

The Transfer

2 Kings 2:1-12

What would you do if you were told that today would be your last day on earth? Some might scramble to get their financial house in order. Others might get their spiritual house in order as they prepare to meet God. Others might reach out to family and friends for one last fellowship. Others might confess sins to people they have wronged. Others might worship the LORD with your church family . . . perhaps you would sing with greater joy (you might even raise your hands in joy!) , perhaps you would pray with greater passion, perhaps you would rejoice in the preaching of the Gospel (you might even shout “Amen”!), and perhaps you would turn your handshakes into hugs.

What would you do if you were told that today would be your last day on earth? **If you are a follower of Jesus, you think about this question in a totally different way than those without Christ.** Here is what Paul says about it:

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.” (Romans 14:7-9 [ESV](#))

God's people look at life and at death and say, “Either way, I am not my own. I am the LORD's. He cares for me completely. He leads me each step. I live for His glory. And He will take me home.”

Elijah wakes up in the city of Gilgal and God communicates to him that he will be taken out of this world on this very day. God also tells Elisha that this will be Elijah's last day on earth.

It is significant that these two start out together in Gilgal. Remember this is the city where the Israelites first camped when Joshua led them across the Jordan River (Joshua 4:19-20).

Gilgal is a place of new beginnings. This will be a new day for Elijah as his 21-year ministry here on earth closes. He is about to begin his new life with God in heaven.

This will also be a new day for Elisha as God has ordained for him to take Elijah's place as His prophet to wayward Israel. **You recall that 16 years earlier,** the LORD directed Elijah to place his cloak upon Elisha as a sign of the LORD's

ordination upon him to ministry. On that day, Elisha told Elijah, “I will follow you.” And for 16 years Elisha has been following Elijah in readiness to be used by the LORD. He has been in the shadows, but he has been humbly present with Elijah . . . simply serving LORD. **Elisha knows that today the transfer of responsibility will be made complete.**

When Elijah gets up early that morning and after a large latte with cool foam art says to Elisha, *“Hey, Elisha, you should just stay here in Gilgal. The LORD is sending me to Bethel. But really, you should take a load off your feet and relax here today.”*

Elisha smiles and says, **“You are not going to get rid of me that easy! Nope. I am coming with you!”** So off they go for an refreshing walk to Bethel.

It is significant that God would lead these two to Bethel. Remember that this is the city where God revealed Himself to Jacob and spoke to him. Jacob slept with a stone for a pillow. In a dream he sees a ladder that reaches from the earth to heaven and angels climbing up and down on that ladder. **The LORD Himself is standing at the top of the ladder and in the dream he speaks to Jacob . . .**

“I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. . . . Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:13-15 [ESV](#))

Bethel is a place of promise. The LORD promises that He will bring His people Israel to repentance and faith. These servants were not to get discouraged by the outward results that they were seeing now. God will fulfill His Word! God will use these two prophets for His glory!

When Elijah and Elisha arrive at Bethel, some “sons of the prophets” take Elisha aside. *“Hey Elisha. The LORD told us that He is going to take Elijah out of this world today.”* Elisha sighs with sadness and replies, *“I already know that! Don’t talk to me about that again. It makes me too sad to think about it!”*

No sooner did Elisha find a nice shade tree in Bethel to cool off that Elijah comes to him and says, *“Hey, Elisha, you should just stay here in Bethel. The LORD is sending me to Jericho. But really, you should take a load off your feet and relax here today.”* Elisha smiles and says, **“You are not going to get rid of me that easy! Nope. I am coming with you!”** So off they go to Jericho.

It is significant that God would lead these two to Jericho. Remember that this is the first city of conquest where the LORD Himself tore down the walls to demonstrate His power to give them the land that He promised to them.

Jericho is the place of Victory. The LORD is able to do the impossible. **These servants are to remember that God never lacks the might to fulfill His good purposes even when the enemy seems overwhelmingly strong.** Nothing is too difficult for Him!

