

Your Last Day on Earth

2 Kings 2:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:8

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How would you spend your last day on earth if you knew it would be your last? Would your ordinary activity stop and rather all energy be shifted toward prayer, repentance, reading your Bible, and hurrying to make things right with family, friends, and brethren? Certainly, those spiritual activities would be right and appropriate if you knew it was your last day upon earth. However, would those spiritual activities imply that you were doing them because it was your last day or because it was what you endeavored to do every day in order to glorify the Lord?

Dear ones, all of us will have a last day on earth, and with every day that we live, that last day is approaching ever nearer. You know not when it will be, how it will come, where you will be, nor with whom you will be, but you can be certain that it will come (Hebrews 9:27). You make preparations for trips whether you are flying or driving. You check your itinerary for your departure time so that you do not miss your flight. You prepare food, clothing, and notify those waiting for you when they should expect you. Days (even weeks) prior to your trip much thought and plans have gone into your preparation. And yet how few people make any serious preparations for their departure from this world and into eternity? A departure for a few days or weeks and great preparation; whereas a departure for all eternity and little or no preparation. Does that make any sense at all? That is called foolishness, my friend.

Elijah had a last day here upon earth. He knew it was his last day. Let us consider how he lived that final day to the glory of God. The main points from our text are the following: (1) Preparing to Leave Loved Ones; (2) Preparing to Leave by Doing the Will of God.

I. Preparing to Leave Loved Ones.

A. Sometime after the death of wicked King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:17), the Lord revealed to Elijah the time of his departure from this world. The fact that there is an appointed time by the Lord for all of us is not in itself a new revelation from the Lord (Job 14:5). What was unique about this revelation was that Elijah knew when he would depart and how he would depart this world (2 Kings 2:1).

1. Elijah was only the second human recorded in Scripture that did not die but was translated into heaven (the first being, Enoch in Genesis 5:24). What a gracious honor! Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died. Moses and Joshua died. David and Solomon died. Even the apostles died. Why not Enoch and Elijah? It's not because they were sinless. We are not told why, and it does no good to speculate in matters that God has not revealed. But it does reveal the sovereignty of God. He has the right to do whatever pleases Him. It also reveals the justice of God, the grace of God, and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for Enoch and Elijah, who could not have been translated into heaven apart from the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If the Lord translated Enoch and Elijah, who both were sinners, without dying, the Lord Jesus could have translated all of His elect whom He redeemed from the curse of the law without their dying—the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

2. Therefore, the death of the Christian is not in order to satisfy God's justice, for Jesus bore in His body God's condemnation for His elect (even the curse of death—Galatians 3:13). Death for the Christian is not a reason to fear God's wrath, but a means for your sanctification and even the salvation of others. Just as suffering is for your sanctification, so is death (2 Timothy 2:10). How the martyrdom of the faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ stirs up both faith and courage in us.

3. You who are declared righteous in Jesus Christ through faith alone in Christ alone are as

justified as Enoch, Elijah, and all of the saints at Christ's coming. The wicked die for their own sin and just condemnation from the Lord (Romans 6:23); but death cannot separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ your Lord. Your body merely sleeps in the Lord at death until the resurrection (while your soul immediately is ushered into the glory of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:8).

B. Ever since God called Elisha to be trained under Elijah (1 Kings 19), the unbreakable bond of a spiritual father and son was formed and which continued until the time that Elijah was translated (2 Kings 2:12). Moses had his Joshua. Paul had his Timothy. Elijah had his Elisha. What a glorious sight to behold when a young man is called by the Lord to learn of the Lord and to walk in the ways of the Lord from a spiritual father who leads and guides him in truth and righteousness. May the Lord raise up many Elishas from our families who will carry on in faithfulness the work of proclaiming the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, the holy commandments of our Lord, the worship which He alone has authorized, and the covenanted reformation of our faithful forefathers.

C. The faithfulness and loyalty of Elisha is tested each step along the way (by Elijah in 2 Kings 2:2,4,6; and by the sons of the prophets in 2 Kings 2:3,5). Elisha knew by way of revelation from the Lord that the time for Elijah's departure was about to occur. He wanted to spend whatever time was left with him in loving communion and in learning all he could yet learn. Here was a true student. He was not forced to do so; He wanted to do so. This is one of the characteristics of all true Christians. They desire to grow. Though they fail and in shame repent; nevertheless, they persevere in fleeing unto the Lord and learning of Christ through the means available to them. Obviously, not everyone can follow an Elijah, a prophet of God; however, every Christian will long to learn of Christ, to be conformed unto Christ, and to grow in Christ. If there is not that fruit—why not? Where then is the life of Christ?

D. From Elijah's perspective, it was not that he didn't want Elisha to be with him to the end—he did—it was rather that he was testing Elisha as to his faithfulness to follow Elijah as Elijah followed the Lord. Those spiritual fathers that we follow need not be alive today. We follow those who preceded us as they followed the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:12; 1 Corinthians 11:1). It is given that you will follow someone—whether men and women of God or men and women of the world. The wise walk with the wise. The foolish walk with the foolish. Remember that godly men are still only men. They are trophies of God's grace and yet have their own weaknesses, sins, and temptations against which they daily must battle (as did Paul in Romans 7). Do not idolize them—follow them as they follow Jesus Christ.

