

Passing the Mantle

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[0 : 0 0] Now as I said earlier, we're going to have a look at the life of Alisha for a few weeks in the evening service in the summer.

And we're going to read together a passage which speaks about his take. He was a prophet in the Old Testament and he takes over the mantle as it were from Elijah and it's in 2 Kings chapter 2 and verse 1 to 18.

Kind of introductory words maybe this evening. 2 Kings chapter 2 from the beginning. When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a world when Elijah and Alisha were on their way from Gilgal.

Elijah said to Alisha, stay here. The Lord has sent me to Bethel. But Alisha said, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.

So they went down to Bethel. The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Alisha and asked, do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?

[1 : 0 9] Yes, I know Alisha replied, but do not speak of it. Then Elijah said to him, stay here Alisha. The Lord has sent me to Jericho.

And he replied, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you. So they went to Jericho. The company of the prophets that Jericho went up to Alisha and asked him, do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?

Yes, I know he replied, but do not speak of it. And Elijah said to him, stay here. The Lord has sent me to the Jordan.

And he replied, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you. So the two of them walked on. Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance facing the place where Elijah and Alisha had stopped at the Jordan.

Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And when they had crossed, Elijah said to Alisha, tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?

[2 : 2 2] Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit. Alisha replied, you've asked a difficult thing, Elijah said, yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours otherwise not.

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fan fire appeared and separated the two of them. And Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Alisha saw this and cried out, my father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel. And Alisha saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart. He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

Then he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it. Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah? He asked. And when he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left and he crossed over.

- [3 : 27] The company of the prophets from Jericho who were watching said, the spirit of Elijah is resting on Alisha. And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.
- Look, they said, we, your servants, have fifty able men. Let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the spirit of the Lord has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley.
- No, Alisha replied, do not send him. But they persisted until he was too ashamed to refuse. So he said, send him. And they sent fifty men who searched for three days but did not find him.
- And they returned to Alisha who was staying in Jericho. He said to them, didn't I tell you not to go? I'm in and may God bless to us that reading from the Bible.
- Now just one for a short time this evening to begin looking at the life of Alisha in the Old Testament and hopefully glean some truth for ourselves from it.
- [4 : 36] And I want to do so by asking kind of four introductory questions about the Old Testament and about Alisha and about the story and how it applies to our lives.
- The first question I'm going to ask is, well, why? Why do we look at the Old Testament at all? Christ isn't in the Old Testament or not overtly in the Old Testament.
- I may have to retract even that statement. But maybe many people think Christ isn't in the Old Testament. It's very culturally alien to us.
- Lots of the stories we read, maybe not so much here. Well, depends I guess. But for many, the stories of the Old Testament and the lifestyle and the thinking and the ethos and even the writing, the way it's written of the Old Testament is very alien to us.
- And so we struggle with it. We struggle with some of the history. We struggle with some of the culture. Struggle with some of the teaching that we find in the Old Testament.
- [5 : 50] Three quarters of our Bible is Old Testament. If you take the Bible and put it on its side and divide the New Testament bit and look at it, the chunk of the Old Testament is much, much bigger than the New Testament, which we spend so much time on.
- But it's also even in the New Testament, lots of the New Testament is quotes from the Old Testament. It's massively quoted at different places in the New Testament.
- Jesus spends a great deal of his time quoting from the Old Testament. The Old Testament is Jesus Bible.
- It was the Bible that Jesus used and he had no problem with it. No problem with it being God's word. No problem with it revealing God's truth.
- And of course, in many ways and in many places, the Old Testament is simply anticipating Christ. It's a forerunner of Jesus.
- [6 : 57] It's setting the way. It's opening up the path for the coming of Jesus. Jesus himself, we're told in Luke 24, he said, and beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scripture concerning himself, all the scripture in that time being the Old Testament.
- And that was what Jesus used to unfold or unfurl the truth about himself to his disciples who knew the Old Testament, but didn't understand about Jesus.
- Or in Acts 3, in the preaching at the early church, indeed all the prophets from Samuel on have foretold these days. So the New Testament days, the New Testament hugely significant times are prophesied, are predicted, are foretold by different places and in different ways in the Old Testament.
- And of course, it unfolds the unchanging character of God. The deal of the Old Testament is spent in affirming that there is one God.

