

Wade Street 03.09.06 11am Elisha

If you were here last week, you'll know that we are looking in a mini series at the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and looking at what we can learn for ourselves about God and our relationship with Him, through focussing on events in these two prophets lives.

Last week we thought about Elijah being very much a prophet of two halves – bold, courageous, hearing and responding to God's call as he called the people back to Yahweh. But then later on frightened, close to a break down, running away and unwilling to listen to God

This week our focus is on Elisha, who Elijah ordained or invested, and who became his servant until Elijah made a very unusual exit up to heaven in a whirlwind. At which point Elisha became a prophet, taking on a double portion of God's Spirit, very much as Joshua did when he took over the mantle from Moses.

Biography of Elisha.

So what do we know about Elisha ?

Not much is the short answer.

The name Elisha means 'God is salvation' this seems to follow on well from Elijah's meaning of 'Yahweh is God' So in the names of this pair of prophets we have the proclamation that Yahweh is God, and then the follow on that God is salvation.

We don't know Elisha's age or birthplace, but we assume that he lived in the Jordan valley and was still only young when Elijah sought him out.

He was from a well-off family, and his father's name was Shaphat.

Elisha's ministry was quite different from Elijah's. Where as Elijah had been dealing with tensions between worship of Yahweh and other gods, Elisha was more into demonstrating God's power and authority through a display of signs and wonders at both a personal and national level.

He also headed up a company of prophets, we're not really sure what that actually involved, but he was obviously the leader of a group who lived together in community.

All in all Elisha's ministry lasted over fifty years, counted from the time of his investiture by Elijah, and he served God through the reign of six of Israel's Kings. He was in many ways a prophet like Samuel, with gifts of knowledge and foresight, and a capacity to work miracles.

Last week I believe God was challenging us very much regarding how we hear and respond to his call on our lives, how we accept the sacrificial nature of following Christ and take up our crosses, and how we listen to him and allow him to move us on to new things.

This week I want to use the account of the healing of Naaman to help us think about our expectations of God, and his expectations of us.

And I'm going to do that by thinking about four things that Elisha **didn't** do....

1.Limit God

The first thing he didn't do was put limits on God.

Naaman wasn't one of the children of Israel. He wasn't a member of God's chosen nation, in fact he was a military commander in a nation that on and off was in conflict with Israel. This just happened to be one of the 'off' times when hostilities had temporarily ceased. I'm sure we could have understood it if Elisha had refused any dealings with him on the grounds that Naaman wasn't one of them, he wasn't the right religion, he wasn't the right nationality.

Much of the Old Testament leads us to think it's just about Israel. But occasionally we see that the focus is wider, like a camera being suddenly switched on to wide angle lens. Here we get one of those shots that show us that God's concerns are actually so much wider.

The New Testament makes it clear that this is the case. Jesus very definitely viewed the world through a wide angled lens.

Elisha didn't limit what God could do.

I wonder whether that is something for us to consider this morning.

Do we focus too much on the local and not enough on the cosmic ? Have we maybe put God in a box, only allowing him power over certain things ?

So Elisha didn't limit God.

2.Respond to status

The second thing Elisha **didn't** do was respond to status.

Naaman arrived on Elisha's doorstep with his horses and chariots in tow expecting a VIP reception. But Elisha didn't even come out of the house.

I know that in the course of his sermon preparation Ian reads lots of intellectual books and uses them very effectively as illustrations. Unfortunately my reading tends to be on a slightly lower level than that, but one that springs to mind here is Roger Hargreaves', The Mr Men Christmas book.!!

In The Mr Men Christmas book, there is a picture of Mr Topsy –Turvey going down hill on a sledge backwards whilst standing on his head. I did consider scanning a picture of it for you, but unfortunately it's a bit inaccessible, in the Christmas box I the loft !! If you're at all acquainted with the Mr Men you'll know that Mr Topsy-Turvey is known for doing things differently and in a, well, Topsy Turvey kind of way. Mr Topsy-Turvey's perspective on life is obviously quite different from everyone else's. His head and feet point in opposite directions, he often says phrases backwards and thinks nothing of approaching the world from an upside down point of view.

In God's kingdom all worldly values are topsy –turvey, turned on their head, reversed. Status doesn't matter to God

After all, he sent his Son to be born into poverty, to live his early life as refugee, to give his life as a sacrifice for the freedom of others. To be, as the song says, the servant King.

Elisha, God's prophet, knew that Naaman's importance in the world was actually nothing to God. Naaman mattered to God because he was a human being, not because he had a good job, not because he had a certain number of horses !

I wonder how responsive to status we are ?

I believe that God is calling us to respond to all people, as precious children in God's sight. That might not be easy, but we have God's grace to help us.

3. Make it difficult

The third thing that Elisha didn't do was make it difficult !

Elisha sent a message to Naaman to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times. Probably not the most attractive request – the Jordan was dirty- we probably wouldn't be that enamored with having to take a bath in the Trent and Mersey or Coventry canal. But it wasn't a difficult task. In fact, it was obviously far too easy as far as Naaman was concerned. Surely he couldn't be healed by doing something so simple ??

Fortunately for Naaman he had wise servants who pointed out that there was no harm in trying something simple, when he would have been prepared to go for something much more taxing.

As one of the commentators says, 'God is often asking for faith and obedience in small matters, when we think he is requiring mighty deeds'.

How often do we complicate what God wants us to do ?

How often do we expect God's call to be something really difficult ?

Jesus simply said to his disciples 'follow me' and they followed !

When our relationship with God seems to be bogged down with complications, I want to encourage us to get back to basics and ask, what is it God wants me to do ? Is it a matter of simple obedience and faith ?

4. Do it himself (God did)

And the final thing Elisha didn't do- he didn't heal Naaman, It was God that did.

Elisha, great prophet that he was, was only the channel or conduit that God used.

Of course Elisha's role was important, but it certainly wasn't the whole story.

I think this reminds us of the need to keep the big picture in focus.

We are only ever going to be God's channels, nothing more.

And the people we hold in esteem as leaders are nothing more than God's channels for him to speak and act through.

So, as this mini series draws to a close and we've considered the challenges of God's call, and how he might use us, lets pray.....

House group notes 'Elisha' 2 Kings 5:1-15

Biography of Elisha.

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The account of the healing of Naaman helps us think about our expectations of God, and his expectations of us.

1. Elisha didn't limit God and neither should we.

Naaman wasn't one of the children of Israel. In fact he was a high ranking official in the army of Israel's enemies.

2. Elisha didn't respond to status and neither should we.

Naaman arrived at Elisha's house expecting VIP treatment, but he didn't get it

3. Elisha didn't make it difficult for Naaman to be healed.

He asked only that he bathe in the Jordan seven times.

We can be very good at complicating what God wants us to do.

4. Elisha didn't heal Naaman, God did !

We can only ever be humble channels for God to work through.

For discussion.

Is there anything that is particularly relevant for you in this account of Naaman's healing ?

How can we avoid being caught up in status, when everyone around us is ?

What things do we do as Christians to complicate faith ?

What about on a personal level ?

How can we make sure that we are suitable channels for God to use ?