

“Where Is the LORD, the God of Elijah?”

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- [0 : 00] Well, we're going to be reading this morning in our Bibles in the Old Testament in the second book of Kings, and Phil Copeland is continuing his studies in these books.
- So please do turn with me if you can to 2 Kings chapter 2. If you need a Bible and don't have one, there's plenty just outside the door there. One of the stewards will gladly give you one, so don't feel embarrassed.
- Jump up and get one, and then you'll be able to read along with us and see where all of this comes from. The second book of Kings is just the continuing history of the story of Israel and Judah, and in particular, in these chapters, we're seeing a great transition being made from the great dominant figure of Elijah, the prophet, to Elisha, his successor.
- And here's a chapter full of drama and full of interest. Quite well-known in some ways, but perhaps not as well-known as we think, and so it's important to read carefully and listen to the detail.
- 2 Kings then, chapter 2, and we're going to read the whole chapter. Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way to Gilgal.
- [1 : 23] And Elijah said to Elisha, please 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. And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?
- And he said, yes, I know it. Keep quiet. Elijah said to him, Elisha, please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.
- But he said, as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you. So they came to Jericho. Sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?
- And he answered, yes, I know. Keep quiet. Then Elijah said to him, please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.
- [2 : 21] But he said, as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you. So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went out and stood at some distance from them as they were both standing by the Jordan.
- Then Elijah took up his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water. And the water was parted to the one side and to the other till the two of them could go over on dry ground.
- When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you. And Elisha said, please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.
- And he said, you've asked a hard thing. Yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you. But if you do not see me, it shall not be so.
- And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

[3 : 31] And Elisha saw it. And he cried, my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen. And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, where is the Lord, the God of Elijah? And when he struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other.

And Elisha went over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

And they said to him, behold now, there are with your servants 50 strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. Maybe that the spirit of the Lord has caught him up and cast him on some mountain or into some valley.

[4 : 37] And he said, you shall not send. But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, send. And they sent therefore 50 men.

And for three days they sought him, but they did not find him. And they came back to him while he was staying at Jericho. And he said to them, did I not say to you, do not go?

Now the men of the city said to Elisha, behold, the situation of the city is pleasant as my Lord sees, but the water is bad and the land is unfruitful. He said, bring me a new bowl and put salt in it.

So they put it to him. Then he went to the spring of the water and threw salt in it and said, thus says the Lord, I have healed this water. From now on, neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.

So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke. He went up from there to Bethel. While he was going up on the way, some youths, the translation here is misleading small boys.

[5 : 46] It's worthless youths who came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, go up, you bald head. Go up, you bald head. And he turned around.

And when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore 42 of the boys.

From there, he went on to Mount Carmel. And from there, he returned to Samaria. Amen.

And may God bless to us his word. Apparently, when Winston Churchill died back in 1965, there were many who felt that his departure marked the end of an era.

And some folks, even though it had been some time since the Second World War had ended, really did think that the nation was vulnerable now that the great leader during wartime was gone.

[7 : 11] And actually, we find a similar situation here in this chapter. It's often missed about this chapter. We're about to witness the departure of a man who was far greater than Winston Churchill.

And this man's departure marks a major transition time in the kingdom of God. A seismic shift is about to take place in Israel.

What is the coming big departure? Well, verse 1 tells us, the Lord is about to take Elijah away. The man who has clearly been the leading prophet of his day.

The man who has shown colossal boldness and trust in the Lord during these dark, dark days of Israel. The one whom the Lord has used so powerfully in the God War.

The one who stood alone on Mount Carmel, speaking the truth against the dead religion of the state. The one whom the Lord used repeatedly to speak out against the evil of the house of Ahab.

[8 : 12] The Lord is taking him away. And let me tell you, this causes no little amount of apprehension amongst the Lord's true people.

True Israel. The small remnant of real believers within the land represented in this chapter by the sons of the prophets and by Elisha himself.

We will see that Elijah's departure actually causes them apprehension. Why would they feel this way? Well, let me just remind you, what was the state of the nation back then?

The current state of the nation was still very, very grim. Very grim. Idolatry was still rife throughout the land. The worship of false pagan gods was as popular as ever.