There's one God. There's one Lord. There's only one divine being. And it's nailed home again and again and again.

[8 : 23] There's not a multiplicity of gods. There's not hundreds of gods. There's not any gods that you fancy, any gods of your imagination. There's one living, creative, creator God and then blossoms in the New Testament to be the same one God, but who is also God, the Father, God, the Son and God, the Holy Spirit.

So the complexity of this one being is revealed in the New Testament, maybe in very shadowy ways understood in that way in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament believers recognized and knew that there was this one God and it's a God who takes us from creation and takes us and begins his redemptive story towards the coming of Jesus.

So that's why the Old Testament is really important for us. I've started reading, yeah, you go through different kind of phases of what you're reading in the Bible. I may have mentioned this before.

I can't remember, but I've got the Bible reading app from Redeemer Church in New York. I'm sure it's the same as, I'm sure there's many different Bible reading apps, but it just takes a chunk from the Old Testament and a chunk from the Psalms and a little bit from the Proverbs and a bit from the New Testament every day.

[9 : 42] So you read the Bible in a year, but it's been great to go back and just read big chunks of the Old Testament. It's so easy to get out of the way of reading big chunks of the Old Testament. And it's a lot of its narrative story.

So you can read big chunks. It doesn't take long and it's not as kind of intense as some of the New Testament passages we read. So you get narrative stories and you get people stories and you get a God at work in different ways and it's good to read big chunks.

So download the Redeemer app and you can read the Bible in a year or any other church app. We don't have that app yet, do we, Ally? Wake up at the top there.

No, we'll get an app and we'll call St. Columbus Bible reading app for a year and you can read that one instead. So that's why we read the Old Testament because it is full of God preparing me, but it's also full actually, despite what I said at the very beginning, it's full of Christ as well.

And it points towards Christ and there's images of Christ and there's the flavour of Christ and there's sometimes even pre-incarnate appearances of Christ in the Old Testament.

[10 : 48] So what about the time of the kings here? This is, if you look before, you'll see first kings and then you'll see second kings. Many people believe that originally it was just the book of kings that wasn't separated into first and second kings.

But what is this book? Well primarily it's just the story of God's people.

When they had kings who ruled over them, kings that they wanted, they didn't just want to be a theocracy, they didn't just want to have God as their king, they wanted to be like all the nations around about them and have their own kings and so God gave them kings.

And it's really the story of what that was like. Sometimes they had good kings who understood the covenant, the relationship with God and who were faithful and obedient and the blessings that came from that.

And sometimes they had terrible kings, kings who were greedy and selfish and arrogant and proud and sinful and it's kind of like a graphic goes up and down the story of the kings at times when they were close to God and close to God as a people and as individuals and other times when they were really far away from God where they wanted all the grace that God could give but they were half hearted, they were faithless, they were idolatrous.

[12 : 14] And these books would have been written much later on in the stories themselves, probably at the early point when Israel and Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

And it's as if this is written and they look back probably written although it were not told directly, written by Jeremiah and it was looking back on these days and saying, this is what it was like for you.

They're almost saying because they've been taken from their promised land, they've been taken into captivity and it's almost like they're saying, okay, where did we go wrong? What happened?

Why was it such a disaster? Why have we not enjoyed God's blessings as he promised and why haven't we remained in this promised land that he gave us?

