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A New Beginning

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1 Kings 19:19-21

The call of Elisha. We will spend a few moments looking at a life changing event that led to a new beginning and relate that to our own lives as we approach a new year which in a way is a new beginning for us as well.

We are being introduced here for the first time in scripture to a farmer called Elisha. To be clear, from what we read here, Elisha was a hardworking wealthy man and was not in any way lazy! In fact, having 12 pair of Oxen would be considered rich. It's like having a fleet of 24 cars or tractors! And if we want to plough with two oxen, we would buy oxen in pairs. Therefore our only conclusion here would be that the reason he has 23 oxen is probably because the 24th one either is sick or has died or something else happened to it. But more importantly is his response. What does he do? His response to this crisis tells us a lot about the kind of man Elisha was. He was not afraid of challenges, was able to assess the deficiency and figured out that he had the strength to compensate for the missing ox and he jumps right in as the 24th Ox to help plow his land. He didn't unhitch #23 and run with 11 pairs, something I would have done! But that would mean wasting the resource of an idle ox! So in other words, he knew the value of his possessions and was using them to the fullest extent. He counted his blessings of 23 ox and did not necessarily halt his life for the loss of the 24 ox! And he was pragmatic and careful...he put himself BEHIND the other pairs of oxen, least he be run over! In other words, we would say he was a very good steward of the resources available to him.

What about us? Are we utilizing every resource God has given us or are we making excuses and waiting for the 24th Ox to show up so that we have the "right number" or the right mood or the perfect time or perfect opportunity to move forward.

Are we giving our best in our job situation or in our non-job situation are we utilizing our time (which is a very valuable resource) wisely?

My dear friend we can ask God to show us what to do with our “23” existing resources instead of being paralyzed for the lack of the so called missing “perfect resource”.

Read James 1:5 ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to **ALL** *without finding fault*, and it will be given to you.

1. We can always Ask God for wisdom regarding any situation we are in.

Sometimes we see interesting illustrations about resources in the lives around us. We have a 12yr old dog and more recently got a 12 week old puppy. The older dog loves to try to play with every other dog in our neighborhood. But no other dog even gives him a second look. But he will keep on trying to get their attention.

In comes the puppy. Our puppy has only one goal in life and that is to engage the older dog in play. The older animal couldn't care less and rejects the advances of the poor puppy rather menacingly. Rejecting the one very thing he wants because it's packaged differently! And as we were watching all this, my kids immediately picked up on the sermon. Because they have heard it from my lips over and over again. And here it is: we are very often just like this illustration. We reject the very thing we want from God simply because we don't like how it's presented to us or we are simply too busy to notice or we are chasing every other “dog in town” (you know what I mean). We think what we are chasing in this world will satisfy us, when the reality is that we are completely ignorant and clueless as to what we are truly in need of. And God always provides us exactly what we need because He loves us more than we can ever imagine. And He wants to have a relationship with us. And some of us are too busy or simply don't care.

Hebrews 2:1-3 So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it. ²For the message God delivered through angels has always stood firm, and every violation of the law and every act of disobedience was punished. ³So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak? NLT

Dearly beloved brother and sister, the message has always been the same from the beginning and that is mankind biggest and only problem is sin and sin will be punished. From the beginning God has been warning about a coming judgment day. And He has also provided a way of salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence the writer to the Hebrews says how can we escape if we ignore this great Salvation in Jesus that God has provided?