The wicked house of Ahab was still the ruling regime of the day. One of Ahab's other sons, called Jehoram, is now seated on the throne.

[9 : 10] And the evil queen mother, Jezebel, who was responsible for the murder of countless prophets of the Lord, she is still alive and kicking and very much settled into her royal position, promoting Baal worship.

So actually, one might say things are as bad as they've ever been in Israel. And the Lord is about to come and remove his mighty warrior prophet. Again, you can just imagine the questions that are coursing through the heads of the Lord's true Israel.

Well, now that Elijah is going, will the word of the Lord continue on powerfully against evil? Will the Lord raise up and empower another bold prophet who will come and defend Israel from evil, like Elijah?

Well, friends, they needn't have worried, because in this chapter, the Lord gives his apprehensive people the assurance that they need to face this massive time of change that they're going through.

Assurance that will help them face the future and carry on following him in the dark, difficult days that they live in. Let's look at the chapter now in four points, four things that we see the Lord doing.

[10 : 31] Firstly, and this is the longest point this morning, verses 1 to 15. The Lord shows he will continue to work powerfully through his word. He will continue to work powerfully through his words.

And friends, the visible sign that the Lord will do this, continue to work powerfully through his word, is he publicly and powerfully appoints Elisha to take over from Elijah.

That is what this section is really all about. That's what the heart of this section is all about. So let's run through it. So verse 1, we're told it's getting very close to the time when Elijah is going to be taken off.

And notice that his departure is not going to come about through death. Miraculously and mysteriously, in a way that we can't probably comprehend, the Lord is going to come down and take him away to heaven.

But the only person who will truly see this happening is not everyone, but just Elisha. This is going to be a private ascension, as we will see.

[11 : 36] This is going to happen, in other words, for Elisha's benefit. But before we get to that point, we are left waiting. There's a lot of suspense, a lot of tension in the drama of this passage.

Before we get to the ascension, we're told about a journey. A journey that Elijah and Elisha go on from verses 1 to 7. Let me just run through that, and then we'll think, why did they take this journey?

So in verse 1, they're in Gilgal. And as they're about to leave in verse 2, Elijah turns to Elisha and says to his young assistant, who's been following him for some time, he says, Elisha, please stay here, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.

But Elisha is having none of it. And he replies, as the Lord lives, and as you yourself lives, I will not leave you. He stands rooted with his master.

He's faithful. And so they both walk on to Bethel. And in verse 3, when they get there, Elisha meets some members of the remnant of faith. These sons of the prophets, these were good men.

[12 : 49] And they come and they ask him this question in this really tense tone. They're full of concern. They ask, do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?

Tell us more. And Elisha replies, yes, I know. Keep it quiet. It's all very tense. Then in verses 4 and 5, the same thing happens all over again in the second leg of their journey.

They're about to set off for Jericho. Elisha turns to Elisha and says, don't come with me. Stay here. The Lord is sending me off. And again, Elisha's having none of it.

He continues to show great loyalty to Elisha. He again swears by the Lord that he will not leave Elisha's side. And so the two of them go off to Jericho.

And when they arrive, Elisha again encounters yet more sons of the prophets in Jericho. And again, they ask that same tense question. Do you not know today the Lord will take your master from you?

[13 : 56] And again, Elisha replies, yes, I know. Keep it quiet. It's all very tense. The last leg of their journey begins in verse 6. And they're about to set off for the banks of the river Jordan.

And for a third time, Elisha turns to Elisha and says, look, please stay here in Jericho. For the Lord has sent me to the Jordan. But again, Elisha replies, as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.

And so the two of them walk on until verse 7. They arrive at the banks of the Jordan, where more sons of the prophets are standing. There's another group in this area.

There's about 50 of them. But this time, they do not ask Elisha anything. What they do is they just stand at a distance and they watch with great expectation.

And before we look at what happens next, let's just ask, what's this all about? Why this journey? Why this journey? Well, firstly, the places that these men travel through from Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan, we will see these places mentioned in the second half of this chapter.