When Elijah and Elisha arrive at Jericho, some “sons of the prophets” take Elisha aside. *“Hey Elisha. The LORD told us that He is going to take Elijah out of this world today.”* Elisha sighs with sadness and replies, *“I already know that! Don’t talk to me about that again. It makes me too sad to think about it!”*

No sooner did Elisha find a nice sycamore tree in Jericho to cool off that Elijah comes to him and says, *“Hey, Elisha, you should just stay here in Jericho. The LORD is sending me across the Jordan River. But really, you should take a load off your feet and relax here today.”* Elisha smiles and says, ***“You are not going to get rid of me that easy! Nope. I am coming with you!”*** So off they go to the banks of the Jordan.

It is significant that God would lead these two to the Jordan River. Remember that this is the place where the LORD parted the waters so that His people could walk across on dry ground. Here the LORD commanded them to take 12 stones from the middle of the river as a memorial to God’s faithfulness to them.

The Jordan River is the place of Remembrance. The LORD wants us to remember His faithfulness, His power, His goodness. **He knows that we are prone to forget the LORD when we face fearful trials.** The devil works upon our souls through our forgetfulness of God’s past blessings. The Jordan River reminds Elijah and Elisha that the LORD is God and there are no other gods besides Him.

As Elijah and Elisha approach the rushing water of the Jordan River, 50 sons of the prophets stand at a distance watching what is taking place. **They know that Elijah will be taken from Elisha at some point and they are curious.**

As Elijah and Elisha stand on the western bank of the Jordan, Elijah takes off his outer garment and rolls it up. He leans over and strikes the water with it. The waters divide! Elijah steps down to the river’s floor and then Elisha follows. The ground under their feet is dry! This reminds them of the LORD’s redemption of Israel from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea.

When they get to the other side, Elijah says, *“Elisha, before I am taken from you, feel free to ask me for anything. You are a faithful servant of the LORD.”*

Immediately, Elisha responds, *“Elijah, I only want one thing . . . please let there be a double portion of your spirit upon me. I want to serve the LORD and I know that I cannot do that without His Spirit upon me. I have seen how God has*

used you and empowered you to do His will. I want to do the will of the LORD too and I cannot do that in my own power. Please grant me a double portion of your spirit! I need the LORD to work in me so that I can have the same faith and the same courage and the same obedience that you have. I know that without these spiritual qualities, I will fail as God's servant."

Elijah loves this God-exalting request and yet he knows that God's spiritual blessing is not his to give. Only the LORD could grant this sovereign life-giving grace in his soul. He smiles with pleasure as he answers, *"Elisha, what you are asking is something that I am not able to give you. Only the LORD can give that to you. But the LORD has revealed to me that if you see me as I am being taken from you, that will be a sign that the LORD is granting you a double portion of the faith that God has given to me. But if you do not see me as I am taken from you, the LORD is not giving you what you ask."*

Well, Elisha kept his eyes on Elijah from that moment with an extreme intensity. **When he blinked, he only closed one eye at a time.** 😊

So they walked and talked and talked and talked some more. Elisha knew he had only a short time to ask Elijah questions and he wanted to soak up Elijah's wisdom. Suddenly, out of the sky, chariots of fire born by horses of fire whisked down upon them . . . separating these two from each other. Elisha fell to the ground trembling, but a great wind blew up under Elijah and he was lifted upward . . . the wind pushed Elijah higher and higher as the chariots of fire ascended alongside of him. (As an aside, Elijah was not in the chariots of fire. He was transported by the wind. The chariots were present to show God's protection over him as he took Elijah home.) Up, up, up Elijah went into heaven.

Elisha saw it all and with great sadness he cried, *"My father! My father! Do not leave me. Oh the chariots of Israel and the horsemen."* And then Elijah was gone AND Elisha was alone.

In grief, he tore his own clothes into two pieces as an act of mourning. He was grieving like a son does at the death of his beloved dad. He missed Elijah already!

But then he saw Elijah's cloak fluttering to the ground. He ran to it and picked it up. It was the only thing left of Elijah! He put this cloak over him and headed back to the Jordan.

When he arrived at the banks of the Jordan, he did what Elijah had done just an hour or so earlier. He rolled it up and struck the water saying, *"Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?"* He wondered if the LORD would be with him as He was with Elijah.