2. We must not ignore the call of God to a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

1 Kings 19:19-20

Elijah throws his cloak on Elisha. This act signifies the call. Without saying so much the action speaks volumes. By doing this Elijah is saying, “Drop what you’re doing and come follow me”. Then notice the response. Elijah doesn’t hang around or wait. He keeps walking. It is Elisha that goes running after the prophet Elijah. What was Elisha’s request? On the surface it seem simple enough. Elisha just wanted to say his family goodbyes to his own mother and father, settle family affairs and then he would join Elijah. But notice Elijah’s reply. “Go right on buddy. What have I done to you?” or in other words “Go right ahead, but remember I’m not the one calling you!! God is calling you!” Remember family is wonderful and back in that day (and even today) children were precious because they were the so called “social Security” for the parents. So the parents might have had other interests at heart that perhaps may have conflicted with Elisha’s call. If Elisha goes, who will plow the land? What about the mortgage? (Never mind the mortgage, money lenders were frowned on back then). But who will look after the parents once Elisha is gone. All of these questions, may well have had an influence on Elisha’s mind as he weighed the consequences of his potential actions. That’s why Elijah emphasizes that this is a decision that only Elisha can make considering who it is that is making the call/invitation...not Elijah but **God Himself**. And this was a true statement, because earlier in the chapter, God actually instructs Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor, so it is true to say that God is the one who is calling Elisha.

Dear Brother, dear Sister, perhaps you are at such a junction in life where God is calling you to do something and you are in the decision making process. Let me share with you an encouraging verse.

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

What is Jesus saying here? What we perceive as a loss in this world as a result of our decision to follow Christ is simply not true, if anything it is the exact opposite. Our "loss" works for us as an investment that is Jesus says is guaranteed to bring in 100% profit and on top of that eternal life. I don't know much about business, but I do know this that any guaranteed returns such as 100% return on investment would sell out in a matter of milliseconds if offered on a stock market. And I don't even know what the market value is for eternal life!! But I bet it is worth much more than the entire world's economic output!

And do you know what the Good News is? It's not so cheap that Somebody, Somewhere did Something and paid Something for it to be free for us. No, my dear brother and dear sister, God Himself sent His only Son Jesus to die on my behalf and yours. That is salvation. He was separated from God the Father on the cross so that through Jesus' death you and I can enjoy eternal life and the 100% return on investment.

3. Answering God's call pays back more than we can ask or think.

1 Kings 19:21

What happened? I thought Elisha was considering telling his parents and family. Looks like Elisha did something big BEFORE setting out to follow Elijah. Elisha made his decision very public, involved not just the family but his entire circle of friends and others in his village. The Hebrew word used for Yoke could be mean just a pair of oxen or the entire team of oxen. And the Hebrew word for people used here refers to people in general not family. Therefore, it is more probable that Elisha sacrificed the entire herd and more specifically the equipment or tools of his trade. Cooked the meat, had a celebration, made a big announcement and then caught up with Elijah.

What is going on here? What is the significance of Elisha's actions? Firstly, he destroyed that which might tempt him to reconsider his decision to answer God's call. In other words, he burned all bridges. There was no hope of going back to his former way of life. He became a new creation!

And even if he wanted to go back to his former farmer lifestyle, he couldn't. Perhaps, he knew that being a pragmatic farmer-businessman, he might be tempted to go back to his old life, and hence he burned up the tools of his trade.

But what about us? Do we still have the "tools" of our former life before we came to accept Christ? It took me several years to take stock of the secular music I was listening to and to recoil at the sinful images most of the song lyrics convey. The same with popular TV shows. Dear brother and dear sister, it is true what they say, we are what we eat or we become what we eat. I love donuts, but if all I ate was donuts, I would definitely end up looking like one! What we view, what we listen to, what we eat or drink or put in our bodies affects us. And if we know it is sin, we need to make every effort to overcome these. Burn the bridges.

Secondly, Elisha made his decision public. Everyone at that big feast knew exactly why they were there, it was to celebrate Elisha's joining Elijah as an apprentice. He was making a public commitment to follow Elijah. To back out later on, would be shameful and he would be accountable to the hundreds of people in front of whom he made his choice public.

What about us? Do people see that we are followers of Christ? Or how about the question, if we were arrested because we are Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

4. No turning back.

As a New Creation once we decide to follow Christ, we must not turn back or give ourselves any opportunity to go back to our old way of life.

Having accountability with the body of Christ is healthy for growth and for encouragement. Consider having a prayer partner this year. Someone with whom you will meet on a regular basis just to pray together.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

These witnesses mentioned here are listed in the previous chapter 11 of Hebrews. They are NOT looking down on us from heaven! Rather we are called to look at Jesus and at their example. Their lives are just like ours, dirty, rotten scoundrels. But yet, because they struggled to the end of their lives against the flesh, against the culture around them against the powers of darkness, because of their struggle, they were rewarded...not with eternal life, but with crowns for winning the race. They understood that eternal life came through FAITH (that is mentioned in the previous chapter 11 of Hebrews). You see, they believed God's Word and they believed that despite their sin, God would somehow justify them in eternity with eternal life.

