

## **A Bold Request**

**2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**

**June 27, 2004**

**Have you ever had a mentor—someone you admired, someone you tried to follow, to emulate, to pattern your life after? If so, I'd like you to close your eyes and think of that person. Perhaps you'd like to thank God for that person and his or her influence on your life.**

**Now I have a couple of questions. First, do you think you were successful in imitating your mentor? Were you a faithful follower? Second, if you could have asked that person for something, some gift, what would it be? Would it be some memento that you could treasure? Finally, do you think there is someone who is following you, emulating you? How do you feel about that? How would you feel if that person were to someday take your place? The story of Elijah and Elisha gives us an intriguing picture of such a relationship and helps us to explore these questions. It may also help us understand how better to follow our Lord.**

**First, what does it mean to be a faithful follower--a truly committed disciple? Listen:**

**2:1 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.**

**2:2 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.**

**2:6 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.

**2:7 Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan.**

**What a contrast to the would-be disciples in the gospel lesson! We don't know if any of the three ended up following Jesus. It appears that they did not. The first, at least, declared that he'll follow Jesus ANYWHERE, and Jesus replied, I've NOWHERE to lay my head. On the other hand, even when Elijah continually told him, "Stay here," Elisha staunchly replied, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you," and he continued to accompany him. If you were to look at a map of Israel, you would see that the route was a strange one. It would be like going from San Bernardino to Claremont to Riverside to Redlands. Then, too, Elisha's commitment contrasts with the excuses of Jesus' would be disciples. With Elisha there is no "First let me" statements. Instead, even in spite of Elijah's request that he remain behind Elisha loyally follows.**

**There is another difference. None of the ones who wanted to follow Jesus knew he was on the way to his death. Even the twelve were in denial about this. Elisha on the other hand, knew very well that the end of Elijah's ministry was near. Perhaps that was one reason he insisted on being with him. Perhaps he wanted to be with his master and teacher as long as possible.**

**What about us? Are we willing to follow Jesus even when the way seems not to be leading anywhere? Are we willing to follow, even when we meet the kind of rejection the Samaritans handed Jesus? Are we willing to follow even though Jesus tells us he is to come before even our families? Will we say, as Elisha did. "I will not leave you?"**

**And look what happens next:**

**2:8 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.**

**Who does this remind you of? Right, Moses. Elijah was seen as a kind of second Moses.**

**Let's go on to our second question. What would you ask your mentor to give you? Let's look at the story of Elijah and Elisha:**

**2:9 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."**

**What would you have asked your mentor for? When my beloved and formidable English professor, Miss Leyburn died, I was given one of the novels that she taught us in freshman English. It sits on my bookshelf, the very book she read, with the under linings and notes she made. I treasure it. But I hope I inherited more than that from her: I hope I inherited some of her love of literature and her love of learning. But neither the book nor the love were things I asked for, things I sought. They just came. I wasn't as wise or as bold as Elisha.**

**Elisha could have asked for many things. He could have asked for some physical thing to have as a keepsake. He could have asked for his mantle, for instance. Or he could have said, "Elijah, you're a prophet, "Tell me about the future. Am I going to be o.k.? Are things going to turn out well?" He could have said "I want power--the power to be head of all the**

prophets, like you are, and the power to intimidate kings, as you do. Instead he made a bold request: “Give me a double share of your spirit.” Now he may have meant this literally, but the commentators I’ve read remind us that, according to Jewish law, when a man died, his property was divided into thirds. The eldest son and heir got two-thirds (a double portion), and the rest was divided among the remaining son or sons. So Elisha could have been saying, “Make me your heir; let me inherit your your spirit, so that I can effectively continue your ministry.”

In the light of this request, how do our requests of our Master sound? What do we ask Jesus for? Do we pray, “Give me health” or “Help me make enough money” or Help me succeed in this task.” or (my favorite) just “Help?” I’m not saying that we should never pray for these things. God wants us to come honestly, to share our wants and our needs. I am saying that, if we were asked, as Elisha was, what our one request was, what our first priority was, it would be wonderful if we could reply, “I want to accept fully, the spirit of Christ, so that I can love as he loved, so that I can work for his kingdom, so that I can bear fruit.” One of our favorite hymns in this church is “Be Thou My Vision.” Do we pay attention to the words when we sing it? Listen to just the first verse:

Be Thou my vision O Lord of my heart.  
Naught be all else to me save that thou art.  
Thou my best thought by day or by night  
Waking or sleeping Thy presence my light.

Let’s go on to the third question. Are there people following you, imitating you? How would you feel if they took your place?

Listen to Elijah:

**2:10 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."**

**What do we make of Elijah's answer? To me it means: If God has given you the eyes of a prophet, so you can see me ascending to heaven then you will be granted your request. In other words, if God has chosen you and graced you with the right gifts you will receive my spirit and be my successor.**

**Note that Elijah doesn't say, "You arrogant young whippersnapper. How dare you think you can take my place." (You may say, "of course he wouldn't say this," but there are leaders who say, or think, something very much like this.) Note that Elijah doesn't say, "Of course you may have what you ask." I believe it's because Elijah knows it is not his to give--it is God's to give."**

**I have a Methodist minister friend who has just been transferred from Hemet to Palm Springs. She was reluctant to go. She loves her congregation in Hemet. She's concerned about them. She respects the pastors who are coming to take her place, but she can't help feeling that she could do a better job. Do you understand her feelings? Have you ever felt that way? Can we be as gracious and generous as Elijah was, passing the mantle on to the next person, trusting God to raise up new and effective leaders?**

**A friend reminds me that a good parent is delighted if his or her child does even better in some area than they ever did. Can we feel that way about those who come after us?**

**Well, let's see how the story turned out:**

**2:11 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.**

**2:12 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.**

**2:13 He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.**

**2:14 He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.**

**Now, who does Elisha remind you of? Joshua. It was Joshua who was Moses successor and who parted the waters so the Israelites could go through the Jordan into the Promised land. Similarly, Elisha is Elijah's successor.**

**Can you imagine how Elisha felt? First awe at what he'd seen, then the grief that made him tear his clothes, and finally the trepidation with which he picked up the mantle? Don't you think that he spoke those words as he struck the water because he was unsure, he was afraid the water wouldn't part, so calling on the Lord couldn't hurt and might help? Can you imagine his relief, his joy, when the waters parted and he knew, he knew for sure that his request had been granted?**

**Friends, the spirit of Christ is ours. All we have to do is to be faithful and loyal followers , to put Christ first in our lives, to be willing to take the mantle when it is given to us and to pass it on when the time comes. Then we can walk up to the waters that hold us back, that divide us we can step out in faith, and God will use us, too, in marvelous ways.**

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**9:51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.**

**9:52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him;**

**9:53 but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.**

**9:54 When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"**

**9:55 But he turned and rebuked them.**

**9:56 Then they went on to another village.**

**9:57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."**

**9:58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."**

**9:59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go**

**and bury my father."**

**9:60 But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

**9:61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."**

**9:62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."**

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*All passages quoted from the New Revised Standard Version*