

## 2 Kings 2:1-12a

As I go about my sermon preparation, it is always interesting to try and figure out why certain texts were chosen for certain Sundays of the church year. For example, today we are celebrating the **Transfiguration** of our Lord - an event which vividly showed to Peter, James, and John that Jesus truly is the **all-powerful, all-glorious** Son of God. The Gospel lesson for today gives us the **account** of that Transfiguration. The Epistle lesson also speaks of the unfading **glory** of Christ and the Gospel. But where does the **Old Testament** lesson fit in? It speaks about **Elijah** being bodily taken up, or **translated** into heaven, without experiencing **death**. My first thought was that **Elijah** was the connecting link, since he is the one being taken into **heaven**, and he is **also** present to speak with Jesus on the Mount of **Transfiguration**. But as I studied the text more deeply, I changed my mind. I now feel that it is the **followers** who are the link. So today, we will undertake a comparison of **Elijah's Translation And Jesus' Transfiguration**. As we consider this comparison, we will focus our attention on the **followers** of both **Jesus** and **Elijah**. We note three things about them - that the followers are **reluctant to separate** from the leaders - that those who are to be the prophets of the future need further **strengthening** - and that having **received** such strength, God's people are **dedicated** to carry on His work.

Our text begins with the **relationship** between Elijah and Elisha. They were very **close**. Since the time God had called Elisha, he had served the LORD as Elijah's **personal attendant**. Elisha had given up **much** to follow this calling. He was the son of Shaphat - apparently a **wealthy** land-owner in Abel Meholah - for when Elijah finds him, Elisha is plowing a field with 11 servants, and 11 yoke of oxen plowing ahead of him. We might compare his situation today with a farmer who uses a 12 bottom plow in his fields. Such a man can't be doing too badly in terms of finances.

So, Elisha had given up **a lot** in order to follow Elijah. But it was **worth** it, and Elisha didn't want to **lose** this spiritual relationship under any circumstances. Yet, we are told that the time was getting near when Elijah and Elisha would have to be **separated**. We read, "*Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay **here**; the LORD has sent **me** to Bethel.'*" But Elisha replied with an oath saying, "*As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will **not** leave you.*" Actually, the same thing happens three times, and each time Elisha's answer is the same. He does not want to **separate** from Elijah. So together, they go to **Bethel**, and to **Jericho**, and finally to the

## **Jordan River.**

As we look at Elisha, we are reminded of **Peter** on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, along with James and John, had been privileged to see Jesus in all His **glory**. Peter **liked** it there, and he didn't want to **leave**. He said, "Lord, let's just build a **shelter** here for You, and Moses, and Elijah, then we can **stay** here and continue to **bask** in the radiance of Your glory."

Perhaps **you** have felt that way too from time to time. In our dealings with the Lord, we experience spiritual **high points** - times when our faith seems strong enough even to move **mountains**. Maybe you felt that way on your **Confirmation** day, or when you first received the **Lord's Supper**, or while you were involved in a **workshop** or **Bible Class** where you were deeply immersed in the study of God's Word. It's the kind of feeling you wish could last **forever**, but you know that the feeling will **fade**. It's not **meant** to last forever. The "spiritual high" is only meant to **strengthen** you for the times which lie ahead. You will **need** the strength, because the Lord has many things for you to **do**.

There are a couple of examples of this type of **strengthening** in today's text. We read, "***Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan.***" Who were these 50 men? Today we would probably call them **Seminary** students - men who were **studying** to serve the LORD in the public ministry. It seems that the first school of the prophets was started by **Samuel** at Ramah, several hundred years earlier. By the time of our text there were **three** such schools - one at **Gilgal**, one at **Jericho**, and one at **Bethel**. Elijah was their **teacher**. Realizing that the time was drawing very near when he would no longer be **able** to teach his students, Elijah allowed them to follow at a **distance** in order to be **strengthened**. They were about to witness a **miracle** - the dividing of the waters of the Jordan River. Actually, they saw the same miracle **twice** - once performed by their **old** teacher, Elijah; and once again performed by their **new** teacher, Elisha.

Serving the LORD in this **new** capacity, as a **prophet** and a teacher of **future** prophets, would be more **difficult** for Elisha than serving as Elijah's **aide** had been. So, Elisha himself would also need some **strengthening**, and God certainly did not leave him out. Elijah said to Elisha, "***Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?***" Elisha answered, "***Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.***" To us, it almost sounds as if Elisha was being **selfish** - as

if he wanted to be **twice** the prophet that Elijah had been. But actually, he was only asking to be Elijah's **heir** to the office of prophet. The double portion was always the portion which rightfully belonged to the **firstborn** - to the **heir**.

It was **not** a sinful request. However, what Elisha was asking was not within **Elijah's** power to **grant**. The **LORD** is the one who chooses prophets - so Elijah left this request entirely in **God's hands**. Would God **choose** Elisha to be the one? Elijah told him to watch for a **sign**. He said, "*You have asked a **difficult** thing, yet if you **see** me when I am taken from you, it will be **yours** - otherwise **not**.*" That would be the **sign**. And as you well know, Elisha **did** see Elijah taken away by a whirlwind - and he received the **strength** he needed to carry out the tasks of his new positions.

Jesus' disciples were in much the same situation. At the time of His transfiguration, Jesus knew that He would not be visibly **with** His disciples for much longer. They would need additional **strength** to carry on after He had returned to His throne in **heaven**. So, Jesus **provided** that needed strength, by allowing them to experience a **foretaste** of His eternal **glory**.

In many ways **we** are **similar** to the sons of the prophets, to Elisha, and to the disciples. Jesus has given **each** of us something to **do** in His kingdom, and we wonder, "Will I be **able** to do it?" We look at our daily **sins** and we wonder, "How can I possibly **fit** into God's eternal plans?" We see ourselves **dragged off** from the straight and narrow path by Satan's wily temptations and we wonder, "Will I ever be **strong** enough to do what **God** wants me to do?" The answer is **yes!** When we are weak, God **provides** us with the needed strength. "*Our **help** is in the name of the **LORD**, who made heaven and earth.*" He grants us His help and strength through His **Word** and **Sacraments**.

For the most part, those strengthened sons of the prophets went on to **fight** for the LORD - doing battle against **idolatry** and **injustice**. Jesus' own disciples **boldly** went out into most of the known world, sharing the truth of the **Gospel** with others - even to the point of laying down their own **lives** as martyrs. How can we be any **different**? We may not always feel the **strength** and **exhilaration** of a "mountain top" experience, but the reality of our **forgiveness** and **salvation** will always remain **constant**. Therefore, each time we receive new strength and forgiveness from the LORD, we are reminded that it is virtually **impossible** for our faith to remain **idle** and **inactive** - for "*Christ's love **compels** us.*" We are literally

**driven** to do the work of our Lord - driven by our **gratitude** for God's love. Dear friends, open your **ears** and **hearts** to what God is saying to you in His Word. **Confess** your sins, **repent** of them, and receive full and free **forgiveness** right here at the Lord's altar. And having **done** so, let the joy of the forgiveness of sins **shine** forth in your life, as you **follow** Jesus with renewed zeal and devotion. Amen.