It was because they longed for fellowship with God, they longed for the day when God would be merciful to them, and hence they laid aside every weight and sin and distraction that kept them from running the race set for them.

We are called to do the same, the only difference is that we have Jesus to look to.

What was the motivation for Jesus? Hebrews 12:2 who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,

Jesus was looking beyond the cross, beyond this earthly life, He knew that He would be resurrected. He talked about it several times to the disciples. And He knew that His earthly body would give way to a glorified body. One that is not like this one that we have. It is not Carbon based! It defies gravity, density and all other laws of physics and chemistry that this body is subject to. His glorified body walked through walls, was transported across space seamlessly, and was able to disappear at will, among other things.

But that's not all. What was Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed...?

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

After the cross, Jesus looked forward to the fellowship He would once again share with the heavenly Father in glory.

And what about us? What is our prayer like these days? For some of us, perhaps we seldom pray. Or perhaps our prayers are always consumed with our apparent lack of something or the other. Food, clothing and shelter and health. Is that all we pray for? What about May your Kingdom come, May your will be done on earth as it is already being done in heaven.

5. We must continue to overcome by surrendering ALL areas of our life to God.

So where do we go from here.

You have heard it being said God is good all the time and all the time God is good. We have come to the end of the year 2019. Perhaps you might say that this year has been a mixed bag. Some ups, some downs, some great experiences and some experiences not worth repeating. And as we look ahead into the next year, it's a good opportunity to pause, take stock of our lives and then decide how we will move forward. Because whether we are ready or not, whether we want it or not, time is NO respecter of persons. Time is coming and going because God ordained it so. Remember His promise to Noah in

Genesis 8:22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

What is remarkable about this verse is the first part...while the earth remains....time will also remain. Which also means that once the earth ceases to exist, there will be no need for time! No more New Years, no more OLD years! And the bible talks about just such a scenario in Revelation 21 and 22.

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Revelation 22:5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

This earth will be gone says God and in its place, God will make all things new and several things will be different, one of which is the absence of the sun as a source of light, because the Lord God will be the source of their light. This also means that if there is no more sunlight, no more need for the

earth to revolve around any bright star. No more night and day! No more marking of time. Time as we experience it today will be no more.

Dear brother and sister, we must work while it is still day. While we still have the ability to respond to God's call. For as long as we have breath in us, there is still hope for salvation, there is still hope for sanctification, there is still hope of being a new creation. There is nothing more satisfying than being in the center of God's will. Doing what He has already ordained for us to do before the foundation of the world. Nothing more satisfying than being the man or woman God call us to be.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship (His masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

6. God has a specific call for each of our time limited lives

Dearly beloved, if you have not yet decided to follow Jesus, today is the day to begin your walk. What a way to end this year by giving your life into the hand of Jesus. Dearly beloved, if you are struggling in your commitment and walk with the Lord, I urge you to yield to the Holy Spirit ALL of your life. Ask God, no, beg God to help you overcome in whatever you are struggling with and don't stop begging till He delivers you. Ask the Lord to give you a desire for Him and His Word, for we know that we are so debased in our flesh that even our desire to come to Him has to be given by Him.

As we enter into a new year in a few days, let us take stock of our life. Are we ready for the New Jerusalem, the City of God, where God Himself will dwell with us and be our light? Our assurance of salvation is this: that we can begin to enjoy His presence in our lives, right here on this earth, right now. We don't have to wait to die to get to experience God. He has promised that whoever accepts Jesus' atoning sacrifice and turns from their sin, God promises to make them a new creation right here on the Old earth and well in advance of the New Earth that He will create. A new creation that will be led by His Holy Spirit that He places in our new hearts.

The real question now is how will we respond? May the Lord Help us respond to His call for our lives.