

Elisha's Death

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[0 : 0 0] Now I want to night for the last time to go back to the story of Alisha, it's in 2 Kings chapter 13 verses 10 to 21. It would be quite interesting I think, I would really love to get all of you to feedback on this chapter and tell me the kind of things that you would preach from, from some of the points you would make, what you would make of the arrows and the bit about the dead body and the resurrection and kind of all the strange names and the kings and what we would make of it because you know in the first reading you look at that a passage like this and the end of Alisha's life and you think oh boy it's just really, it's so different, it doesn't really connect with what I am, where I am, what I'm doing tonight, who I am and the kind of life I lead, you know, culturally, historically, spiritually, socially, in a literary way, conceptually, it's more like Narnia really than my day-to-day living, there's not much in it that really connects with what is my life and so I think a lot of the time we'll come to a passage like this and we'll just kind of read it because what we read the Bible, that's what we do and we're plowing through the Old Testament and I'll read the Bible in a year so I'll read the Old Testament and I'll read the

New Testament even if I don't make any sense of it, I just read it and that's what we do so often isn't it and we think well this doesn't really have anything to do with me and with my life and it's so divorced, it's so far away from what I am and my understanding of God, this beautiful New Testament God that was revealed in Jesus Christ and sometimes you know we feel that, you know, it's just a brief summary report here, it's written down so we don't have the kind of nuances, we don't sense the people and the context and the background and what God knows about these people and so we struggle with it in many ways, on the surface at least but I wonder whether in reality it is that different and why would I say that because it's got a couple of very important things, crucial realities in the story, one is it's about God and the other thing it's about us, it's about people. I know the times and the generation and the culture and everything is very different but I wonder if it really is that different because there's in many ways we can take from it truths about God and truths about life and truths about spirituality and truths about death as well, as I want to do briefly this evening as we finish this account and I think it's the most, in many ways it's interesting isn't it that Alicia's death is so understated in this whole passage as well, Alicia, it's just one verse, Alicia died and was buried, there's no fanfare, there's no great story all round about Alicia's death, it's no different from all the other kings, it's just recorded and mentioned and moved on but nonetheless I think we can, as we come to, as this concludes the story of Alicia I hope we can learn something about the God of Alicia for ourselves. I think that's very important for us to remember even when we were reading the Old Testament and when we are seeking to make sense of it is that God is still the same, God hasn't changed, Hebrews 12 verse 18, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever, Jesus is God and the Old Testament believers might not have had a clear understanding exactly of who God was in terms of our Trinitarian understanding of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but it was nonetheless God and he is eternal and he's unchanging at that level and there's two things in this chapter that are typical of the God of the Bible, the God that we have put our trust in and the God who is the only God and the first thing is that he's a God of promise, okay, God is always a God and throughout the Bible he comes across as this God of promise, it's God who has worked right from the beginning, right from the core of the problem between man and God in Genesis chapter 3 where he makes this tremendous promise, you know, I will put enmity between you and the seed of the woman in you and the promise goes on right through Scripture to the coming of Jesus and God is a God of covenantal promise so that in verse 22 of this passage which we didn't actually read near towards the end, He is the King of Aaron, the press Israel but then we're told the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob and so this covenant that he

makes with Abraham is a significantly important covenant because it's a covenant, it's the beginning of the covenant of grace, it's this promise that I will be your God and you will be my people that is made full in the coming of Jesus Christ, there's one story, it's one story of rescue, that God is the God who rescues us and we enter into a relationship with Him lost and we're saved and He does it through this covenant that

He makes with His people covenant to deliver us. I was listening, you'll probably hear me say this, probably about once every three or four weeks I'll say, I was listening to a sermon of Tim Keller because I listened to it in my earphones on the way to work sometimes and he's got a great little bit about the covenant that God makes with Abraham, there's a Genesis 15, there's a brilliant picture, again it's a picture that we would look at and really not make any sense of because God's making a covenant with Abraham at this point and he takes various animals, God does, and he cuts them in half and he lays them out on either side of the aisle like it was here, the aisle here, so he lays out these animals on either side, cuts them in half and he goes on to, in that visual way he goes on to make this covenant with Abraham about being the redeemer and saviour.