[15 : 12] Because what we're going to see is that Elisha, after his master has been taken up into heaven, he retraces this journey and goes back the way. From the Jordan through Jericho to Bethel.

This time on his own. And as Elisha retraces their steps through that route, what he does in each position is he works powerfully with the power the Lord gives him in order to confirm that he is the Lord's new lead prophet.

It was a powerful sign. Here is my replacement, says the Lord, in all these places. And it would bring great comfort to the sons of the prophets in these places.

Another reason for this journey is actually a big thing of it is preparation. What Elisha is happening to him here is he's being tested.

He's being prepared. That explains this three times when Elisha tells him to stay and to walk away from him and to leave him. Elisha says no.

[16 : 18] And basically, he passes with flying colors, showing himself to be a man of real character. A dependable and worthy successor for Elisha. But another reason, I think, is also one of concern for Elisha.

Because as they go on this journey, Elijah wants his replacement to look at these places and remember what the Lord had done in the past in these places.

These three places aren't just any old places. These were three places where the Lord showed his people great faithfulness and showed off his power. Gilgal, for example, was the place where Israel set up base camp after crossing the Jordan under Joshua.

And it was at that place that any faithful Israelite, when they looked at Gilgal, would remember this great act of the Lord's grace and mercy. That he was with his people. And that he acted powerfully for them.

Then Bethel. It goes way back further to the story of the patriarchs. And it was near Bethel that Abraham built an altar and first called on the name of the Lord in Genesis chapter 12.

[17 : 30] And later on, it was there that God met so graciously with Jacob, the father of Israel, in Genesis 28. And then, of course, friends, there was Jericho.

And if you know your Bible, you'll know the significance of Jericho. It was the place where Joshua met with the commander of the Lord's armies. Where Joshua learned about the true power of the Lord.

And realized that the battle was the Lord's. And the Lord was fighting for his people against the enemy. And as they traveled through these places, surely Elisha's heart was reminded of all these glorious examples of the Lord's faithfulness.

And power. It's almost like Elijah saying, just notice where we are. This is who your Lord is. He will be with you. Well, let's look at what happens next.

So in verse 7, Elijah and Elisha are on the banks of the Jordan. With these 50 men, the sons of the prophets, they're looking on from a distance.

[18 : 36] And in verse 8, we're told that Elijah takes off his mantle. Which is really another word for his cloak, his jacket. And what he does is he takes it. He rolls it up, probably around his arm, like a big glove, a boxing glove.

And what Elijah does, he comes forward to the river and he strikes the water like that. And all of a sudden, the water parts in two. And Elijah and Elisha are able to walk across on the ground with two walls of water beside them.

And again, this was yet another gracious reminder of the Lord's dealings with his people in the past. A reminder of what the Lord had done powerfully through Moses.

His first appointed leader, the prophet of Israel in the Exodus when he parted the Red Sea. And in verse 9, the two men, they walk on.

And notice they are alone now. They are alone. Very intimate. And Elijah asks, or sorry, rather, he says, Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you.

[19 : 46] And Elijah said, please, let there be, notice, a double portion of your spirit on me. That's what Elisha asks for here. But don't misunderstand him.

He is not asking to be twice as good as Elijah was in his ministry. The phrase double portion is actually lifted from the Lord's law. From Deuteronomy 21.

It's what a father would ask of his son to give him before his father. Sorry, yeah, it's what a son would ask of his father before his father died. So that the son could carry on the family name and carry on the work of his father.

And that is really what Elijah is saying here. He's saying to Elijah, you're like a father to me. And I want to carry on your name. I want to carry on your work. I pray that the Lord will use me in the same way that he has used you.

And in verse 10, do you notice? There's even more tension in the text comes in. We are left in greater suspense. For Elijah doesn't say, oh yeah, that's going to happen.

