judgment of the scornful youth in this Scripture.

The second kind of ministry that is presented here in contrast to the ministry of blessing is a ministry of cursing. By cursing we don't mean some common idea of placing a curse on someone or wishing evil upon them, but cursing defined as *judgment*. You can see this contrast in the New Testament where Peter blessed the impotent man at the Temple but pronounced judgment on Ananias and Saphira for lying to the Holy Spirit.

The principle we want to extract from this the concept of *balance in ministry*.

2. Balance in ministry -

While there are applications that we could make from each of these events, their placement here could almost appear

random. This happens elsewhere in Scripture where the placement of contrasting events yields a Biblical principle. For example, you can read about the life of Joseph and then in the middle of your reading, Judah is presented giving in to a temptation to join with his deceased son's wife. It could look random until you notice that it is placed in contrast with Joseph *resisting* the same kind of temptation with Potiphar's wife. Psalm 23, The Good Shepherd Psalm, is best understood in the light of Psalm 22, The Crucifixion Psalm. Without the crucifixion, there *is no* Good Shepherd in the shadow of the valley of death. The reign of Saul, David, and Solomon when considered together, present a picture of the worldly, saved, and glorified man.

By choosing *these* two miracles and placing them side by side we get two parameters in the spectrum of what ministry is like. There is a range from being a blessing to others in our ministry and sometimes judging. The power of the healing of the waters and the cursing of the insolent placed side by side remind us that ministry is not made up of one extreme or another. We are neither to be constantly Pollyanna-positive nor pulpit-pounding-preachy. Ministry is to be balanced.

Phil 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

Sometimes we have to present the hard to hear message and sometimes the positive message that has to suffer people's foolishness.

Ps 103:8-14 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever.

10He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13Like as a father pitieth *his* children, *so* the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust.

Sometimes God chides and judges us. Other times He takes it easy on us because knows the weakness of our "frame" and remembers that we are "dust."

Ministry lies somewhere between the parameters of judgment and mercy. Judgment and mercy met at the cross when we were embraced by Christ. We are called to a balance in ministry. Paul spoke of this when he met with the Ephesian elders in Miletus:

Acts 20:18-27 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

19Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

20And how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

...

25And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

26Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*.

27For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

This was Paul's instruction to Timothy:

2Tim 4:1-4 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.

Paul presented Timothy the importance of being ready at any moment to deliver a balanced ministry. Sometimes you have to rebuke people. Sometimes they need exhortation, or encouragement and challenge. Sometimes they need something in between, like reproof.

3. Speak up -

Ministry is sometimes meeting people's physical needs. Other times it meets peoples spiritual needs. It is not hard to accept the challenge to assist people in their physical needs. When it comes to addressing spiritual needs, people can be a little fearful.

First, we are challenged, as we read in 2Tim 4, to preach the Word and to be instant in season or out of season. We have to speak up with the Word of God.

The next challenge comes when addressing more specific situations. There is often a fear of speaking up at those times that could require the blessing of encouragement or the cursing of judgment.

Ecc1 3:7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

There are those who might find themselves given *over* to being critical. Notice that I am not saying that being

critical is *wrong*. As we are going to see a little later, there are *times* when we *should* be critical. It becomes a problem when we it is the way we *predominantly* view the world around us. There are times to be Pollyanna-positive and look for the good. In ministering to others, we need to be careful to be conscious of encouraging others.

Prov 25:11 A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in pictures
of silver.

Prov 15:23 A man hath joy by
the answer of his mouth: and a
word *spoken* in due season, how
good *is it*!

Have you told someone what you are thankful for them? Have you conveyed how someone is a blessing?

Then there comes the opposite of this. Sometimes people are afraid of being confrontational. This is usually revealed in a business meeting where a sin problem might have to be dealt with. Those who are spiritually younger have worried that this is being too harsh and un-Christlike. They have a mistaken notion that we are supposed to be loving and that love means only being soft and positive. They possibly were not paying attention during the new member's class when we were careful to go over this kind of situation.

Matt 18:15-17 Moreover if thy
brother shall trespass against
thee, go and tell him his fault
between thee and him alone: if
he shall hear thee, thou hast
gained thy brother.

16But if he will not hear *thee*,
then take with thee one or two
more, that in the mouth of two or
three witnesses every word may
be established.

17And if he shall neglect to hear
them, tell *it* unto the church: but
if he neglect to hear the church,
let him be unto thee as an
heathen man and a publican.

What is truly unloving is leaving people feeling comfortable in their sin. Some situations call for rebuke. If you find yourself afraid to confront, realize that many times the loving thing to do is to speak up even though it requires judgment.

Most of ministry lies somewhere between these two parameters of blessing and cursing, but the larger problem is not speaking up and engaging in ministry to each other and the lost. The world does not want to hear that there is an eternal judgment. Christians don't like to receive the chastisement of God. Our ministry is to help people escape both kinds of judgment while we encourage and train them on to the blessings of Godliness. Throughout our examination of the ministry of Elisha, we have to ask ourselves, "What is my ministry?" Are you actively engaged in ministering to others? Do you speak the truth in love?

1. Two challenges - 2Kgs 2:19-22, 2Kgs 2:23-25
2. Balance in ministry - Phil 4:5, Ps 103:8-14, Acts 20:18-27, 2Tim 4:1-4
3. Speak up - Eccl 3:7, Prov 25:11, Prov 15:23, Matt 18:15-17