

# Finish Well

*1 Kings 19:15-21, 2 Kings 2:1-13*

- We are going to wrap up our look at Elijah this week.
- Although there are a few other passages where God uses Elijah to confront kings, in some ways, they are more about the kings themselves than Elijah's role.
- Instead, we are going to pick up where we left off in **1 Kings 19:15** and take a bird's eye view of the last season of Elijah's life and ministry.
  
- As we do, let me say this:
- I am now almost 34 years old. Over the years, I have had the tremendous privilege of serving with adults who were older than me.
- When I was in middle and high school, the pastors at my church would pull me aside and encourage or challenge me as they saw God preparing me to serve Him.
- When I got to seminary, I worked with hundreds of senior adults during at a large church. Those men and women prayed, loved, and supported me. They were always so gracious to give me feedback and encourage me to keep growing and serving the Lord. They let me teach their class, shared their stories, and were always there for me.
- Since I have been here, I have had the privilege of going through life with adults who have been walking with Jesus longer than I have been alive. I joked with our Tuesday group that I lower the average age of our small group to 75! I am so grateful, though, to hear their struggles and joys and glean additional wisdom on how to navigate the challenges of life.
- I wouldn't be who I am now if God hadn't brought older people alongside me throughout my life, and I am so grateful

he continues to do so.

- What does that have to do with Elijah and God's power?
- One of God's primary tasks for Elijah during the last years of his life was to bring someone along with him.
- God worked mightily through the ordinary man Elijah, but like all of us, he wouldn't live forever.
- This morning, that's the challenge I want to bring out to all of us.
- Really, none of us know how much longer we have to live. Whether you would consider yourself young with plenty of life ahead of you or in the fourth quarter of life, you need to give serious thought to who you are bringing with you as you seek to finish well.
- In fact, if you walk out of here this morning with nothing else, I would challenge you to **bring someone with you as you seek to finish well.**
- We're going to break that down into two different sections.
- First, we need to...

## 1) Look out for the next generation.

- Pick up with me in **1 Kings 19:15-19.**
- Elijah had been serving the Lord faithfully already for years, and he still had several years of fruitfulness to go.
- However, a part of God's plan for Elijah's last section of ministry was that he would bring someone along with him.
- What do we mean by that?
- Elijah was told to go find Elisha. When he found him, Elijah did something significant: he put his mantle around him.
- That mantle represented the power of God on Elijah's life as a prophet.

- By putting his mantle around him, Elijah was showing Elisha and everyone else that he would one day take Elijah's place.
- However, if you look through the rest of the stories in 1 Kings, you see Elijah popping in and out over the next several years.
- Elijah's death and "retirement", if you will, weren't going to happen for some time, yet God ordained for Elisha to shadow Elijah for years so he would be ready when the time came.
  
- In one sense, Elijah was lucky, because God told him explicitly who to anoint and who would take his place.
- We don't always get that. However, the Bible gives us a pattern of coming alongside younger brothers and sisters in Christ and helping them to grow in their faith, especially for those of us in leadership.
  - We see how Moses brought Joshua alongside him during the years in the wilderness so he would be equipped to take over when Moses died.
  - Here, we see it with Elijah and Elisha.
  - Jumping to the New Testament, we see Jesus taking along twelve men, investing years in them in ways He didn't invest in the rest.
  - We see it in **Acts 18**, where Priscilla and Aquila pull Apollos aside and help him learn the full truth of Christianity.
  - You read it in the letters the apostles wrote as they talked about the people traveling with them and wrote encouraging notes and letters to those who they had won to Christ and disciplined.
  - Perhaps the clearest command of this is in Paul's second letter to Timothy:

*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2, NASB95)*

- Let me ask you: who are you bringing along with you?
- This is the process we sometimes give several different names: mentoring, leadership development, but perhaps the most biblical term is discipleship.
- Let me give you a crazy complicated definition of discipleship, and then we'll break it down:

*"Discipling others is the process by which a Christian with a life worth emulating commits himself or herself for an extended period of time to a few individuals who have been won to Christ, the purpose being to aid and guide their growth to maturity and equip them to reproduce themselves in a third spiritual generation."*

- That's what Elijah was doing. As you read through 1 & 2 Kings, you see that there were a lot of prophets throughout Israel. Instead of trying to train every prophet, Elijah focused on equipping one to take his place.
- He committed himself to Elisha, working to help Elisha grow spiritually and be equipped to lead others when the time came.
- This is not an easy process.
- First, you have to be walking with Jesus closely enough that there is something for others to emulate. You don't have to be perfect, but you do have to be growing.
- Next, you are committing to a long process. People from other generations don't look at life the same way, which is why your grandfather said the same things about your generation that you are saying about theirs.
- However, when you are bringing someone along, you are committing to help them grow, even when they disappoint

and frustrate you, even when they don't see eye to eye with you, and even when you don't want to anymore.