- [20 : 53] He doesn't say that. Look at verse 10. He says, you've asked for a hard thing. You've asked for a hard thing. Wait and see. If the Lord lets you see me being taken up.
- Then you will know that the Lord has given you the double portion or not. And in verse 11, they walk on. Just the two of them talking away.
- No one else is there. And then suddenly the moment finally arrives. And the suspense is finally lifted. Out of the blue, the Lord comes to his faithful servant Elijah.
- And what a terrifying thing it is. What a terrifying demonstration of power. What an impact it must have had on Elisha's heart.
- But he sees these chariots of fire. And these horses of fire. And then he sees Elijah being taken up. Not just up into the sky, but into heaven. In a whirlwind.
- [21 : 53] The true prophet of the Lord. Ascending up in glory. Into glory. After his faithful ministry. Has finished. And friends, as we read this.
- As we look at this description. We can't help but think of an ascension. Centuries later. That was even greater. Where an even greater prophet. Ascended up.
- To bring about an even bigger seismic shift. In the whole of history. The ascension of Christ. Is foreseen here. Which marked the beginning. Of the last days of history.
- Well how does Elisha react to this? Because actually what happens here. Is for his benefit. It is for his benefit. He is the only one who sees this properly.
- Look at verse 12. And Elisha saw it. And he cried. My father. My father. The chariots of Israel.
- [22 : 52] And its horsemen. And he saw him. No more. Just notice please. That in crying out. The chariots of Israel. And its horsemen. Elisha.
- He is actually there. Talking about. Elijah himself. For that is what Elijah has been. Throughout his ministry. That is what he has been to Israel. As I said at the start of the sermon.
- Elijah has been the great defender. Of the Lord's people. Against the wickedness of his day. Against the evil of Baal. And the house of Ahab. Elijah has been worth more to Israel.
- Than a whole army of chariots. But now he is gone. He is gone. And so there is a little hint of despair.
- In Elisha's cry here. He loves Elisha. He seems to have forgotten verse 10. And the fact that the Lord.
- [23 : 46] Has let him see. His master going up into heaven. And so that can only mean. That the Lord has heard his request. Of verse 9. And answered.
- Yes Elisha. Yes. I have heard your request. To receive the double portion. Of Elijah's spirit. And my answer is yes. Yes. You are my new defender.
- Of Israel. The Lord will continue. The powerful work. That he has been doing. Through his word. Through this new man. Elisha's power.
- Is really the Lord's power. And now it rests on Elisha. To enable him to minister. Just as his master has done. And the Lord is really gracious here.
- Because he gives Elisha. A further sign. That this is so. In verse 13. We learn that when he ascended. Elijah. He dropped his mantle. That is his cloak.
- [24 : 44] His jacket fell off. And it fell on the ground. And landed nearby. And so what Elijah does. Is he comes and picks up the mantle. That's where that expression comes from. In our English language.
- He picks up. Elijah's cloak. And what he does. Is he goes back to the same river Jordan. They were at moments before. And he uses the same jacket. And he strikes the water.

In the same way. And as he strikes the water. He shouts. Notice. Verse 13. Where is the Lord. The God of Elijah. In other words.

He's asking. Are you with me Lord? Are you with me? Show me that you haven't left. Israel defenceless. Show me. That you are calling me.

To replace my master. And immediately. When he strikes the water. Again. The river. Parts in two. Just as it did before.

[25 : 40] For Elijah. Now it does. For Elisha. And he's able to cross. In other words. The Lord graciously says to him again. Yes. I am with you.

You are. My new prophet. And in verse 15. When all the sons of the prophets. Who were standing at a distance. Who had stayed this other side of the Jordan.

When they see. Elisha coming back. Across the water alone. They all come to the same correct conclusion. The spirit of Elijah. Rests.

On Elisha. Elisha. The Lord is not left us defenceless. The Lord will carry on. His powerful work. Well friends.

Let me just pause there. And think about the implications for us today. As the people of God. As the church of the Lord Jesus. Friends. I think this passage. This passage should absolutely thrill us today.

[26 : 36] For a whole bunch of reasons. But let me just mention two. Firstly. It teaches our hearts. That the Lord's power. It is not tied to a particular time. A particular era.

The events of verse 8 and verse 14. The parting of the Jordan. As I say. They are clearly a rerun. Of the parting of the Red Sea. And they are also most probably.

Although it is a different miracle. Slightly different miracle. It is also a rerun. Of the parting of the river Jordan. Under Joshua. In Joshua 3 and 4. Where the Lord moved the water.