And it shows that they were hugely, there was times when they were hugely deluded by trying to live without God and trying to worship false gods and trying to worship idols that were about the story in Mount Carmel and 1 Kings 18 of the prophets of Baal and there was this time of drought and Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to pray to their God to bring about rain and remember Baal was this God, he was the God of storms and the God of rain and the God of fertility and they tried so hard to pray to these gods but nothing happened and it's a very dramatic story of course because it revealed that these people, these gods in whom they trusted were unable to save them, a clear message that came through again and again and then God through Elijah answered the prayers for rain and revealed himself to be both the redeeming God and the saving God and that even in these stories for us there's the same reality for us of encouragements and warnings when we choose to turn our backs on God as believers and live without him and rejecting his love and rejecting his grace and saying we don't know him, the principles are very much the same for ourselves that we see that we can often make shipwreck of our life short term, that we can make a mess of things because we choose to ignore the wisdom and the grace and the power and the strength and the guidance and the love of God and we go our own ways and we think well I know better than God and I don't need to pray a God and I don't need his grace in my heart and I'll just sort things out myself and Kings is really a story of just the kind of tangled up mess that people get into when they ignore God and it's an encouragement to us not to go down that same road of autonomy and self-rule in our lives but to remind ourselves that our Lord and our God as a sovereign God is a great God and he wants us to be dependent on him and he wants us to trust him. So the question what about the why the Old Testament or what about the time of the Kings and then what about the prophets themselves there was lots of different prophets and lots of the books of the Bible in the Old Testament are books named after the prophets of God. Well they were

[15 : 39] God's messengers in the Old Testament there was a succession of prophets who brought God's word and God's truth to the people they were witnesses of God and they were there to lead the people to encourage them to teach them to warn them to foretell we often think of prophets simply as those who foretold the future and that was an element of what they would involved in but it wasn't by far wasn't the greatest part of their work their work was simply to they were anointed by God and by the spirit of God and they brought God's message to the people before there was a finished Bible before there was the completed scripture and obviously before Jesus had come so they were leaders among the people and they had message to bring from God and very much they were nearly what all the prophets were pointing forward you know these prophets in Israel were pointing forward and they were pointing forward to Jesus Christ in many different ways they were pointing forward to Jesus Christ there's different different kinds of parallels and there's obviously a parallel between Elijah and between St John the Baptist the forerunner of Christ Jesus says in Matthew 11 14 if you're willing to accept it John the Baptist is the Elijah who was to come so there's a link between Elijah that great Old Testament prophet and John the Baptist the last of the great

Old Testament prophets who was the forerunner of Jesus and also in Malachi 4 Malachi himself being the last of the Old Testament prophets says he sees I will send you Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord so there was this parallel between Elijah and John the Baptist and there's a lot of commentators would parallel Elijah John the Baptist and Elisha with Jesus that Elisha was a very Christ like character he received a double portion of God's spirit as we read in this passage we'll see a little bit more about that later he was a kind of graceful prophet Elijah was was much more like John the Baptist he was kind of wild and mental in a good way and kind of tough and strong but Elisha was much much more like Christ there was more kind of more graciousness about him and there was more like the still small voice of God being spoken through him and he of course performed many miracles and we'll look at some of that in subsequent weeks similar in many ways to

Jesus so there's this sense in which these guys were were pointing forward to the great prophet the Lord Jesus Christ and each of them in their own way were bringing part of that character to bear on him and they were always they were pointing forward not just to the coming of Christ which they prophesied and predicted not just in their character but in their teaching but they were pointing forward to a day when all believers would be like them when it wouldn't just be one or two believers who would have this special kind of presence of God in their lives but when all believers would be like them in Numbers chapter 11 Moses is kind of making a prayerful wish and he says I wish that all God's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit in them and that's a kind of prophetic wish which Joel brings to the fore in his prophecy where he says and afterwards I will pour my spirit on all people even on my servants both men and women I will pour out my spirit in these days which is of course fulfilled at Pentecost and the New Testament church where all of God's people become prophets because all of us are given the Holy Spirit and not just anointed for kind of special times of teaching or prophecy but when we are in dwell by the spirit so there's this great pointing forward that we have what they had in temporary kind of form which only one or two of them had we have this great reality as believers who have come to know Jesus Christ who have moved from death to life spiritually which we were looking at briefly this morning and we have the power of a new life and we have a message like the prophets we have an are to be witnesses for Jesus Christ in the way that they were and that's a great thing there's this kind of parallel between their proclamation and their role in pointing people to God that we have in our own lives as believers a great significant and important role as prophets of God.