- It also means that you have to be secure in who you are in Christ.
- How will you feel when the person you are discipling does better than you at something you taught them to do?
- Here's how the apostle John reacted:  
*I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (3 John 4, NASB95)*
- If you allow your pride to creep in, you will resent the success God gives those you are bringing along.
- You say, "Well, that's great if you are a pastor, but I just help in the nursery or the kitchen or this area or that. I'm just a grandmother or a mom."
- Listen: part of discipleship is bringing others along to help serve God, their family, the church, community, and world with their gifts and talents.
- If you are faithfully serving the Lord where you are, you can help disciple someone else!
- Let me give you an example: I know some of you here are single moms and you had to raise your kids by yourself. You can disciple a single mom on how she can find her strength in her relationship with Christ, how you have seen Him provide in crazy times, how you failed and what you would do differently so they can avoid the mistakes you make.
- Are you a Christian in business? You can come alongside a young man or woman just starting out and help them learn how to do their job for the Lord and not for man, how to honor the Lord with their finances, how to make difficult personnel decisions in a way that Christ is honored.

- In both those situations, I can and will teach those things from the pulpit, but they don't communicate as well as when you come alongside someone to show them Christ.
- It doesn't have to be some formal weekly meeting; just invite them over for lunch after church, call them from time to time, do life together.
- Let me ask you: who is your Elisha? Who are you discipling? Who are you equipping to fill your shoes when you are gone?
- Remember, none of us know how long we have to serve the Lord here, so we should all be doing this.
- We should be investing in the next generation in such a way that we can help them take our place and serve the Lord in their generation as we have had the privilege in ours.
- **If you're going to bring up someone with you, you have to make sure you also follow Elijah's example of finishing well, which means you...**

## 2) Stay faithful to the end.

- Jump over to **2 Kings 2:9**.
- As you're turning, let me summarize what is going on.
- A few years have passed, and now the time is come for Elijah to go home to be with the Lord.
- In the beginning of chapter 2, we know it's happening.
- Apparently, Elisha and others know it as well because Elijah tries to get Elisha to let him go on without him, but Elisha refuses.
- By the way, this wasn't a test to see if he would fail; it was a test to prove Elisha's devotion to the Lord and Elijah.

- As they get ready to cross the Jordan, Elijah rolls up that mantle he had wrapped around Elisha, smacks the river, and it parts.
  - Pick up with me in **verse 9-14**.
  - Elisha followed Elijah as closely as he could until angelic chariots separated the two.
  - With a powerful whirlwind, God took Elijah home.
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- Boy, don't you long for that? Don't you wish God would come and take you home without some long illness or some painful, agonizing death?
  - We don't have that guarantee. As far as we know, Elijah was the only person in history to go this way. We know Enoch didn't die either, but we don't know how God did it.
  - God took one of His greatest, most faithful prophets home in an incredible way.
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- Right up to the very end, Elijah was faithfully serving the Lord.
  - He was still discipling Elisha until the very moment he went home.
  - It reminds me of Harold Waycaster, an older gentleman who prayed faithfully for me while I was in seminary. He taught Sunday School on Sunday and passed away that Tuesday.
  - I think of Charlie Stone and Bill Jackson, faithful men in this church who actively served the Lord until the very end.
  - What a tremendous legacy men like that leave for us! They were faithful until the very day they died, serving the Lord until the very end.
  - That is the epitome of finishing well.
  - Here's how the Apostle Paul summed up his final days:
    - *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 course, I have kept the faith; in the future 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, NASB95)*

- You know what is one of the most painful things to see? When someone who has faithfully followed Christ and disciplined others falls away at the end.
- Whether through moral failure, apathy, or a refusal to go on with God, their reputation is damaged by their last few years.
- It hurts their family, their church, and all the lives they have been involved with.
- Would to God that we would be men and women who stay faithful to the very end.
- Let's strive to fight the good fight of the faith, pressing forward to honor our Lord and Savior.
- As we think about finishing well, we need to look behind us. Who can we bring along with us? Who can we encourage, invest in, and challenge to walk with God more closely than we did at that age?
- You and I have no idea how long we have, so fight, strive, push hard to finish well by investing and staying faithful.
- After all, isn't Jesus worth it?