

Elisha 6 - The Ultimate Ministry

We have been learning about serving God from the ministry of Elisha. We have considered the

- How a calling to ministry can sometimes look merely like a promotion
- 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.
- How ministry has to be unbiased, ready to bless whoever God brings to us with what they actually need.
- How we always minister out of the sufficiency of Christ to what people *truly* need.

Today we are going to take notice of something that should never be left out of our sense of ministry. Ministering the Gospel is always our ultimate goal.

1. Ministry unto life -

As we look at the model of Elisha's ministry through a sampling of miracles in 2 Kings 4, there is one that was left out last week. There were miracles that provided just enough and also more than enough for people's needs. There is one miracle was left out, though, for special consideration. After providing for many *physical* needs, the miracle of the raising of a dead boy stands out as an illustration of ministering *in the Gospel*.

There are two phases to the miracle. The first phase is the miracle of birth:

2Kgs 4:8-17 And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where *was* a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And *so* it was, *that* as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

9And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this *is* an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

10Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

11And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

12And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

13And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what *is* to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

14And he said, What then *is* to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

15And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.

16And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, *thou* man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

17And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

What makes this miracle so notable is in the second phase that foreshadows the miracle of *rebirth*.

2Kgs 4:18-23 And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.

19And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.

20And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother,

he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.

21And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut *the door* upon him, and went out.

22And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

23And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? *it is* neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, *It shall be* well.

After some going back and forth between Gehazi and Elisha, Elisha went in to the dead boy.

2Kgs 4:32-35 And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, *and* laid upon his bed.

33He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.

34And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

35Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

The resurrection of the boy, by itself, was a notable miracle. His miraculous birth might almost seem incidental. They have to be considered together. By putting them together, we see the implication of what Jesus told Nicodemus...you have to be born of the flesh and then born again of the Spirit.

John 3:3-7 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be

born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

The boy being raised from the dead can only be a *foreshadow* of resurrection since the glorifying resurrection will only happen at the rapture. In these two miracles, we see the ministry of the Gospel in Elisha's service.

The raising of the dead boy might look like just another miracle in this chapter, but the character of the miracle makes it stand out to teach a lesson about ministry. The other miracles provided for things of the living. This miracle provided for the problem of death. Of all the needs we meet in ministry, be careful that you don't leave out evangelism.

Paul told Timothy to make sure to not neglect evangelism as part of his ministry:

2Tim 4:5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Applying this one way, we could emphasize how much we have to make sure to make evangelism is *part* of the rest of our ministry. Take care of all aspects of ministry, including evangelism. But our main idea is that soul winning is the *ultimate* ministry.

2. The ultimate ministry -

Paul's admonition to Timothy could be applied another way. He was not only

saying, make sure to make evangelism *part* of your ministry. We could take this as an admonition that when all is said and done, whatever you do in ministry should lead ultimately to evangelism.

Not all churches have this perspective. Some think that the ultimate mission of the church is to achieve social justice feeding the poor and helping the oppressed, the repressed, and the depressed. Others think the mission of the church is to glorify God. To one degree or another, these two aspects certainly are part of the mission of the church, but the purpose the church was created was to build on the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is attested to by, of all things, an interesting passage in Genesis 9. In God's institution of the *secular* mission of *government* and His institution of the *sacred* mission of the *church*, we see a parallel concept that affirms that the Gospel is the ultimate ministry.

