



HG204: Elijah & Elisha 'Standing For God' **Blinded By The Light**

2 Kings 6:8-23

Home Group Study Notes

26 July 2020 - Revd Dr Stephen Dray



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

As lockdown eases, and life gets back to some kind of normality, what are you most looking forward to in the coming weeks?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG204: Elijah & Elisha 'Standing For God' **Blinded By The Light**

2 Kings 6:8-23

Home Group Sermon

26 July 2020 - Revd Dr Stephen Dray

In the days when Bibles were in books not smartphones I sometimes invited my hearers to hold them, closed, with the spine in their hands and note where the wear and tear was visible along the page ends that were now on display. It is an interesting exercise! If the Bible had been put to any use, the evidence usually pointed to the fact that the stories of Genesis and the first half of Exodus had often been consulted. However, from then until the Psalms the Bible seemed largely virgin territory and, except for the odd 'purple' passages elsewhere, the rest of the Old Testament showed evidence of having been rarely read. The New Testament did better: especially in the Gospels and Paul's Letter to the Romans. But here, too, there were sections of relative neglect.

Why should this be so? The time doesn't allow me to address this question at length this morning; but it does lead me to our text. So far, in our studies of Elijah and Elisha, we have been amid the 'purple' passages-tales of derring-do by these two remarkable men; stories that were and are the staple of Sunday Schools or Messy Church even today. But the present chapter with its tales of floating axe heads and men put into a sort of collective trance so that they are blind to the very things they are seeing are rarely on the syllabus!

Part of the reason for this, I suggest, is that they do not so easily give up their applications to us. We cannot see the point of the story. But a further part of the reason is, I propose, that we start reading these stories from the wrong place. In fact, this contributes to our failure to read many of the stories of the Old Testament. Let me explain what I mean. We tend to think that these stories are primarily about us and we look for morals and principles we can apply to ourselves. There are, of course, things to learn and apply: but what we need to grasp is that the stories are primarily about God and about what we need to know about him.

Our text today is part of a section of the Bible story which introduces us to Elijah and Elisha. Within the 'Big Picture' of the Scriptures, these two men constitute a new stage in the unfolding drama. They are the first of the great prophetic voices that the Lord raised up to speak to his people. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others will follow.

And, as with other new developments elsewhere in the biblical drama, they are accompanied by a plethora of miraculous signs to validate their ministry.

But, now, here is a strange thing: when the prophets turn up they are rarely innovators. Oh, yes, they do make predictions (of course they do)- but the main focus of their ministries was to remind their hearers of what the Lord had already said. Even the predictions were given to warn and encourage present obedience in the same way as a preacher today will refer to God's future plans. So, the prophets, Elijah and Elisha among them, were raised up to call God's people back to the 'old ways' that had been largely abandoned and forgotten.

However, who is going to listen to that strangely dressed fellow, standing on a street corner or in the market place bleating on about God's judgments? Who listens to street preachers today? To gain a hearing more was required and miracles were the thing: miracles that were dolloped out in such quantities that it was pretty impossible to ignore the fact that 'the LORD is God'; even for a people who had become stone-deaf to the LORD's words.

The first lesson for us to learn, then, is the extraordinary grace of God. Right back at the beginning of the human story we messed up big-time. We abandoned God and found ourselves in a hostile world. Inner turmoil, relationship breakdown, the 'Blue Planet' our enemy rather than friend, pain, suffering, mortality and a tragic restlessness of spirit became our deserved lot. But, if we had abandoned the LORD, he still loved us and was determined to bring us back home to himself. Promises were given and those promises were located within a specific family: the family of Abraham. Accompanied at each new stage with extraordinary miracles, Abraham's descendants now live in Palestine. And there, true to form, they have forgotten the LORD and his promises. By the time of Elijah and Elisha spiritual darkness prevails on all sides until, also true to form, the LORD himself steps in. If his people abandon him and show little interest in seeking him and walking in his ways, the LORD's love for his people and his determination to fulfil his promises remains. This is the primary point of our text. The very fact that Elisha is there is a remarkable testimony to our loving and gracious God who will not give up on us even if we repeatedly give up on him. If we have ears to hear, we need to listen, too.

More specifically, however, we turn now to our text for today. Israel and Aram are, apparently, engaged in some form of guerilla warfare. Presumably, Naaman is involved. However, Aram's strategy is constantly thwarted by the fact that there appears to be a spy in the camp. Every plan made within the secret counsel of the high command of Aram is anticipated. The MI6 of the day (for there were indeed spies in the respective camps) enables Aram to discover who is the culprit: Elisha. So Aram is determined to capture him- not least because his clairvoyant skills might be used to their own strategic advantage!

