



Sermon

Remarkable Miracles

2 Kings 4:38-44; Acts 6:1-10; John 14:8-19

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We have followed the career of Elijah pretty closely but skimmed quickly over the events of Elisha's life - his disciple. Two weeks ago, we heard some of the stories of Elisha from the Bible Story Telling team who visited. Do you remember the stories they told?

- The Shumanite woman's child – where Elisha's prayer gave a child to a barren couple and later restored the dead child to life.
- The cleansing of Naaman the Syrian general from leprosy.
- The attempt by the Syrians to capture Elisha which was thwarted when Elisha commanded blindness upon them, led them inside the city and then restored their sight when they were surrounded by local soldiers.
- The siege of Samaria being lifted, which we also looked at last week where the Lord caused the Syrians to hear the sound of a great army and to flee from the siege.

We heard two more today: the poisonous stew made edible by throwing in some flour and the bread multiplied to feed the hundred men. The servant protested that 20 loaves of bread were not enough but Elisha told him to do serve it, "They will eat and have some left over." Does that remind you of anyone?

When we review the ministries of Elijah and Elisha what is so striking is the many miracles and accurate prophecies attributed to them. That is the main point.

One of those miracles was when a young man was cutting wood with a borrowed axe. ¹ The head came off the handle and fell in the water. He was distressed because an axe head in those times would be extremely expensive. He would probably be sold into slavery to repay the owner. Elisha cuts a stick and throws it into the water and it made the axe-head float. That is remarkable! And you probably don't believe it. I wonder if this account would help you? I was told it by a fellow student at college who knows and respects the lady concerned. However I tracked her down in 2006 and rang her to confirm the story in detail.

¹ 2 Kings 6:1-7

Kath Hall who in 2006 lived in Eastbourne was a missionary in Nigeria in the 1967-8. She trained Girls Brigade Leaders. She drove herself to the village of Matazu, north of Katsina in Northern Nigeria to visit a girl's Bible school. Near the village the road crossed a river with a simple concrete bridge just a deck with no sides at all. The bridge was damaged and half the width of the deck was washed away. There was just a hole there. However she managed to skirt the hole and get by.

In the Bible school, a girl, Amina, had become pregnant by a Muslim man who was going to claim her as extra wife and the child too when it was born. There was a lot of pressure in the situation and the Senior Missionary Jessie McGill asked Kath to take Amina away for refuge while matters were sorted out.

So Kath and Jessie set off with Amina. When they came to the bridge they found that there was flood and the bridge was now hidden underwater. Kath wasn't sure which side of the bridge was sound but she thought she remembered and drove through successfully!

They got Amina to the refuge and next day returned to Matazu. When they reached the bridge the flood had receded and they were shocked to see that the side of the bridge they had used was the side which was washed out! Furthermore, the tire tracks of the Holden ute she was driving could be seen going down one bank and up the other in line with the hole. Some of the local Muslim men, saw what had happened and said, "Your God has power, you should be dead."

I don't understand how that happened but Kath Hall told me the account herself when I called her. When I told this story at my previous church, one of the staff, Julia Powley, said she knew Kath Hall well and she trusted her word.

Double Portion

When the mantle was about to pass to Elisha he asked for a double portion of the spirit. I said that this expression meant the oldest son's inheritance, yet in spite of that if we count the miracles and prophecies of Elijah we reach a total of 14. If we count the miracles and prophecies of Elisha we find twice the number, 27. Oh, not quite! I tried breaking them down into categories.

Miracles of provision for Elijah: Elisha 2:4; Prophetic pronouncements: 4:8; Resurrections: 1:1; Other events: 7: 14.

Resurrections stand out as an exception. If you look after Elisha's death there is a strange story of some Israelites burying a dead body when they were surprised by armed raiders. They didn't have time to bury it and seeing a tomb nearby, decided to put the body there and flee. When the body touched the bones in the tomb it was restored to life². Whose tomb was it? Elisha's. And there is the 28th miracle: his bones gave life to a corpse – exactly twice as many miracles as Elijah! That is it – theirs were lives of remarkable miracles.

Do you believe these claims of lives being restored? I have told you before of the young Church Army Officer who had his own death certificate. I have heard Ian McCormick tell his story of dying from box jellyfish stings and being restored to life. I have read four books by people who were certified dead and yet returned to life and tell of their experiences.

Do these remarkable things happen these days – the answer is yes if we are interested to find out about them.

On the shoulders of giants

Do you remember sitting on your father's shoulders as a child? I remember watching the Farmers' Parade perched on my Dad's shoulders and falling over when I was put down because my legs had gone numb! But when we sit on someone's shoulders we are higher than we can be ourselves. If we are an acrobat and stand on another's shoulders even more so. Our height is not all our own, we are using the other person's height and strength to lift us up and get us higher – higher than they could go too.

² 2 Ki 13:21

Elisha stood on Elijah's shoulders. In the New Testament, Jesus the disciples are given a platform to stand on.

