

Elisha said, “I see chariots of fire and the horsemen of Israel.”

In those days a prophet was someone who could hear the word of God. A prophet was someone who had eyes to see God in a given situation. In those days a prophet was someone who was willing to stand up for the Lord and speak out. In the Old Testament, Elijah was the quintessential prophet and Elisha was his student, his apprentice, and his protégé. In our passage of scripture this morning, the prophet Elijah was about to be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Today we tend to think that such things don’t happen anymore. This is Old Testament stuff. People today don’t hear God, see God, or speak out for the Lord. Oh, I wouldn’t say that.

Have you read (or heard) Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s last speech? This afternoon you can go on the internet and listen to it. The thing that amazes me about his last speech was that Dr. King talked about his life and his death. He knew. Listen to his words:

Dr. King said: “I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now - because I’ve been to the mountaintop... Like any man, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain - and I’ve looked over - and I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land... I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man.” And the last thing Dr. King said to us was; “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

He gave that speech on April 3rd, 1968. 22 hours later the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” Something similar to this was happening in our text this morning.

In the 2nd chapter of the 2nd Book of Kings, the prophet Elijah and his student Elisha were traveling from Gilgal to the Jordan River. At each place they stopped they were told (and they knew) that this would be the day that the Lord would take Elijah up to heaven. Verse 7 tells us that when they finally came to the Jordan River there were 50 prophets all gathered together to witness his departure. Then Elijah and Elisha crossed over the Jordan. On the other side the prophet turned to his student and asked, “What can I do for you before I go?” That is what I want to talk about for a little while this morning.

Roy Williams, the head coach for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Tarheel basketball team, had Dean Smith as his teacher. Dean Smith, on the other hand, had learned from Frank McGuire. I’m sure that Frank McGuire had someone that he

looked up to and learned from, but as to who that may have been - I am no where near enough of a Carolina fan to possess that kind of knowledge.

Having a teacher – a mentor – someone that you can learn from is important in life. And it is important for us, in turn, to pass the mantle on to others - especially when it comes to our faith. If you knew that today you would be taken up to heaven, what would you want to pass on to others? In our passage of scripture this morning, there are three things that Elijah passed on to Elisha: (1) Faithfulness, (2) Spirit, and (3) Vision. Let's talk about faithfulness.

Notice that in our scripture, every time Elijah came to a village he would say to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord is calling me to go on." Each time his student Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives... I will never leave you." That is faithfulness. How do you teach someone to be faithful?

Years ago I was talking with my next door neighbor. He asked, "John, you work in a church. Does your church ever help the homeless?" he asked. "Sure we do," I replied. "I want you to do me a favor," he said, "I want you to take my kids with you the next time you help the homeless. My kids are not thankful for anything and they have no idea of how good they've got it. I want you to take my kids to help them see how other people live. Would you do that for me?" I said, "Yea, I'll do that. But it would make more of an impact if you came with us." He looked at me as though I had said something ridiculous. "I don't need to hang out with homeless people," he replied. "I already know how fortunate we are." How do you teach others? It begins by being an example.

I think of the story of the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi. Together they had been through famine, hardships, and the loss of their husbands. When the famine was over, Naomi said to Ruth, "You should stay here for the Lord is calling me to go back to my home in Bethlehem." And do you remember what Ruth said?

"Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee. For wither thou goest there shall I go, whether thou lodge, there shall I lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God shall be my God." Why did Ruth chose to be faithful to God? The answer is: because Ruth chose Naomi. During their years of hardship, Naomi had exemplified a stronger faith and a higher quality of womanhood than Ruth had ever seen before. Ruth chose Naomi's God, because Ruth chose Naomi. How do you pass faithfulness on to others? By being faithful and by being the example.

That was happening in our text this morning. I believe that Elijah was so influential that Elisha wanted to be like him. "As surely as the Lord lives, I will never leave you," said Elisha. That is faithfulness!

