

Message: “The Challenge of Apathy – Part 2”, Week 2 of “Challenges Series”

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 09-25-2016
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Sermon inspired by Stephen Sheane

Elijah was a bold prophet of the Old Testament, who defended the worship of the one true God of all creation. God worked many miracles through Elijah and even put to shame the worshipers of Baal.

Elijah is given the awesome privilege of entering heaven without a physical death. But before he is, he must find a replacement. He is directed to Elisha and trains him in the work. But Elisha wants Elijah to remain with him. We read about it in 2 Kings Chapter 2 verses 1 through 12.

2 Kings 2:1-12

Now the time came for the Lord to take Elijah to heaven—by means of a whirlwind! Elijah said to Elisha as they left Gilgal, “Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Bethel.” But Elisha replied, “I swear to God that I won’t leave you!” So they went on together to Bethel.³

There the young prophets of Bethel Seminary came out to meet them and asked Elisha, “Did you know that the Lord is going to take Elijah away from you today?” “Quiet!” Elisha snapped. “Of course I know it.” Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here in Bethel, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But Elisha replied again, “I swear to God that I won’t leave you.” So they went on together to Jericho.

Then the students at Jericho Seminary came to Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the Lord is going to take away your master today?” “Will you please be quiet?” he commanded. “Of course I know it!”⁶ Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan River.” But Elisha replied as before, “I swear to God that I won’t leave you.”

So they went on together and stood beside the Jordan River as fifty of the young prophets watched from a distance. Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it; and the river divided and they went across on dry ground!

When they arrived on the other side Elijah said to Elisha, “What wish shall I grant you before I am taken away?” And Elisha replied, “Please grant me twice as much prophetic power as you have had.” “You have asked a hard thing,” Elijah replied. “If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”

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¹As they were walking along, talking, suddenly a chariot of fire, drawn by horses of fire, appeared and drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariot of Israel and the charioteers!” As they disappeared from sight he tore his robe.

God’s mighty and holy word to our hearts. Amen

A little boy lived out in the country around the turn of the century. He had never seen a traveling circus, and one was coming to his town on Saturday. When he asked his father for permission to go, his dad said he could providing his chores were done early. Saturday morning came. Chores finished, the little boy asked his father for some money to go to the circus. His dad reached down in his overalls and pulled out a dollar bill, the most money the boy had ever seen at one time. Off the little wide-eyed fellow went. As he approached the town, he saw people lining the streets. Peering through the line at one point, he got his first glimpse of the parade. There were animals in cages and marching bands. Finally, a clown was seen bringing up the rear of the parade. The little boy was so excited that when the clown passed, he reached in his pocket and handed him the precious dollar bill. Thinking he had seen the circus when he had only seen the parade, the little boy turned around and went home.

What if he had kept moving forward? He might have seen more! He might have followed the parade all the way to the circus and had the full experience!

Isn’t it sad that some people come to church like this little boy? They may come with the intent to worship God, but all they see is the parade – the parade of liturgy, hymn singings, prayers, and preaching. They peer through their pews at all the activity and then go home; thinking they have been to God’s house, but yet they missed the main event – a personal encounter with Jesus Christ!

What is your experience with coming to church? Are you expecting to see God? Are you expecting to see miracles? Will you move forward, stretching your comfort level and expectations?

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “No! I’m coming with you.” So they went down to Bethel. The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Stop! I don’t want to hear it!” The same thing happened at Jericho and then again at Jordan.

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I can remember my first plane ride. It was exciting! I couldn't wait to get back up in the air. But now that I've travelled pretty extensively for school and conferences, have experienced some bumpy landings and serious delays, flying isn't as shiny any more. I don't get all excited. Christianity can become like that. Our zeal to know and serve Jesus can be replaced by routine and apathy.

Let me ask you a simple question, what are you here for today? We need to keep the sense of adventure alive. What did you come looking for today?

When Cortez landed in Mexico he faced severe opposition from the natives. Knowing the men longed to return to their homes he burned the ships meaning there was no returning. They would conquer the land or die trying.

Flying in a plane means you will face the point of no return – which you do not have the fuel to return to the place of your departure. You must go forward. Elisha couldn't go back - no matter what happened. The same is true for us. When we came to Christ we were set free. We are a new creation. There is no going back to what we were before, there is only forward.

Now the time had come and God was going to take Elijah away. He tells Elisha to stay in Gilgal but he refuses. Then he tells him to stay Bethel but he refuses. Then he tells him to stay in Jericho but still he refuses. Each time Elisha says “as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you”. Elijah was trying to tell Elisha that their time was over and they needed to move forward. There was nothing else to see. But Elisha couldn't let go and move ahead.

In our walk with God, we can't just stop and stay in one place. We need to move forward in our relationship with Christ. Like riding a bike, the moment you stop is the moment you fall off. There is always more to learn and see and experience. I tell couples that I'm counseling for their wedding the same thing. Right now you're working hard together to move the relationship forward. When you stop... things will get stagnant, the shine will wear off. Keep moving forward! And keep listening for God's presence in your marriage.

Obedience to God's calling in small things often opens the door to bigger and better things in our lives. I know in my own life there have been many crossroads where I have had to choose whether to obey God or disobey. Every time I chose the path of obedience my faith was built. God's promises are out there and we need to always be ready to move. This doesn't stop until the day we die.

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When Elijah asked Elisha what he wanted he said he wanted a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah replied that this was a difficult request - but it was granted. We also need to dream big dreams and ask big things of our God. God wants to unleash big blessings into our community, into our church... into our lives!

What do you want this morning?

Now recognize that Elisha asked for the ability to prophesy to God's people. To lead them to God. Now, again in 2 Chronicles, Solomon makes a request. Notice what it is that he asks for...

2 Chronicles 1:7: “That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” 8 Solomon answered God, “You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. 9 Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. 10 Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

Solomon became the wisest person to ever live – and he governed God's people.

What single request would you make? What double portion do you request? What would your relationship with Christ look like this morning if your passion for worship was doubled? If your desire to witness was doubled. If your desire to give or serve or your prayer life or time spend in the Bible was doubled.

Elisha received what he wanted. He got what he asked for. So did Solomon.

There is more to faith than just a comfortable flight. If your faith has grown routine maybe it's time you ask whether you have stopped in Gilgal or Bethel or Jericho. Maybe God is on the move and is crossing the Jordan. Crossroads is blessed... Let's continue to move forward with Him desiring to receive a double portion of what we already have. Let's finish what we start, know what we want, and get what we came for.

I challenge you today, especially if you are dealing with spiritual apathy to move forward by doing three things:

1. Make it a priority to continue through this series and invite someone you know to join you.
2. Explore what expectations you have of God.
3. Pray that the Holy Spirit rekindles your passion for God.