So his people could enter the promised land. Well the Lord is doing it again here. And his spirit is now upon this new prophet. It tells us.

That simply the God of 1400 BC. Is just as mighty as the God. In 805 BC. In other words. The Lord's powerful arm. Never loses his strength.

[27 : 33] The Lord our God. Is as strong as he ever was. In whatever stage of history. In whatever date. And friends. We are not Elijah.

We are not Elisha. But we have this same God. As Elijah and Elisha. And if we want to stand firm. As a church in these last days.

Well they are. Dark days that we live in. They are not so dissimilar. To the days of Ahab. If we want to stand firm. Then we must remember. That our God is all powerful. And he is the God.

Who continues to empower his people. In whatever age. To spread his powerful word. And he will continue to work. As he pleases. Powerfully. As one writer says.

God is still saving. And sanctifying his people. Still keeping them. From the evil one this day. In power. The Holy Spirit. Is still leading. Wandering Christians.

[28 : 29] To repent. And to renew their obedience. For as these mighty acts of the Lord. They are not limited. To these moments in the Bible. To Pentecost. Or the Reformation.

Or whatever point of church history. You want to look at. The Lord is powerful. All the time. The historical God. Is the contemporary God.

And so that should give us. Great boldness. As we seek as a church. To witness to our city. As we seek to reach out. With the good news of his gospel. Another lesson.

This section teaches us. Is that the Lord's power. Is not limited. To a certain instrument. The sons of the prophets. Saw this. They rightly said. The spirit of Elijah.

Now rests on Elisha. In other words. They saw the power of the Lord. That was once on one man. Shifting to another. The Lord's power. Is not bound to any one individual.

[29 : 25] God's leaders change. But God's power persists. As John Wesley once said. God buries his workers. But carries on his work.

And friends. Knowing that is the case. I think it should again. Give us confidence. But it should also keep us. From idolizing. Any servants of the Lord today. Which is something. That we're tempted to do.

Is it not? We live in a celebrity. Obsessed culture. It's so easy. For people in the church. To be seen. And idolized. In that way. Well actually.

Our help is in the name. Of the Lord alone. And not. In the charisma. Of any of his servants. Well secondly.

And briefly. In verses 16 to 18. We see that the Lord shows. He will continue. To teach his people. Wisdom. The Lord shows.

[30 : 24] He will continue. To teach his people. Wisdom. Now in this scene. It becomes apparent. That the sons of the prophets. Who were standing by the Jordan. They haven't been given.

The same insight. And understanding. As Elisha. In verse 16. We're told. That they did see. Elijah being swept away. They did see him being taken off. By the spirit of the Lord.

But these men. Have no idea. Where he has gone. They haven't seen this event. In the same way. That Elisha. Has been allowed to see it. In other words.

Elisha has been given. Real wisdom. And insight. From the Lord. But these other men. Haven't. As in verse 16. They come up. With great sincerity.

But deeply misguided. Intentions. They come up. And they say. Oh Elisha. We've got 50 strong men. Here with us. Please. Let us. Send them out. To search for Elijah.

[31 : 21] It may be. That the spirit of the Lord. Has caught him up. And cast him upon. Some mountain. Into some valley. And Elisha says. No.

No. Don't do that. Don't send out. The search party. And you know. Instead of listening. To Elisha. Instead of listening.

To the one. Whom they've clearly seen. Is full of the Lord's power. And the Lord's wisdom. Instead of trusting. In the Lord's prophet. In verse 17. These men. Do not take no.

For an answer. And they badger. And badger. Elisha. Until eventually. He's had enough. They break him. And he eventually says. Fine. Send out.

The search party. And so they go. They send out. Their 50 men. To search for Elijah. And they search. For three whole days. No doubt. They searched. Here. There. And everywhere. But they find.

[32 : 16] Absolutely. No trace of the man. Anywhere. There is no sight. Of Elijah. On earth. And in verse 18. These sons of the prophets. They come back.

To Elijah. Sorry. To Elisha. Who is at that point. In Jericho. And when Elisha. Sees them. He looks at them. And he says. I told you.