Now that initially doesn't mean anything to us but it would have meant a lot to Abraham, he would have understood exactly what it meant because it was the kind of thing that a sovereign king would do when he had defeated a vassal nation, a small state, but was entering into a covenant with him, a covenant where he would protect him, this great powerful king would protect the smaller nation and he would walk through between the animals that he'd been split into and he would make a covenant to protect them and it would be sealed by this initiation and then the vassal king, the king of the smaller army who was to serve this bigger nation and this bigger king, he would also walk through in the aisle and say that I will fulfil the terms of this covenant as well, I will obey you and I will come under your sovereign oversight and lordship and as they walk through they were saying if I break this covenant it will be to me as it has been to these animals I'll be cutting pieces, so it was basically saying you know you kept this covenant otherwise there was consequences for not keeping the covenant that would be ultimately death, but in that covenant that

[8 : 06] God makes with Abraham, Genesis 15, God walks through in the darkness, darkness comes over and symbolically he walks through, that in itself is amazing, God enters into relationship with Abraham, but the more amazing thing is he doesn't ask Abraham to walk through, he says basically God says if you fail I will be cutting pieces on your behalf and it's pointing forward to Christ being our saviour who in many ways literally was torn apart on the cross for us because we are covenant breakers, we could never keep that covenant and so Abraham would have recognised that this was a unilateral divine covenant that God was making on our behalf, he gives the blessings, he takes the curse on the cross and he walks through the valley of the shadow of death for us, that's the promise that's made right there at the beginning of the Old Testament and it's on the basis of that covenant that he remains faithful to his people right through the Old Testament and is committed to them, he's a God of promise and he wants therefore his people in the Old Testament and for us also to trust him wholeheartedly now I can't really, I don't know exactly what this story is about in verses 14 to 17 where you have the picture of the arrows and shooting the arrows and the king doesn't shoot enough arrows and then he gets judged, what's happening here is Alisha is dying okay and so Jehoash the king goes to him and he weeps over him and says well if you go how are we going to survive because the prophet always is the one who invokes God's help on our behalf, the chariots, the Norsemen of

Israel are going to be destroyed and so Alisha is a kind of last act he says to get a bow and arrow, take the bow and he says fire it and then he says this symbolic act as you hit the eastward towards the enemy you will completely destroy them and then he says take the arrow strike the ground and the king strikes it three times and stopped and the man of God was angry and said you should have stuck the ground five or six times then you would have completely destroyed Adam, now we're not really told why that was a disobedient act really, we're not given much detail about it but what seems to be the case is that he was being half hearted, the king was being half hearted in his fulfilling of the command, he only struck the ground three times he should have struck it more, now we don't know it seems a bit odd to us doesn't it, it seems a bit unfair but obviously God knew his heart and possibly Alisha knew and maybe it was something that was known even to the king you should have known something but more about being whole hearted but clearly he didn't trust God completely, God had made this promise through Alisha and he could have completely destroyed his enemies but he didn't really believe it so he didn't really wholeheartedly fulfill what he was

commanded to do and we know that God would have seen his heart, he wasn't convinced that God would give the victory with Alisha going and isn't that often the case with us in a very different way, God promises many things and he says many things to us and he promises us victory over sin and he promises us a way forward and he promises us guidance and he promises us a future and we kind of half heartedly believe it but not wholeheartedly so we kind of we trust in ourselves, we half heartedly trust in God, we give him a bit of the benefit of the doubt but we don't really follow him wholeheartedly and God wants us to be Christians who wholeheartedly follow him through his promises because of the promises he makes, you look right back at the Bible and all these promises are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and all the Old Testament promises that Messianic promises are fulfilled in Jesus as are many of the other ones and so we can take confidence in a risen Saviour that the promises he makes about our future and about heaven and about not just about heaven but about life now he will also fulfill so we trust him wholeheartedly so we're not, he doesn't want us to be lukewarm, he doesn't want us to be half hearted, he doesn't want us to drag our feet spiritually but really go after him because he's the sovereign God as Tom was saying in the prayer, he's worthy, he's big, we shrink him down, we make him absolutely tiny and not really worthy of being followed and serving him because of who he is so we have here this God who's a God of promise but also in the same way he is clearly revealed here as the God who is the judge, you know in verse 11 we have this repeated formulaic verse right through Kings where he says, speaking about the King, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jerobo and the Son of Neba which had caused Israel to commit, he continued in them so you've got this constant repeated formula of judgment on the Kings in these books of the Bible, in the eyes of the Lord they did what was evil so there's this great recognition that morality, evil and good is not ultimately just a democratic decision, a Christian decision but it's God's decision because it's the eye of the Lord that's spoken of here so it's in the eye of the Lord, it's the Lord who sees in other words, it's the Lord who watches and clearly he is the standard so we sneak in behind a closed door and we think nobody's seeing or we think lots of things in the privacy of our own mind and we think nobody knows but what the Bible reminds us of constantly is that the eye of the Lord is on us and it's an eye that sees our hearts and knows our motives because if it was just how we would act outwardly and if it's just our moral outward behaviour probably lots of us could be saved, I don't think I would but some of you would, some of you are very moral and upright and beautiful and in fact many people outside the church are much nicer and beautiful or than we are outwardly sometimes but the eye of the Lord sees the heart which is why we need a saviour because he sees it's what comes out of our hearts, it's what comes out of our thoughts that cause us to need a saviour, it's the bitterness, it's the envy, it's the jealousy, it's the lust, it's the impurity, it's all of these things and the eye of the Lord sees and we are accountable to him and that's unchanging isn't it? So we'll go from here and we are aware of the eye of the Lord on us and not in a spooky way because it's the eye of Jesus, it's the eye of the one who is forsaken on the cross for our sins, it's the eye of the God who loves us no greater love as any man than this he lay down his life as friends. So as you go from here, who you want to impress, who is it that matters to us, who are we seeking to put first in our lives because surely the eye of the Lord, the living God is hugely significant, it drives us to prayer but also drives us to honesty, to not being hypocritical Christians, you're trying to be what we're not.