The second thing that Elijah passed on was Spirit! When they crossed over the Jordan, Elijah asked, "What can I do for you before I go? And Elisha responded: "Give me a double portion of your Spirit." In those days it was customary for the oldest son to receive a double portion of their father's inheritance. What kind of inheritance could you get from a prophet? Elisha said, "Give me a double portion of your Spirit."

Here is your quote for the morning. Phillip Brooks said: **“Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for power equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work will be no miracle. You will be the miracle.”**

My favorite line from the movie *Bruce Almighty* comes near the end. How many of you have seen *Bruce Almighty*? After Jim Carrey has been given God’s power – after he parts his tomato soup like Moses parting the red sea – after he has used his power for self-serving purposes and thoroughly messed every thing up – The Lord speaks to Jim Carrey and says: “Parting soup is not a miracle, Bruce. It’s a magic trick. A single mom who is working two jobs and still has time to take her son to soccer practice, that’s a miracle. A teenage boy who says “no” to drugs and “yes” to an education, that’s a miracle. You want to see a miracle, son. Be the miracle.”

Be the miracle. Pray that God will give you the strength to face life and to turn your life into a ministry for others. Be the miracle! Pray that God will give you the power to face whatever tasks God puts before you. Be the miracle! Pray that God will give you such an infectious Spirit that others will want a double portion of the Spirit they see in you. How do you do that?

I understand how we can pass on being faithful because we can all be an example of faithfulness to others. But how do you pass on your Spirit. Ultimately that has to be something that God does. It is when the Holy Spirit is empowering us. Elijah said to Elisha, “You have asked a difficult thing.” So Elijah gave Elisha a prophetic sign. “If you see me being taken up to heaven, then that will be your sign that God has granted your request. If you don’t see me being taken up to heaven, then it is not to be. Not everyone can see what God is doing. That brings us to our final point:

In our story this morning, there are three things that Elijah passed on to Elisha: Faithfulness, Spirit, and Vision. What was the vision? As they crossed over the Jordan River suddenly Elisha stopped and said: “Father Elijah, I see it! I see it! I see the chariot of fire and the horsemen of Israel, coming to carry you home.”

Would it make a difference if we could see a vision of heaven this morning? C.S. Lewis once said that many Christians are ineffective in this life because they lack a vision of the life to come. I like to turn that into a positive statement and say that the most effective Christians in this life are those who live with heaven as their goal.

Think of the first Christians like Stephen who was stoned and Paul who was thrown into prison, and Peter who, according to tradition, was crucified upside down. Why were they willing to face such things? Because they knew that beyond this life is the life to come. Would it make a difference if we had a vision?

Years ago I knew a man who, to the best of my knowledge, had never stepped inside a church. It was like he was allergic to the church. His wife was there every time the doors were open. His wife was on every committee. His wife really was a saint in the church. But he – well, it was like he had been inoculated. At some point in his life he

had gotten just enough church to make him want to stay away from anything religious for the rest of his life. But when his wife died, because of her influence, he came to the funeral. And then he came to church the next Sunday, and the next Sunday, and the next Sunday. Everyone welcomed him. I personally went up to him and said: "I am so glad that you are here. He was honest. He said "I need to be here" then he added "If I'm ever going to be with her again." That is a starting point. That is a goal. That is a vision.

Would it make a difference if we had a vision of heaven? In the movie, *The Color Purple*, which depicts how difficult and unfair life can be, Oprah Winfrey asked Whoopie Goldberg, "How can you take this? How can you live like this?" Whoopie Goldberg said, "Cause this life is not all there is."

How does the story end? The prophet Elisha said: "I see the chariots of fire and the horsemen of Israel. And when the prophet Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, the prophet Elisha – who was faithful, filled with the Spirit, and empowered by this vision, turned and crossed back over the Jordan River to continue the work of God. Let us go and do likewise.