I told you so. I told you not. To search for him. But you did not. Listen to me. You wouldn't take no. For an answer. And of course. The implied message is.

Maybe next time. You will listen to me. Maybe. You will choose. To walk wisely. In other words. The Lord uses this situation.

To warn these. Sons of the prophets. That they need. To get wisdom. And what does that look like? That looks like. Humbly listening. To the Lord's word. Through Elisha.

[33 : 13] And they need to walk. According to that word. Let it shape. And inform their decisions. In life. And in ministry. But friends.

The Lord loves to do this. Actually. The Lord loves to teach his people. And correct his people. And give them wisdom. He's like that. All the way through the Bible. And that's what he's shown himself to be. Yet again. Even here.

And again. That should thrill our hearts. As his people. Because we need. Wisdom. If you're a Christian. Even if you've been a Christian. For many years. You need more wisdom. That's what the book of Prophets says.

Growing in wisdom. Is something we must never stop doing. So friends. Will we listen? Will we let the Lord's word today. Teach us. How we're to live.

In our everyday lives. Will we let his word. Shape our decisions. In life. And in ministry. Because friends. If we don't. Then we will.

[34 : 09] Very likely. Most likely. Find ourselves. Getting wrapped up. In fruitless ministries. As a church. Just like these men. Did. Listen to James Philip.

On this point. He says this. It was not that these men. Were not sincere. But they were sincerely. And totally wrong. And misguided. They were in the wrong dimension.

Spiritually speaking. They had no wisdom. This is the real danger point. In Christian work. When well-meaning folk. Determinantly. Pursue courses of action.

That will surely come. To nothing. The trouble is however. That all too often. Such people in the church. Are unwilling to face facts. And persist.

In their misguidedness. Some folks. He says. Never learn. But friends. Let's not be like these men. Let's learn wisdom. And the Lord our God.

[35 : 08] Delights to give us that wisdom. Through his word. Thirdly. In verses 19 to 22. 19 to 22. We see that the Lord shows.

He will continue. To be gracious. To those who seek his word. The Lord shows. He will continue. To be gracious. To those who seek his word. So remember.

In the second half of the chapter. The prophet Elisha. He's retracing his journey. That he made at the start of the chapter. But this time he's alone. Elisha is no longer with him.

And in verse 19. As I said a moment ago. He is now in Jericho. And the men of the city. They come up to him. And what they do is a lovely thing.

They come to him. And they seek his help. They seek the help. Of the man who's carrying the word of the Lord. Please look at verse 19. They say.

[36 : 03] Behold the situation of this city. It is pleasant. It's pleasant enough. As my Lord sees. But the water is bad. And the land is unfruitful. Now friends.

The Hebrew there is much much stronger. It's almost shocking language. The Hebrew there says. That the water here is foul. It is deadly. It stinks of death.

And the land suffers. From miscarriages. And it says land there. That shorthand. Not just for the ground. But also for the occupants of the land too. For all the livestock.

And all the people who live there. In other words. Jericho is a place of death. It's not a place of flourishing. It is the opposite.

And what does Elisha do. To these people who come. And seek help. In verse 20. He asks for a new bowl. And he also asks for some salt.

[36 : 59] To be put in it. And the people oblige. And in verse 21. What he does. Is he walks over to the water source. Wherever that was. So wherever the water supply came out.

And he takes some salt. Out of the bowl. And he tosses it into the water. And look what he says. Thus says the Lord. I have healed this water. From now on.

Neither death nor miscarriage. Shall come from it. Now verse 22. His words prove to be totally true. The water that was once deadly.

Is now healed. And what are we to make of this. Well friends. We are not to get hung up. On the significance of the bowl. And the salt. In many miracles throughout the Bible.

We meet some sort of visible. There is always some sort of visible action. Which accompanies a mighty work. That is a bit bizarre. But no. This salt is just a mere external sign.

[37 : 56] The thing that really counts here. Is the word of the Lord. That Elijah speaks. That is the essential component. About what happens here. And so in this episode. We are meant to see clearly.

The fact that God's word. Through God's prophet. Brings God's grace. To God's people. It is a beautiful picture. Of the transforming power.