The waters parted and Elisha KNEW that the LORD had fulfilled the word that He spoke through Elijah. The LORD would give him spiritual life and energy for ministry even as He had given it to Elijah! Elisha walked on dry ground back to the land of promise where he begins his new chapter as God's prophet to His people Israel.

Main Idea: Jesus gave His church a mission to fulfill. Every follower of Jesus is ordained by God to engage in Jesus' ministry for the glory of God!

From this story we learn so much about engaging in Jesus' ministry? I hope by the end of our time together you will have greater insight to answer this question:

How might I receive God's blessing as I fulfill the ministry that God has given me to accomplish in my life for His glory?

Let us first consider . . .

The Spiritual Ministry of God's Servant

As we look back over the spiritual ministry of Elijah, we stand in awe of the miracles that God performed for him and through him.

We think of Elijah praying that it would not rain and for 3.5 years it did not rain.

We think of the ravens feeding Elijah by the Brook Cherith.

We think of the widows oil and flour that constantly was refilled.

We think of the widow's son brought back to life.

We think of the fire that came down from heaven to consume the water soaked sacrifice.

We think of Elijah praying that it would rain and rain fell.

We think of fire coming down from heaven consuming the first and then the second set of 50 soldiers.

We think of Elijah striking the Jordan River with his cloak and the Jordan River parting.

From Elijah's life, it would be tempting to think that spiritual ministry is mainly about performing miracles in God's name. **But we would have missed the whole point of Elijah's life if we thought that.** You see, the LORD did not send Elijah to do miracles. The miracles were only meaningful as a support for Elijah's ministry,

not as the substance of his ministry. The miracles were simply witnesses to prove Elijah is sent by the LORD to have a spiritual ministry in Israel.

Question: If miracles were not Elijah's ministry, what was his ministry?

In this Elijah's ministry is very similar to every church members ministry:

Truth: Spiritual ministry takes many forms, but every spiritual ministry possesses the common goal of leading others to know the LORD and to worship Him.

The LORD sent Elijah to Israel to call this rebellious people to repent of their sin and to turn back to the LORD. The LORD called Elijah to proclaim His Word and to call men and women back to worship of the one true and living God. Elijah's message was not, "Hey watch me do miracles!" Elijah's message was, "And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."" (1 Kings 18:21)

God sent Elijah to be salt and light to a nation who had turned away from Yahweh to serve idols. He is not call Elijah to merely criticize nor to condemn. He called Elijah to spiritually ministry to his generation. If you are a follower of Jesus, God calls you to do the same!

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16 [ESV](#))

The good news is that you are not alone. God places us in His church where we get to serve in spiritual ministry to the LORD together! Each member of Jesus' church is given a spiritual gift to engage in spiritual ministry to the LORD. Our calling is not secondary to Elijah's calling. Our calling is just spiritual. Just as meaningful. Just as vital!! Are you engaging in the spiritual ministry that God has given you?

Application: Wherever you serve in Jesus' church, our ministry's goal is to glorify God by pointing people to Jesus. If you serve in the nursery, your goal is

to point people to Jesus as LORD and Savior. If you serve on the finance team, your goal is to point people to Jesus as LORD and Savior. If you serve on the building and grounds team, your goal is to point people to Jesus as LORD and Savior. It is not just the Bible teachers who point people to Jesus. It is the core of every spiritual ministry.

Illustration: Man with grease all over clothes working on a car in a garage near a church. I asked him what he was doing. He shared that the church had a ministry of fixing cars for widows and unemployed members. He said, "But we are not really here to work on cars. We are here to help others know Jesus and have eternal life."

Question: How do I point people to Jesus? By sharing the Word of God with them. By sharing your testimony with them. By talking about what Jesus is doing in your life.

I know that this may seem very awkward to you at first. But it is what ministry is. As you point people to Jesus by sharing God's Word, by sharing your testimony and by sharing what Jesus is doing in your life, you will find much joy and much spiritual fruit! The church becomes strong as God designs her to be when each member embraces spiritual ministry through her.