[16:18] It drives us to be honest and humble because God sees in our hearts. So the God of even a passage like this is no different from the God of the New Testament and the God of Calvary and the God of the Cross and the God of Jesus.

Same thing as briefly is the Old Testament story that we have here in Kings is a roller coaster, okay, that's the nature of the text, it is like that all the way through Kings is a king who did well, a king who did miserably, king who did well, king who did miserably, king who obeyed, a king who rejected, king who followed, a king who didn't.

So you've got this up and down all the way through Kings of the Kings who is like a roller coaster but they always needed deliverance and you know right through the Old Testament whether it was Moses or Joshua or Kings of the prophets, there was this always need for a savior figure coming to redeem them and that of course is pointing forward to the need for Jesus.

And it was kind of like in the Old Testament it was kind of like Boomer bust. Today's economy of greed is a good picture of that we can spiritually apply to the Old Testament.

It was a picture of extremes, it was kind of Boomer bust. There wasn't terribly much consistency in the faith of the Old Testament believers and sometimes we look at that and say wow that's just what my Christian life's like, Boomer bust, we are close to the Lord, we are far away from the Lord, nearer or far away and there's this constant Boomer bust and maybe we justify it as we look at the Old Testament.

[17 : 57] I think our experience should be different because the New Testament is a progression from the Old and we are far more privileged than Old Testament believers.

This deliverer that was being promised and that was reflected in the lives of prophets like Elijah and Alisha and Moses, they're all typical figures as it were of Jesus but our deliverer is being Jesus on the cross.

We looked this morning briefly at his cry of dereliction, my God, my God why are you forsaking me? But he also says on the cross it is finished, it's done, the work is done and we have the resurrection. Now can I just say a little bit at this point about this bizarre little end to the story that we have in this chapter about the Moabite raiders coming and it's kind of quite fun, I think it's quite a funny little story but also a bit bizarre where one, we're burying a man suddenly saw a band of raiders so they threw the man's body into Alisha's tomb and the body touched Alisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up in his feet.

What is that about? Do you ever remember reading that before? This is nothing to do with venerating the bones of the ancient relics of the saints as if there's some magic in them that could, mystery and magic that could bring people back to life.

[19 : 27] This is again pointing forward in quite surreal terms in many ways but pointing forward saying okay Alisha's dead but the power of God and the promise of God remains with the people and that there is hope and a future and there is life and again it's pointing forward to this great redemptive work of Jesus, his own resurrection and the power of that for the lives of believers.

You know in Matthew 27 from verse 51 it talks about the cross, the crucifixion when Jesus died. Until we look that up it's just after Jesus died.

In fact it's probably the resurrection, Matthew 27 and verse 51.

Just after he died when Jesus had cried out again and allowed him to give up a spirit at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rock split, the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. It's the same kind of thing, it's just pointing forward to the significance of the deliverer and the redeemer and the God who is going to come and bring that resurrection into our own life.

[20 : 55] And but we are post, aren't we? We are post Calvary but we are more than that, we are post resurrection the third day. We are more than that, we are post the ascension, Jesus goes back and we are post Pentecost where Jesus in the upper room had promised the Holy Spirit to his people that he wouldn't leave us as orphans but he would give us, he would come in the person of his Holy Spirit and live in our lives.

So I don't think we have an excuse for living a boom and bust Christian life because we are not Old Testament believers. We have, we have God's power and God's strength and all that.

I'm not saying that will always be the case but I don't want us to use that as an excuse for that kind of, I'm near to the Lord, I'm far away from the Lord. I'm having a bad week, I'm having a good week. Because much of what is spoken of in the New Testament is the conditionality of our faith. Is that we stick close to Jesus Christ and we have a responsibility because he empowers us.

