**GREAT SUCCESSION’S IN THE BIBLE – ELIJAH TO ELISHA**

2 Kings 2:1-18

This week I want to teach on the topic of godly succession from the lives of Elijah and Elisha. Succession is the passing of leadership from one person to another and God does it differently to the world of politics and business. Can I just say this in starting today – **the church is not a business**. While many good business principles apply in areas like management and governance, there are specific areas where the church differs ***significantly*** from the world.

We are *inclusive and diverse* – whoever comes may join us

We are a *redemptive community* – not a club gathered for a purpose

We are a *kingdom community* – who try to live-out kingdom principles

We are a *volunteer community* – made up of gifted passionate people

So, the key question we need to keep asking in Church is not what pleases people, not what will pay well, or what will bring us the greatest return - but what does God want in this place?

Let’s look at Elisha as he seeks to follow the call of God in his life. He faces three tests as he has aspirations to be the next Elijah. I think there is something here for us too as followers of Jesus. Did you know, that in the early church apostolic succession was a big issue, because it was believed that it preserved the purity of the truth? That's why they questioned Paul so closely and those that opposed him tried to undermine his teaching by saying he was not apostolic because he had not seen nor walked with Jesus during his earthly ministry. To refute this Paul argued that he had seen the risen Christ on the Damascus Road.

But it's not apostolic succession that you or I need to concern ourselves with its an apostolic *anointing of the Holy Spirit* of the Word of God in our lives. The succession we need to show evidence of is the life of Jesus, by the anointing of the Spirit which is in line with the teachings of scripture. And if we want to see that anointing of the Holy Spirit, I think there is something Elisha's life can teach us. In particular three tests he had to face:

1. **The test of Loyalty – where you go I will also**

In this chapter, Elijah moves on three times to four different places.

**GILGAL** - which represents the **familiar and secure**. Gilgal was the place where the 12 stones were set up after coming through the Jordan river into the promised land. It’s a location that marks the promise of God to bring the people into this new land of milk and honey. You may visit Gilgal to remind you of God's intervention and promises to you but you cannot camp there. You need to go and take the land and overcome the enemy in it. And that doesn’t happen until you leave Gilgal and head out to wherever God has sent you.

**BETHEL** – which represents worship and the place of the **presence of God.** Every one of us needs to visit Bethel in our lives – and be changed as we gaze upon the awesome majesty of God. But we cannot stay there either. Our calling is to take this presence of God out among the people. To carry this glory of God into our workplaces and homes and become salt and light. Too many people want to stay at Bethel basking in the presence of God and not follow Jesus who said in John 9 “*I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day for night comes when no man can work”*

**JERICHO** – which represents the **power of God**. It was at Jericho where the walls fell down, unless God intervened and did something, the outrageous strategy of the people would fail completely. Unless God turns up, we are dead in the water!  Have you been there? Out on a limb and nothing can save you expending all your energy on a hopeless plan until all your strength is gone – and nothing but God can save you. Elisha, you need to learn this if you're going to follow God's ways and not yours.  On the reverse side of this is the power and control that you choose not to trust in, the power and control of having a secure income if following God means you might have less and have to trust him. The loss of power and control over your future, your kids, or family and being the provider – will you yield that to God. Jericho is where you learn that.

**JORDAN** – which represents the **purposes and assignments** God has for you.

Hang on you say, we have gone around in a circle. Jordan comes before the others. No, it's exactly in the right order. Your assignments and the purposes of God for you are only really discoverable once you have been to Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho…. Don’t think that crossing the Jordan is the first and final test. You see the Jordan represented what God wanted to give the people, it was the entry point into the new land. But what we are to do in the land is only really discovered once we have learned how to leave the familiar and secure, come down from the mountain tops of worship, and face the test of power and control.

So here it is in a nutshell the test of loyalty. Elisha will you follow Elijah to these places and can you face the testing each of them represents? Can you keep going? At any point you can stop but if you do you will never take up his mantle.

1. **The test of Aloneness**

“So, the two of them walked on” – love that in the story.

They came to the river and there Elijah struck the river with his cloak and the waters divided and they walked through on the dry ground. Watched from a distance by 50 people. There Elijah asks Elisha – “What can I do for you before I am taken away? *I want a double portion of what you have and to be your successor!”*  Don’t mistake vain glory here for passionate aspiration!  There is nothing wrong with passionate aspiration as long as it is tempered by having been to Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and Jordan!

But it is the cry Elisha uttered when Elijah is taken up in a chariot of fire that reveals another test of his resolve. My Father!!! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!  He saw something he didn’t expect to see and he didn’t see what he wanted to see. I think he felt God was not going to give him what he wanted because he never saw Elijah depart – just the immense display of fire and power. Sometimes God answers our prayers and requests differently to our expectations or wants. But His answers are best. If we just look outside the box a bit there will be an answer of some kind that is just right for you.

And it is here we see possibly one of the hardest tests of all faced by any of us who dare to want to be followers of Jesus. We all need to face the test of aloneness. Or put another way we need to find out where our true *dependency* lies. Where our mentors, trainers, encouragers, and those who have significantly spoken into our lives are separated from us and we learn to walk with God – alone. How easy it is to want reassurance and appreciation and endorsement from others especially those who we admire. Aloneness does not mean lonely – “*The test of aloneness is to build strength and steel into your spirit…so you can walk with God without the applause of people or their criticism.”*

1. **The test of Hearts Desire – what is truly in your heart?**

If truth be told we are all mixtures in our hearts. We long for heaven and home but this world has a grip on us in many ways. But what will you do when the chips are down?

The cloak in this culture was not just to keep out the cold, it was also symbolic of the person's life. When a prophet put his cloak on someone it was a sign to others that they had chosen this person to succeed them. The cloak would have been quite rough and worn, probably sleeveless and well known to others that it was worn by someone of authority.

The transfer of authority and succession did not take place when Elijah left the cloak but when Elisha ***picked it up***.

In picking it up Elisha was taking on the mantle of Elijah. And probably somewhat aggrieved by believing he had not been given the double blessing he asked for struck the water and called “Where is the God of Elijah”?  It was a clear message to those watching on that the anointing Elijah carried had been passed onto to Elisha.

Elisha went on to do ***twice as many miracles*** as Elijah who had been fed three times by divine supply: by ravens, by a widow, and by an angel. He was a fearless reformer who rebuked kings, was mighty in prayer yet struggled at times with discouragement, and whose judgement at times was questionable. Yet God honoured him greatly. He reminds us that perfection is not a requirement for usefulness to God.

You will never find Elijah! Elisha tells 50 of the prophets who seem to think he might be hiding somewhere. Elisha basically says go and look but you are wasting your time because he knows this part of his life is over and the new part is about to begin. How we long for what we have when it is taken suddenly from us. Especially when that person has played a defining role in our lives.

It’s a new day Elisha and you need to start living in the new era, with what God has built into you.  The Test of Loyalty, The Test of Aloneness, and The Test of Hearts Desire

 I spoke last week about Identity, Character and Impact.

Here’s the thing, Identity and Impact are both measurable and seen above the waterline of our lives. Whose you are and what you do have to do with your role and then how well you are carrying it out. Character is less measurable and has to do with the below waterline areas of our lives. This is where loyalty, aloneness and heart's desire are grown.  And when they have grown sufficiently God will open up for you an assignment that utilises the very unique person you are!  Don’t try to make the impact until you have been shaped below the waterline and visited Gilgal (secure dependency), Bethel (worship) and Jericho (power).