The Spiritual Ministry of God's Servant

The Spiritual Preparation of God's Servant

As we see Elisha in our story, we see the picture of spiritual preparation. We see a young man who is called by God into ministry and anointed by Elijah as his replacement. But then Elisha lives in obscurity for 16 years before the LORD promotes him to a place of prominence. I think of David when I think of Elisha. He too was anointed at a very young age and then had to wait about 18 years before he become king.

God often places us in lowly positions to prepare us to be God's servants. You see spiritual ministry is not about gaining the attention of crowds, it is not about being in a position of power to make decisions, it is not about being in the spotlight.

Preparation #1: Spiritual ministry is a place of humble service. God prepares us for spiritual ministry by opening doors to serve Him in the most humble places doing the most humble things.

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9:33-35 [ESV](#))

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." . . . And Jesus . . . said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35-45 [ESV](#))

James and John were asking the wrong question and getting no where in spiritual ministry because of it. Jesus prepared them for spiritual ministry by changing the question that rolled through their souls.

I am convinced that too many followers of Jesus never find their place of spiritual ministry in Jesus' church because they are asking the wrong questions.

We are prone to ask, "What do I have time to do?" Or "What will be the most fulfilling for me and for my life?" Or "What will I enjoy the most?" I do not see any servant of God in all of scripture ask any of these questions! What is the question that will propel us in spiritual ministry in Jesus' church today?

"Lord, how would you have me serve You? I will do anything you ask. Please open a door today!"

Spiritual ministry's greatest goal is not to find our identity in some important work or to fulfill our greatest potential. Spiritual ministry's greatest goal is to hear our Master say on the day of Judgment, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'" (Matthew 25:23 [ESV](#))

Preparation #2: Persistence through discouragement will be necessary if we are to serve the LORD. God prepares us for ministry by leading us through discouraging situations.

Three times Elijah says to Elisha. “Hey, why don’t you stay here and take it easy while I go to the next place.” Why is he doing that? Because Elijah is testing Elisha to see if he has the persistence to push through discouragement. Elijah is preparing Elisha for the times in the future when Elisha will feel like quitting on the Lord.

Principle: Just as it is better to never marry than to marry and quit on your spouse, it is better to never begin serving the Lord than to begin and quit on the Lord.

“Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”” (Luke 9:62 [ESV](#))

The Spiritual Ministry of God’s Servant

The Spiritual Preparation of God’s Servant

The Spiritual Power of God’s Servant

If Elisha learned anything in those 16 years of watching Elijah humbly serve the LORD, he learned that he does not have the ability to fulfill God’s ministry in his own strength. He needs the LORD to do the LORD’s work. So on the day that Elijah is to be taken from him and says to him, “Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you.” Elisha already KNOWS what he is going to ask. Without a moment of hesitation he says, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit upon me.” He is asking for the blessing that a Jewish dad would give to his firstborn son. (cf Deuteronomy 21:17). He is asking that the same spirit in Elijah would be his spirit. What kind of spirit is that?

He is asking for a spirit of faith to trust in the LORD when it seems like the LORD is absent. He is asking for a spirit of obedience to submit to the LORD when the LORD asks Him to do hard things. He is asking for a spirit of courage when the world stands against Him with threats and violence. He is asking for a spirit of prayer to believe that the LORD hears his cries and answers with power.

Now Elijah knows that he does not possess these things because he is such a great man. No. Elijah knows that he is a weak human being like the rest of us. So he tells Elisha, “This is not for ME to give. Only God can give you that.” But he also

knows that God is generous to give everything that the LORD's servants need to fulfill the LORD's ministry.

Truth: Spiritual ministry can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God upon us. We must not attempt to do spiritual ministry in our own strength!

Our experience. Our training. Our life wisdom. Our personalities. Our talents. These are NOT enough for us to fulfill what the LORD is calling us to do in His church! We need the Holy Spirit to fill us and shape us for His glory.

Application: Ask the LORD for the Holy Spirit to give you a spirit of faith, obedience and courage. Ask with the purpose of bringing glory to God and not to yourself. Ask with the goal of fulfilling the ministry of the LORD. God loves to give the Holy Spirit to those who humbly ask!