Jesus, of course, worked remarkable miracles, besides the healings, deliverances, insight, knowledge of people's thoughts, he had control of nature, he multiplied food, turned water into wine, walked on water. That gospel reading is encouraging and challenging:

"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."³

That is the platform he gives us – his followers will do even greater things than his miracles. That doesn't take glory from him, because he was showing us what a man empowered by the Holy Spirit was like and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. It glorifies Jesus if his followers do great works in his name. We can squirm around the idea of greater things: greater in number, greater in magnitude, what sort of greater. He doesn't specify the answer and the reality is that we are to rise in faith not find ways to avoid believing.

As a local community of believers Stephen is our patron saint. I said last night at the dinner, that we can take encouragement from his example. Stephen stood on the platform of faith Jesus gave us. Picking out the statements about him in our passage today, I find he was full of Holy Spirit and so of wisdom, faith, grace and power. He did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people - not ordinary wonders but great wonders. I would love to know what they were. In that grace and wisdom he was an effective preacher of the gospel and an apologist – one who defends the faith in debate. He was so able, no one could stand against his speaking, so they brought false evidence against him and had him killed on a blasphemy charge.

Stephen was full of the Spirit. Our logo expresses that idea – the wind filling the sail. It is the Holy Spirit who empowered Stephen. It is the Holy Spirit who will fill and empower us.

We must seek to be filled with the Spirit. We need to retrain our minds away from their scepticism to believe what God says and does. Does this sort of thing happen today? Far more than we imagine. Healing is not uncommon - it was tremendous to hear Trevor's testimony today. Diane told us of her unusual and rapid healing recently which involved significant rearrangement of bones overnight. One of our parishioners a couple of years ago had bone fragments move back into position reattach and set after prayer. A friend of mine had a similar miracle with a chipped knee bone where a broken-off piece migrated back and reattached after Helen prayed for it. These are real stories from people we know.

Friends, let us press in to know the Lord. Let us press in to see more of his works. I want to see more healings like Trevor reported. I want to see greater miracles than I have seen before. Don't you? Let us press into God for these things that we might also do great miracles and miraculous signs and Jesus' words might be fulfilled in our lives.

³ John 14:11-12

Miracles of Elijah:

- 1) Causing the rain to cease for 3½ years (1Ki 17:1)
- 2) Being fed by the ravens (1Ki 17:4)
- 3) Miracle of the barrel of meal and cruse of oil (1Ki 17:14)
- 4) Resurrection of the widow's son (1Ki 17:22)
- 5) Calling of fire from heaven on the altar (1Ki 18:38)
- 6) Causing it to rain (1Ki 18:45)
- 7) Prophecy that Ahab's sons would all be destroyed (1Ki 21:22)
- 8) Prophecy that Jezebel would be eaten by dogs (1Ki 21:23)
- 9) Prophecy that Ahaziah would die of his illness (2Ki 1:4)
- 10) Calling fire from heaven upon the first 50 soldiers (2Ki 2:10)
- 11) Calling fire from heaven upon the second 50 soldiers (2Ki 2:12)
- 12) Parting of the Jordan (2Ki 2:8)
- 13) Prophecy that Elisha should have a double portion of his spirit (2Ki 2:10)
- 14) Being caught up to heaven in a whirlwind (2Ki 2:11)

Miracles of Elisha:

- 1) Parting of the Jordan (2Ki 2:14)
- 2) Healing of the waters (2Ki 2:21)
- 3) Curse of the she bears (2Ki 2:24)
- 4) Filling of the valley with water (2Ki 3:17)
- 5) Deception of the Moabites with the valley of blood (2Ki 3:22)
- 6) Miracle of the vessels of oil (2Ki 4:4)
- 7) Prophecy that the Shunammite woman would have a son (2Ki 4:16)
- 8) Resurrection of the Shunammite's son (2Ki 4:34)
- 9) Healing of the gourds (2Ki 4:41)
- 10) Miracle of the bread (2Ki 4:43)
- 11) Healing of Naaman (2Ki 5:14)
- 12) Perception of Gehazi's transgression (2Ki 5:26)
- 13) Cursing Gehazi with leprosy (2Ki 5:27)
- 14) Floating of the axe head (2Ki 6:6)
- 15) Knowing the Syrian battle plans (2Ki 6:9)
- 16) Vision of the chariots (2Ki 6:17)
- 17) Smiting the Syrian army with blindness (2Ki 6:18)
- 18) Restoring the sight of the Syrian army (2Ki 6:20)
- 19) Prophecy of the end of the great famine (2Ki 7:1)
- 20) Prophecy that the scoffing nobleman would see, but not partake of, the abundance (2Ki 7:2)
- 21) Deception of the Syrians with the sound of chariots (2Ki 7:6)
- 22) Prophecy of the seven-year famine (2Ki 8:1)
- 23) Prophecy of Benhadad's untimely death (2Ki 8:10)
- 24) Prophecy of Hazael's cruelty to Israel (2Ki 8:12)
- 25) Prophecy that Jehu would smite the house of Ahab (2Ki 9:7)
- 26) Prophecy that Joash would smite the Syrians at Aphek (2Ki 13:17)
- 27) Prophecy that Joash would smite Syria thrice but not consume it (2Ki 13:19)
- 28) Resurrection of dead man who touched Elisha's bones (2Ki 13:21)