The scene is, thus, set for two remarkable incidents. The first is the story which begins with the abject terror of Elisha's servant who, when day dawns, sees Aram's crack troops, who had gathered under the cover of darkness, at the front door and surrounding Samaria. His response, like that of Private James Frazer in Dads' Army was, 'We are doomed!' However, Elisha's response was to open the young man's 'inner eye' so that he was brought face to face with spiritual realities. The point is surely that, when God's promises and purposes are at stake, there simply is no contest. Though immense human resources appear to assemble against the people of God, the victory is his- inevitably. Very simply, then, this incident reminds us that when it comes to the promises that the LORD has made to put us back into a relationship with him, nothing is going to get in the way- not even the assembled might of Aram.

The second incident is a true counterpart. Whereas the young man seeing had not seen the assembled hosts of the LORD, here Aram's elite while still seeing (for this is the force of the language) are blinded to their situation and are led meekly, by the very man they seek, into the city of Samaria. I think we are probably intended to have a chuckle. The Lord does have a sense of humour.

Predictably, Joram thinks in worldly terms and wishes to annihilate the enemy. But the LORD is at work to effect peace... one that was achieved through the incident described here. It is always his purpose to establish peace and, here, Joram was reminded of his calling to be the peaceable leader of the LORD's peaceable people. So, if we can leave the LORD to accomplish his purposes, we are also called to live as the citizens of his kingdom: peaceable in our dealings with one another and peace-loving in the face of those hostile to us. Joram was given a remarkable reminder of this; but it is a lesson we must make sure we do not forget either.

Briefly, as I draw to a close, I want to refer to the passage which preceded today's reading (verses 1-7). It is almost trivial by comparison. Someone with a borrowed axe, loses the axe head in the Jordan river alongside of which he is engaged in tree-felling. The axe head may have been a relatively valuable item (metalworking technology was still in its infancy then)- but it's loss is still not what we would describe as a problem on the 'grand scale'. Nevertheless, Elisha steps in, the axe head floats, is recovered, and all's well that ends well.

But the triviality of the story is surely deliberate. In the midst of tales of the great and not so good and of men and nations is this narrative. If the LORD's purposes and plans cannot be frustrated on the international scale, the point here is surely that he is interested in the individual and the small details of our lives. The same LORD who governs the nations is also at hand for a disciple in trouble; even to meet a problem that might seem too minor to be of interest to him.

So we are to read the Old Testament stories as repeated reminders of the greatest love story of all time. Time and again, we are brought face to face with the LORD's compassion and commitment to the undeserving- us. Time and again, we are also taught that his promises, promises that find their 'Yes' and "No' in Jesus cannot be frustrated. The LORD is determined to gather his people to himself and through hell and high water to do so. Indeed, Jesus was engulfed in death and hell itself was let loose against him so that he might bring us home. But for our sakes, he prevailed. Again, time and again, we learn that the LORD has often needed to get out a spiritual megaphone in order to make us, his people, hear. Finally, however, we are consoled by the fact that the God of the nations is your God and mine. We can trust him with our every need today. In Jesus, we know better than Elijah and Elisha, the LORD loves us and is committed to us without any qualifications or small print!

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

*“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Can you recall (and, if appropriate share) some remarkable intervention of God in your life? As you reflect upon today's Bible passage, what do you think you are intended to learn about the LORD in the way he acted towards you?

2. Why was Elisha's servant 'spiritually blind'? Elisha responded with a miracle. However, why was this miracle required? What should we learn from this for ourselves.

3. Joram had to learn that as the LORD's anointed king, he was to be peaceable and lead a peace-loving people. King Jesus, is the prince of peace, and his citizens are called to demonstrate their citizenship by being peace-makers. In what areas of our lives (individual and together) might we need to re-learn this lesson?

4. ‘There are none so blind as those who cannot see’. Reflect upon the challenge that this passage makes. How might this shape our evangelistic strategies?

5. What is your ‘axe head’ today? How does this passage teach us how we should respond in our need? What is it that so frequently means we fail to seek the right help?

In the face of the present pandemic, what does this passage teach us?

6. What, out of all that we have studied through this series on Elijah and Elisha, really sticks in your mind?

What has strengthened your faith the most?

What has challenged your faith the most?

What has inspired your faith the most?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org **WA** EmmanuelCM12

T @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** [EmmanuelChurchBillericay](https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelChurchBillericay)

Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry