

## **Lesson Six: I Kings 19:19-21**

### **The Calling of Elisha**

**Objective:** As we study the calling of Elisha, we will also look at the story of Jesus calling fishermen to follow Him (a story that at least in Mark and Matthew seems to be a purposeful reminder of the call of Elisha) as well as some of Jesus' teachings about what it means to follow Him. We will look at what God is asking Elijah to do - passing on his ministry to someone else. We will think about what it means to follow Jesus and what we are asked to give up in order to follow Him.

**Review:** Last week we saw Elijah's deep discouragement, his feeling of being all alone. God does not encourage him by building him up, saying, "You are doing a really great job, Elijah, don't you remember Mount Carmel? Remember how great it was when you outran Ahab's chariot?" He also does not rebuke Elijah saying, "How could you think that you are alone after my people turned to me on Mount Carmel? How could you be so afraid when you have seen the great power that I have shown you?" Instead God reassures Elijah that He is still there, and He gives Elijah a new job.

**Read I Kings 19:15-18 as a reminder. What does God tell Elijah to do?**

**At this point, what might we expect to happen next?**

**Read I Kings 19:19-22**

Again, God surprises us by continuing with the unexpected. Instead of Elijah going to find Hazael or Jehu, he finds Elisha. We are not sure of the reason for this - is Elisha easier to find? Is it that Elisha is the most important? He will be the prophet who succeeds Elijah. For whatever reason, Elijah finds Elisha.

\*As a side note, this does start a chain of events that leads to the fulfillment of what God told Elijah to do - Elisha commissions Hazael to become king (2 Kings 8) and commissions one of his prophets to anoint Jehu (2 Kings 9) (Goldingay, 2011).

**What is Elisha doing?**

**How many oxen are ahead of Elisha? What inference can you make from this?**

There are twelve yoke of oxen - so 24 oxen ahead of Elisha! This would indicate a very large operation in the ancient world, showing considerable wealth (Keck, et al, 1999).

**What does Elijah do?**

It's interesting that the language reads, "Elijah passed by him." It's possible that this is an allusion to God "passing by" Elijah on Mount Horeb. When God passes by Elijah, Elijah wraps his face in his mantle. Here, he uses the mantle to throw over Elisha.

Later, he will use the mantle to part the Jordan River. It is possible that the mantle is to Elijah what Moses' staff is to Moses. Somehow, when Elijah throws the mantle over

Elisha, Elisha understands exactly what this means. Elisha leaves the oxen and runs after Elijah.

**What does Elisha ask Elijah?**

**What does Elijah reply to Elisha?**

It is easy to read this in a way that sounds like, "Do whatever you want, how I am keeping you from it?" But, it is more likely that Elijah fully recognizes the call that he has placed on Elisha. "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" (NRSV). He recognizes that Elisha is being called into a difficult role, a lonely role - a break from his family, from his social status, from everything.

**What difficulties has Elijah encountered as a result of living into the calling that God has placed on him?**

**What is God asking Elijah to do at this point?**

Sometimes in ministry, or in the Christian walk, God may call us to do big things such as Elijah's ministry on Mount Carmel, publicly pointing the nation of Israel back to God. But, in this situation, we see that Elijah can show his faithfulness to God's calling by passing on the mantle of leadership (Keck, et al, 1999). Sometimes being faithful to God means helping prepare others for their own ministries. It is God's story that we are

living in, it is God's work that we are doing. We do not "own" our ministries. We do them for the Lord.

**Can you think of a time that someone passed a mantle to you? Or you passed one to someone else? If you have helped someone else prepare for ministry, was it hard or easy for you?**

**What does Elisha do? What significance do you think this has?**

When Elisha slaughters the oxen and uses the equipment from the oxen to make a fire to cook the oxen, he is completely severing his old way of life. He has no more means to go back to farming. His oxen have been eaten, his equipment is gone.

**What was the main call from God in chapter 18? How do Elisha's actions reflect an answer to that call?**

In chapter 18, we saw that God was asking the people to choose Him and only Him, to put their trust completely in Him. Elisha's decision to cut off his way to earn a living, to say good-bye to his family, all of this shows us that he is willing not only to follow only God but to follow Him in a radical way, to trust God completely with his life.

**Does this story of Elisha remind you of any stories or teachings of Jesus in the New Testament?**

Here are some passages from the New Testament that reflect this same spirit of radical following. (There are more that are not covered here such as the calling of Levi)

**1. Story of the Rich Young Ruler - Mark 10:17-22 (read)**

**What does Jesus tell the Rich Young Man to do?**

**What is the Rich Young Man unwilling to do?**

**How does this story compare with Elisha?**

**Did Elisha still need a plow and 24 oxen at home? In what ways did he free him to follow Elijah to sacrifice all of it?**

Elisha is able to do what the rich young ruler is not - Elisha makes a clean break with his past, severing off even his way to earn a living, in order to follow Elijah completely.

**2. Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, James and John - Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20**

**Read through either Mark 1:16-20 or Matthew 4:18-22.**

### **What similarities do you notice to the the story of Elijah calling Elisha?**

- there is a call to follow
- no one tells them exactly what the call means, there is no explanation of the calling (also no convincing arguments)
- Elisha doesn't ask Elijah what the mantle means, the fishermen don't ask Jesus where he is going (a logical question after "follow me")
- there is no explanation of what comes next
- Elisha already has a job farming; the fishermen already have a job fishing - both useful and important jobs
- they are willing to leave it all behind

### **What differences do you notice from the story of Elijah calling Elisha?**

- Elijah throws a mantle over Elisha; Jesus says "follow me"
- Elisha asks to go back and say good-bye while the fishermen simply get out of the boats and follow Jesus

### **What are fishermen giving up to follow Jesus?**

They are leaving their families, they are leaving some type of financial security. It is likely that fishing had been in their families for centuries, and their income was modest but secure (Wright, 2004). Jesus calls them away from security into the unknown - it is an intrusive and disruptive call, calling them away from work and family (Keck, et al, 1999).

**What kind of argument does Jesus make to the fishermen to convince them to follow him?**

(not a trick question)

The fishermen knew they were being called but didn't know exactly where Jesus would lead. They did not know how popular and unpopular Jesus would be. They did not know what would be required of them. They did not know how they would die or be remembered. As we have seen with Elijah, God only revealed things to them little by little. There was no "master plan" given to the disciples. They did not see the glory or the pain - they only saw Jesus and that was enough (Wright, 2004).

**In today's times, what do you think it looks like to follow Jesus?**

As modern readers, modern Christians, we are tempted to make these stories more familiar to us - we want to make following Jesus about accepting Jesus' principles of living. While this may be partly true - we are to accept Jesus' teachings and live them out - this is a call to FOLLOW - not simply to be saved, not simply to "live a good life".

This story reminds us that following Jesus has a cost. Just as Elijah says to Elisha, "What have I done to you?" Jesus recognizes that there is a cost to following him as we see in the following teachings:

### **3. Teachings from Luke 9:57-62 (read).**

#### **What strikes you as we read the passage?**

Jesus does not seem to be trying to win any awards for having the most followers here. The first would-be follower was enthusiastic - "I will follow you wherever you go." But does he realize where Jesus is going? If we look back at Luke 9:51-53, we see that Jesus is heading for Jerusalem, to be crucified.

#### **How do you think knowing that he is heading for Jerusalem affects his responses to his would-be followers?**

Jesus knows that the call to following him is not an easy life. He wants to be sure that his followers know this is not just about power and miracles and excitement. Following Jesus is a commitment to go into painful places, difficult places, to enter into suffering with others. Elijah recognizes this also as we see with his cry, "What have I done to you?"

#### **What is he telling these followers they may (or will) have to give up?**

#### **How do these sayings make you think of Elisha's response to Elijah?**



Elisha does ask to say good-bye to his parents, but he also sacrifices his plow and oxen, making as much of a break from his old way of life as most of us can imagine. He is not looking back.

**It can be tempting to interpret these sayings as exaggerations, but in what way may we be called to give up the same things today? (Security, family, etc.)**

Note - One way we often try to soften these teachings is by saying that the second follower doesn't just want to bury his father but to take care of him in his old age and then bury him. It is possible that this is the meaning but it is also possible that he just wants to bury his father. Commentators do not seem certain that this is not exactly what it sounds like - Jesus saying that it is more important to follow him than to bury his own father. This would have been an even bigger deal to the Jews during Jesus' day than it is to us now (which is saying something!). In New Testament Times, burying a father was so important that it even took precedence over saying the "Shema". The expected answer when a would-be follower says "Let me bury my father first" was "Of course!" (Wright, 2004)

**In our current culture (American culture, American Christian culture) is it recognized that there is a cost to following Jesus?**

**Is following Jesus worth it? Why? (Or...Why should anyone want to follow Jesus? Is it worth what they may be asked to give up?)**

## **What are the benefits to following Jesus?**

Some scriptures to ponder if there is time: (Feel free to add any scriptures that speak to you about the benefits of following Jesus)

**John 10:10** “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (NIV)

**Matthew 13:44, 45** “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

**John 7:37, 38** “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’”

**I Corinthians 15:58**, “There, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

**For thought:** What do you need to let go of in your life to fully follow Jesus?

## **Conclusion:**

In our study of chapter 18, we talked about how Yahweh wants the people to make a choice between Him and Baal. We are also asked to decide whether we are going to follow Jesus wherever He leads us or cling to our current way of life. Elisha seems to have joyfully stepped out with faith - even throwing a party with his sacrifices. He becomes to Elijah what Joshua is to Moses. Peter, Andrew, James and John follow Jesus without having any idea of where He might lead them. Jesus acknowledges in his teachings that following him does not lead to a comfortable life - if we are going to follow Jesus to the cross, we have to be ready make sacrifices. Some of the questions we must grapple with are: What does it look like to follow Jesus? What am I being asked to give up? Is it worth it?

We live in a time and place where our culture tells us that we do not have to give anything up to follow Jesus, but Jesus does not seem to say the same. He is open about the sacrifices that need to be made. But, he also shows us a life that is filled with the richness of knowing God as well as the security that comes from knowing that we are loved and can be filled with love for others.