"Then he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.'" (Zechariah 4:6 [ESV](#))

D.L. Moody was to have a campaign in England. One pastor protested, *Why do we need this 'Mr. Moody'? He's uneducated, inexperienced, etc. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?* Another pastor rose and responded, ***No, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody.***

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:5-6 [NAS95](#))

The Spiritual Baton of God's Servant

Every servant of God will one day be replaced. Every servant of God will one day leave their place of ministry. It is vital that those in spiritual ministry pass the baton of ministry to others. We must not cling to our place too long. We must not find our identity in our work. **We must prepare others for the ministry that we currently hold.**

Moses prepared Joshua. Elijah prepared Elisha. Jesus prepared the 12. Paul prepared Timothy and Titus.

How do I do this? If you are serving the LORD in the nursery or teaching a SS class, God would have you prepare to pass the baton. There are people whom God would have you to prepare for His work. No ministry in Jesus' church is OUR MINISTRY. All ministry is Jesus' ministry. We are servants . . . stewards of it for a time. We are not the owners.

You then, my child, . . . what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:1-2 [ESV](#))

Oh, how much stronger the ministry of Jesus' church would be if everyone engaged in ministry would be laboring to pass the baton.

Our desire to pass the baton is not to be relieved of the weight of responsibility for ministry. We joyfully hold on to the responsibility as long as the LORD tells us to. But we know that our lives are short and that there is much to do for God's kingdom. So we eagerly pass the baton for the glory of Jesus.

This story is as much a story of Elijah's passing the baton as it is a story of Elijah's amazing departure from this world. The story does not climax with the chariots of fire. The story climaxes with Elisha taking up Elijah's cloak and striking the Jordan River with it. It ends with Elisha walking back into the promised ground through the divided river. It culminates in Elisha's readiness to take Elijah's place as God's prophet.

Pass the baton. Pass it quickly. Pass it often. Pass it securely.

How do I do pass the baton?

**Five words to pass the baton of ministry:
Invite. Equip. Engage. Encourage. Evaluate.**

The Spiritual Departure of God's Servant.

Elijah departs from this world in such a dramatic fashion. The chariots of fire with the horses of fire separating Elijah from Elisha. Then the whirlwind that swept under Elijah's feet and lifted him in the air! What a sight to behold!

Yet the important matter is not HOW Elijah left this world, but WHERE Elijah went. The text tells us that Elijah “went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” Elijah departed from the broken, fighting, sinning, dark world and entered a whole, peaceful, righteous, light-filled world. There Elijah is to this day and on into eternity.

Elijah is ready to depart BECAUSE he knows where he is going.

Question: Do you know where you are going when you depart from this world? It is a most important question! We cannot be ready to depart until we know where we are going!

In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” **Thomas said to him,** “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” **Jesus said to him,** “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”(John 14:2-6 [ESV](#))

Truth: Everyone departs. Not everyone departs to the same place. If Jesus is with us, He will lead us safely to His Father’s house. If Jesus is not with us, we have no hope of arriving at the Father’s house. Make sure Jesus is with you in this life so that He will be with you at the time of your departure!

What is with the chariots of fire? These are symbols of God’s powerful protection at the point of His servant’s departure from this world. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil. Because God is with His Servants . . . He protects us on the journey to the safety of our eternal home.

Jesus tells us about a poor man named Lazarus who all his life had to beg for bread in order to live. Jesus says that when Lazarus died, he “was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.” (Luke 16:22-23). I believe that the “chariots of fire” are the glorious common experience of God’s people the point of our departure.

What a joyful day our departure will be if we have become God’s servants through faith in Jesus!!!

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8 ESV)

Conclusion:

Question: What would you do if you were told that this were the last day of your life on earth? Make ready! If you are ready, then we would simply continue with the ministry that God gives to us. All the way to our final breath.

Main Idea: Jesus gave His church a mission to fulfill. Every follower of Jesus is ordained by God to engage in Jesus’ ministry for the glory of God!