Of the grace of God. And friends. Let me just say. Remember the location. Remember where are we? We are in Jericho. I have mentioned this earlier.

In our series in Kings. But Jericho. Was actually for many years. A cursed place. Way back in the time of Joshua. When the Lord had defeated Jericho. And gave it over to his people.

Joshua you remember. Uttered a curse. And he said. Cursed be the man. Who rebuilds this place. This Jericho. Was a condemned. End place.

[38 : 52] And back in 1st Kings 16. Under the evil king Ahab. Israel ignored that curse. And they rebuilt Jericho. And you'll remember. That in that chapter.

A terrible curse. Comes upon. The lead builder. Whom Ahab had hired. To do the work. We're told. Heartbreakingly. Two of his children. Dropped dead.

And from that point. Still. Jericho remained. A place of curse. Seemed in the water supply. But not now.

Not now. All things are changed. All things are changed. For here. We see. That the city. That was once. Under curse. Now receives. A blessing. Of God's grace. The place.

Where the Lord. Once inflicted. His destructive word. Has now. Come to be. The place. That enjoys. His healing word. Grace. And really. Here. The Lord. Is declaring.

[39 : 47] To everyone. In Israel. That in Elisha. Here is my new prophet. And if you turn to me. Through him. If you seek my word. Like the men of Jericho did.

I am ready. And willing. To show you. The same grace. That I have shown Jericho. Grace that will transform you. Grace.

That will bless you. That is what the Lord. Is showing his people. Through Elisha. He will continue. To show grace. And again. Friends. The Lord.

Our God. Has not changed. Doesn't change. Through any. Period of history. He is always the same. He is the same today. He is the God. Who right now. This day. Delights to do.

This sort of thing. With people's hearts. As one writer. Puts it. The Lord. Our God. Delights to turn the most. Cursed ridden. Sin laden.

[40 : 42] Judgment bearing. Situations. And people. Into episodes. Of his grace. In living color. My friend. Maybe you are here.

This morning. And you are someone. Who is desperately. Struggling. Under the weight of. Guilt of your sin. Maybe you have come here. This day. And you feel crushed. Because you feel.

You have failed. Before God. And you deserve. Just consequences. Well you need to know. That the Lord. Is ready. And willing. To show you. The same kindness.

That he does here. So friend. Whatever you do. Do not reject. Or mock his words. But if you come to his word. Humbly.

As the people of Jericho do. Knowing. You are hopeless. Without help. From the Lord. He will help you. And bless you. Through Jesus Christ. His greatest prophet.

[41 : 34] But as I say friend. Whatever you do. Do not reject. That word. And certainly. Do not. Mock that word. Which brings me on.

To our fourth. And final point. This morning. In verse 23. Into 25. We see. The Lord shows. He will judge. Those. Who mock his words.

So friends. Once again. The author of the book of Kings. He not only shows us.

The way of life. He also gives us. A necessary negative. He shows us. Also. The way of death. The way of death. And that's what we see here.

In this last section. See. It's a bit misleading. Some people think. They look at the prophet Elijah. And they say. Well Elijah's ministry. It was really one. Of predominantly grace. And it was a little bit.

[42 : 29] Of judgment. But his ministry. Was mostly grace. Whereas the prophet Elisha. His ministry. Is mostly grace. Sorry. I've got that the wrong way around. People look at Elijah's ministry.

And think. That was a ministry. Mostly of judgment. And there's little bits. Of grace thrown in there. But when they come to Elisha. They think. Well he's just a prophet. Of grace alone.

I tell you friends. That is not right. The Lord will continue. To bring his judgment. Through Elisha. Please look at verse 23. He went up from there.

To Bethel. And while he was going up. On the way. Some small boys. Came out of the city. And jeered at him. Saying. Go up. Bald head.

Go up. Bald head. So Elisha. He's in the Bethel area now. And as he was going by the city. He doesn't go through the city.

[43 : 26] He's going by it here. He has this encounter. That is so different. From the encounter. That we read about in Jericho. In Jericho.

People came. Humbly seeking help. From the Lord's word. For here. Elisha receives nothing but scorn. And hostility. Now our translation.

As Willie said. And as people in other locations. Have probably pointed out. That unhelpfully says. That this group. That approach Elisha. Was a group of small boys. That is really misleading.

That is not what the Hebrew says. It's probably better. As the NIV puts it. Worthless youths. These were young men. These were thugs. And let me just say.

There was not two or three of these young men. There was at least. Forty two of them. At least. Probably more. Definitely more. And notice where they came from.

[44 : 21] Very deliberately. Carefully put in the text. They came. Out of the city of Bethel. They came out of Bethel. And what was found in the city of Bethel.

At that time. One of the massive. Of idolatrous golden bull calves. Of Jeroboam. That he built. Bethel. Was a capital city.

Of pagan worship. And idolatry. We're supposed to see. That this massive gang. Of young thugs. They are a product. Of that idolatrous city.

And that idolatrous education system. Of that city. Over forty two of them come. And as I say. They show Elisha. Nothing but contempt. And notice what they shout.

Yeah of course. They slag off his appearance. They call him baldy twice. But let me just say. There's something far more serious. Than what they say. And their insult.

[45 : 18] It's when they go. Go up. Go up. News has obviously travelled fast. About Elijah's. Ascension. And here. These young thugs.

What they're doing. Is they are mocking. They are mocking. This powerful work. Of the Lord. What they're really saying. Is come on Elijah. Come on Elijah. You bald idiot.

Let's see you do it. Okay. You go up. Let's see you ascend. Just like you're full. Of a master. Elijah. Which he has. Allegedly done.

They don't believe in their. Ascension. For one second. They are mocking. They're saying. Come on. Show us. Give us a sign. Ascend up to heaven. You bald idiot. And this gang of young thugs.

Are full of hatred. For the Lord's prophet. And the Lord's power. And in verse 24. In response to this hostility. Elijah prays. And he prays.

[46 : 15] A curse upon them. He prays in other words. For the Lord to act justly. He prays for the Lord. To defend his name. And his word. That's what's at stake here.

This is not a personal thing. This is. All prayer. All about the Lord's glory. And do you know what the Lord does? The Lord answers.

Yes. And suddenly. Two bears. Come bounding. Out of the woods. And what they do. Is they tear. Forty two of these young thugs. To pieces.

And friends. Can I just say. If you're sitting there thinking. This is horrible. This is terrifying. This is just like that fire. That we read about last Sunday morning. Which fell from heaven. Upon those soldiers.

In second Kings chapter one. This is horrifying. Friends. If that's how you're reacting. To this passage. Can I just say. You're absolutely right. This is horrifying.

[47 : 13] This is terrifying. And that is exactly how we should all feel. When we hear about the just judgment of God. Falling upon rebellious sinners. They despise.

And mock his word. Friends. This should shake us. This is not something for us to laugh at. Because Elisha says. Baldi twelfth. This should sober us.

This should shake us. Wherever we are. Even as believers. We need to take God seriously. We need to take his word seriously. We need to take repentance seriously.

That's why this passage is here. That's why the Lord actually allows this to happen. This would have been another sign for Israel. About the way of death. That we are to shun and avoid.

The Lord shows. He will continue to judge. Those who mock his word. Well friends. If you haven't humbled yourself.

[48 : 09] Before the Lord this day. Second things. Chapter 2. Please with me. Could do so without delay. And as someone maybe. Who's trusted in the Lord. Maybe you've been. A professing believer for many years.

This chapter wants us to come to him afresh. With humility. Once again. And to make sure we are still walking.

Faith and repentance. Well friends. Let's bow our heads and let's pray. Let's pray. We praise you.

Our Lord and our God. For you are the King. Who reigns throughout all the ages. You are the King. Who continues to work powerfully. Your purposes through your word.

So help us we pray. Your precious people in Christ. To keep on trusting. In your word. And to praise you. Whatever we face. In the days to come.

[49 : 15] May we remember. These glorious truths. Of 2 Kings chapter 2. So that we will stand firm.
Whatever comes our way. And we pray this in Jesus precious name.
Amen.