Gen 9:5-6 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

6Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

This is the passage of Scripture where human government is established. We see the change in the dispensation of God's work with man where man is held responsible and accountable for the life of man. Human government was created when man was given the power to accompany that responsibility. Man cannot be held responsible for what is not within his power to change. Here government is responsible to protect against death. It is not responsible to regulate how we live, but only to protect. This *does* form the basis for *some* regulation where products or behaviors are a real *threat* to life. There are reasonable limitations though. Carbon dioxide has been listed as a

greenhouse gas and subject to regulation because it is considered to pose a threat to mankind through global warming and climate change. But, no one is proposing that we all wear gasmasks with a catalytic converter attached to it. What makes Genesis 9 the definition of the dispensation of human government is that the protection from death is the ultimate responsibility. This is reflected in the Declaration of Independence, one of our nation's founding documents. The American founders' genius was to recognize that our rights derive from God. Among those rights they enumerated only three: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. You cannot guarantee happiness, only the *pursuit* of happiness. Government is formed to protect us from death so we can freely pursue happiness. This is also affirmed in Romans 13, later. This ultimate *secular* responsibility runs congruent with, or alongside of, the ultimate *sacred* responsibility. Just as the ultimate *secular* responsibility is to protect against death, the ultimate *sacred* responsibility is to protect against death. Genesis 9 serves to reinforce the concept that protecting life is the ultimate ministry. Elisha's ministry of life is demonstrated in a number of miracles, but it is defined most clearly as the ultimate ministry by the raising of the dead. This then should be our ultimate ministry. When Elisha raised the dead boy, he was born again figuratively. When we preach salvation and the message is received, that person is born again literally by the resurrection power of the Gospel.

Evangelism is the ultimate ministry. If what we are doing in ministry is not part of the dynamics of the church for delivering the Gospel then we have failed. Cleaning the cobwebs, tables, toilets, and floors is great but only if we realize that it keeps a lost person from walking out because he judged the Gospel by how we kept house. Teaching Sunday School, the Bible, preparing literature, tithing, giving rides to church, etc., etc., is all part of the dynamics of getting the Gospel out.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Matt 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

3. Ministry of compassion -

There is one other aspect that is presented here that we need to embrace. The ministry of life unto life is filled with compassion. In our effort to maximize our outreach, there is a risk of treating soul winning as a mere intellectual manner.

Soul winning is not just a mechanical transaction. It is true that there is a kind of formula. Someone boiled the message down to the ABCs of Salvation: **A**cknowledge your sin, **B**elieve on Christ, **C**all upon the name of the Lord. This is a pretty good summary. But, we don't want to miss the fact that it is a precious *soul* that is getting saved.

Luke 15:4-7 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than

over ninety and nine just persons,
which need no repentance.

Those who think that God has determined who He is going to force to get saved risk adopting an uncaring attitude, "Why worry? They are going to get saved no matter what so why should I care?" Such people justify soul winning because it is a mere duty. This so different than the attitude of Paul in Romans 9:

Rom 9:1-3 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

2That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

3For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

There are theological truths we extract from the Scriptures that are presented in the drama of life in the narrative (story) passages of the Old Testament. Elisha's ministry of birth and rebirth is presented in this woman's life in human terms so we can view it with the compassion that should accompany our evangelism. We have a picture of compassion with the consideration of what this woman was going through.

- Her son's life was precious to her. Her husband was old and childbearing seemed impossible for her.

2Kgs 4:14-17 And he said, What then *is* to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.
15 And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.

16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, *thou* man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

17And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

- After the boy died, she behaved in a way that someone might have thought excessive when she saw Elisha, but he excused her because she was greatly "vexed."

2Kgs 4:27 And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul *is* vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid *it* from me, and hath not told me.

- Like any mother, she could not depart from his side.

2Kgs 4:30 And the mother of the child said, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

Elisha recognized her distress over the life of her son and extended himself to her cause. Do we have that kind of compassion? Are we burdened and greatly vexed for the eternal destiny of souls? Are we caught up in the day to day affairs of life, pursuing our careers and retirement? Are we more concerned about securing the borders of our comfort zone that we don't venture out with the Gospel? Where is our passion? Does our compassion drive us to show up and speak up?

1. Ministry unto life - 2Kgs 4, John 3:3-7, 2Tim 4:5
2. The ultimate ministry - Gen 9:5-6, Luke 19:10, Matt 28:18-20
3. Ministry of compassion - Luke 15:4-7, Rom 9:1-3, 2Kgs 4