We don't need to be boom and bust Christians all the time because we have this promise of his presence and we have this promise that we can grow in grace and that we have the strength of God with us but we are conditionally to do so, fix our eyes on Jesus, keep in step with the Spirit, throw off the sin which he hinders, run the race with patience, be consistent, be faithful and no blessing and no witness.

[22 : 27] You know in our lives that's what we're craving isn't it? That sense of consistency that failure isn't inevitable. So we don't say, ah that was bound to happen because of what I'm like. But he says, but you're not like that now, you're a child of God and the boom and bust of the Old Testament needn't be what we experience.

Now there will be many times when we don't feel close to God, I know that. But that doesn't mean that we need to be far from God.

We don't rely on our feelings but on the promises and on the person of Jesus Christ. So the Old Testament as a roller coaster needn't be our experience.

And the last thing, very last thing I want to say, maybe not the best thing to finish with but death remains inevitable doesn't it? That's the end of the story of the militia, he isn't resurrected, he dies. He has an illness and he dies even though he's a prophet. And it's the universal story isn't it? Story of the kings, it's the story of the militia, it's the prophets, story of every single human being that one day it will be our epitaph that we will have died.

[23 : 41] And Job recognises that in that wonderful struggle of Job with God through that book he says my life is passing swifter than a weaver shuttle. It's the one certainty in this uncertain world isn't it?

And I think the end of the story of the militia is significant at that level because it's something that mocks, it mocks our invincibility. We're really invincible, we're independent, we're young, we're brave, we're in control.

But death is the one thing that mocks that. And you know everyone here we can associate and we know of someone who died at your age.

It's not just something for old people to consider and it's a very great reality in the world in which we live. And that death is always for us, needs to be seen I think as Christians as part of God's judgment over sin and over rebellion.

Because you know right from the very beginning again Jesus says you shall surely die. That's the judgment. If people, if they rejected God's lordship at that early stage you shall surely die.

[25 : 00] It's not just natural therefore it is also spiritual judgment. That comes from the mouth of the author of life. So we're image bearers of God created to worship Him and in the mystery of evil coming into our lives and the rebellion of His lordship then death entered into the world, into our experience and it was a rejection of the voluntary coming under the voluntary lordship of God.

Now I wonder if this may be a very unfeel logical thing to say and a lot of people ask you know where did evil come from, why did God create evil, no God didn't create evil but we know evil came into the world.

I wonder and maybe people will shoot me down with it, I wonder was it always a risk of creation, was it always a risk of creating men and women in His image to love Him voluntarily and freely that there would always be, part of the cost of that was the risk that they would reject Him and with the solemnity of that we recognise that death is part, that we are part of that judgment and that Christ's death on our behalf is so significant.

Death is that great megaphone which changes our perspective because it's the judgment of God but I don't finish there, I finish there with the truth that it's also the experience of God and that's the remarkable and amazing thing.

That's why we never move from the cross because the cross reminds us that not only is death a judgment of God but it's also the experience of God on our behalf that all death, your death in mind can only be defeated in one place.

[26 : 54] So we never trivialise the cross and we never, boring the cross, move on a deeper and more significant, never because that's the place where it all happened and that's the place where God becomes the curse, the judgment on our behalf.

Remarkable, brilliant, glorious place that everything points forward to and where we can find our safety and our hope, it's the simplicity of substitution but it's the mystery of the death of God, the Son of God for us.

Out of that great darkness of death comes a great life and a great light and his resurrection is our guarantee of resurrection and a future beyond our wildest dreams so we don't lose sight of that and we don't just live there for today and we don't just think that our life is about living till we're old and then that's it finished and it's once you're past 30 then there's nothing we're living for but it's much more than that, it's much more than that.

It's this great hope of a new creation, of a new future in Christ and it's based on these promises that are integral and interwoven through the whole of Scripture, sealed in the blood of Jesus and in his resurrection.

So I hope that in the kind of strangeness of this chapter and the stories that we can find significance and importance and relevance for our own lives.

[28 : 39] Amen, let's pray briefly together. Father God help us to hear and understand and know your word and your will.

We're amazed at Scripture and we're amazed at your consistency and your faithfulness and your covenant, we're amazed at your promises, we're amazed at our lives that are being transformed, we're amazed at how little we accept often wholeheartedly your promises for give us when we drag our feet, when we don't really believe them, when we say well these promises aren't really for me and when we lose sight of the greatness of our God and the wonder of His salvation, forgive us for that Lord when we live just for today and when we choose so much to dethrone you and shove you off the throne of our lives and we demand that dark place of lordship in our own lives which is a dangerous and a powerless place to be.

So fill us with your grace and keep us close to your truth and your word and its application in our lives and bless us, we pray as we sing together as we worship you together at the end of this day for Jesus' sake.

Amen.