E. This was a time of preparation in which Elijah would be separated from his dear son in the faith—Elisha. Elijah was preparing himself and was preparing Elisha for the separation that was about to occur. Likewise, dear ones, if you will not now prepare yourself for that separation from your loved ones that will occur at death and prepare them as well, what will you leave to them that will help them and teach them how to prepare for death? Do you avoid this subject because you cling too tightly to the people and things of this life? Where is your life—with Christ in heaven or with your loved ones here upon earth (Matthew 6:21)? Yes, of course, we will grieve for our spiritual fathers, mothers, and brethren that precede us, but our sorrow is swallowed up in their joy before the glory and presence of our resurrected Savior (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

II. Preparing to Leave by Doing the Will of God.

A. As Elijah prepares to be translated into the glories of heaven, I find it interesting that he does not spend the whole day in prayer and fasting, but in doing the will of God in visiting his seminary students in various locations where there was a school of the prophets (called here "sons of the prophets") and in preparing Elisha. Note the phrase that is repeated: "for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel (verse 2), Jericho (verse 4), and Jordan (verse 6).

1. This was what characterized the life of the Lion of the Covenant—Elijah. The will of the Lord was made known unto Elijah, and he did it (not perfectly, but faithfully even after he had fallen into fear and despair at the threat of Jezebel). This is true of every Christian (Matthew 7:11). Elijah had no doubt already spent time in communion with the Lord on that day as the Lord revealed to him His will, but the Lord sent him to encourage his seminary students and to bind up their hearts in faithfulness to the Lord by way of his departing testimony to them. That tells me, Elijah was ready to meet the Lord—there was no incomplete laundry list of unrepented sins from the past.

2. May we so live in daily communion with Jesus Christ in doing His will that we would not find our self at the time of our death in a perpetual place of unending confession of sin because of our unrepentant sin, but rather would find our self in unending praise to the Lord for His faithfulness, His love, His mercy to us and to all His elect in Christ Jesus. On his last day, Elijah is doing what he always did—serving the Lord and following the will of the Lord—communing with the Lord—guiding and leading others to Christ by his word and example.

B. It was also God’s will to send Elijah to various towns that had particular redemptive significance for God’s people. Elijah began that last day in Gilgal. God sent him to Bethel, then to Jericho, and finally to the Jordan River. As Elijah was preparing to depart this world, the Lord wanted to remind him and us of His great salvation before his translation.

1. **Gilgal.** What happened at Gilgal? When Israel first entered into the Promise Land, it was at Gilgal that they renewed their covenant with the Lord through Circumcision and the Passover—both Old Testament sacraments pointed God’s people to God’s promise to save His people through the cutting away of sin and forgiveness of sin through the Lamb of God (Joshua 5). The Baptism and the Lord’s likewise point to and confirm the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is only salvation in the Lord. Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. There is no life in the Church of Jesus Christ apart from the pure and simple preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no sanctification, no growth, and no heaven without the gospel of Jesus Christ. It all begins there.

2. **Bethel.** What happened at Bethel? It is where the Lord appeared to Jacob twice and revealed to him that He would be Jacob’s God as He had been Abraham’s God and Isaac’s God (Genesis 28—the ladder from heaven; Genesis 35). Jacob fled in fear two times for his life—once from Esau and once from Laban—and the Lord delivered him out of the hands of those who would destroy him. As you prepare for your death, you need to know that you are never alone—no matter the enemies within and without that would seek to destroy you (Psalm 46:11). You cannot live this Christian life on your own without communion with the Lord Jesus. He alone is your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).

3. **Jericho.** What happened at Jericho? The walls of that mighty city came crashing down—not through the might and strength of Israel, but through trusting in the might and strength of Jehovah—not trusting in what they could see with their eyes or even feel in their hearts, but trusting in the promises of the one true living God who cannot lie (2 Corinthians 5:7). Dear ones, here is the true battle of all battles that you face in living the Christian life. It’s not first and foremost lust, pleasure, ambition, anger, resentment, stubbornness, etc. It is rather your battle to receive, believe, and rest in the truth and promise of God even when you don’t see the walls of Jericho crumbling down even after you have walked around those walls six times in prayer. The battle is to keep your eye upon Jesus as Savior and Lord, rather than upon yourself (whether in pride or in shame). There are times we don’t even recognize Jericho as an enemy to our soul. Instead of walking, praying, singing, and trusting the Lord to bring down that Jericho in your life and mine, we are banging on the gates asking if we can come in and enjoy the sinful pleasures of sin for a season. Don’t play with your Jerichos because they desire to destroy you. Rather trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to bring down those walls and destroy that Jericho. You cannot live in the victory over yesterday’s Jericho, for there will be other Jerichos to battle throughout your life. Your battle against your Jerichos reveals

you see them as your enemy (praise God, for that is the first step to overcoming them). Believe not the lie of the enemy that the walls of your Jericho cannot be destroyed. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Live in communion with Him. The more you enjoy communion with the Lord (prayer and the Word), the more those temptations will fall because they have no power over you.

4. **Jordan.** What happened at the Jordan River? Just as the Promise Land was to Israel and to us a type of heaven (Hebrews 11:16), so the Jordan River was a type of death. Just as the Lord supernaturally carried Israel through the Red Sea and through the Jordan River, and just as the Lord supernaturally carried Elijah and Elisha through the Jordan River, so the Lord will supernaturally by His grace carry you through your Jordan (death) into His everlasting glory. Dear child of God, do you avoid thinking about, talking about, and praying about death because it seems like a mighty river that will simply crush you? It certainly would if it were not for the fact that Jesus (your greater Elijah) has already crossed that Jordan River and was raised from the dead so that He could walk with you (as Elijah walked with Elisha). Because Jesus lives, you live and have hope that death need not be a fear to you, but rather a joyful entrance into everlasting glory and uninterrupted communion with Jesus Christ. Let this prayer be always upon our lips: "So teach us to number our days, that we might apply our hearts unto wisdom" Psalm 90:12.

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