But what about Alicia here in this story? Well he was called by God he was called to serve God and if you turn back to 1 Kings chapter 19 you get that link between Elijah and Alicia in 1 Kings 19 verse 19 we're told Elijah went up from there and found Alicia the son of Shaffat and he was plowing 12 Yoke of Oxen and he himself was driving the 12th pier Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him and Alicia then left his oxen and ran after Elijah let me kiss my father say goodbye he said then I will come with you go back Elijah said what have I done to you and so Alicia left him and went back and he took his Yoke of Oxen and slaughtered them he burned the plowing equipment and took the meek and gave it to the people in there then he set out to follow Elijah became one of his attendants so he was at this point going to be called to serve and to be a follow on prophet from Alicia from Elijah and he had this special role calling him where he was set apart to that role and that I simply want to say that's a very simple calling that he's a symbolic form that the mantle is thrown over him and he knows that that is the work of God and Elijah is the prophet of God and there's significance in that and but each of us have also a calling from God we are called to follow Jesus Christ that's our calling we are called we are set apart this morning we looked at Saul it became Paul and when

Ann and I said to him get up be baptized call the name of the Lord there was a sense of calling there was a sense of being led there was a sense of significance that you have a role to play and the same authority that called Saul and called Alicia and there's clear sovereign authority in these callings is the same call that is on your life and on my life as Christians you know sometimes we feel that our following Christ is well we're doing God a favor it's great isn't it amazing that God has me to follow him I'm such a great person and it's wonderful that I'm doing that and we're looking for God to jump through our hoops and really do what we want in our lives but until we are people who have been at the cross of Jesus and who recognize both his grace which is in many ways easy for us to talk about but also his sovereignty and his authority then we will not have that sense of duty privilege love joy but also duty to follow this great God when he calls we don't really have the option of ignoring him or of choosing not to follow or not to serve him and we look for in our own lives that sense of the significance and the authority and the sovereignty of God calling us to serve him where we are not necessarily in this obviously in the same way as Elijah Alicia being called to follow Elijah kind of in very physical ways and leaving his home but we are called whatever you're called to to serve you are you have a calling of God whether it's a university whether it's in school whether it's in the workplace whether it's in your neighborhood or your home God has called you to that work he's called you to serve him there he's called you to be an ambassador for him there and you all have that calling and I have a calling and we don't do God a favor we follow and serve him because of his grace and his love and we recognize his sovereignty and his authority and Alicia in being called followed and responded in obedience to that call he gave his wholehearted commitment to that and again can I just stress and I'm just applying this very quickly into our own lives into our own situations that same calling and that same commitment is what Jesus Christ asks for us in Luke chapter 9 verse 22 Jesus speaks about the cost of following him and he says you know if anyone would come after me he must deny himself take up his cross daily daily he says is it maybe for us something we think of as once in a while or monthly weekly by annually now and again when something particularly needy comes around we take up our cross or are we following but he says to us you know that we take up our cross daily and follow him for whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it what is good as it for a man to gain the whole wide world and that for fear lose his very

[26 : 42] soul and the great a sacred gospel message isn't it of wholehearted commitment Elijah real Alicia realized that in giving himself to God and following God be profit his whole life had gone and he followed and went in this new direction and and that's very much the same for us in our lives that the prophets had this wholehearted devotion they preached that they lived that and they tried to example that to the people to a greater or lesser degree successful or otherwise but it's important for us that we remember and recognize and battle with the mental attitude which always veers back towards self rule and autonomy and love of sin that we want to be still in control we want to do things our way that we don't really want to be wholehearted and committed to him we can't be in two camps we can't have a foot in both camps we can have two gods and that was what the Old Testament people struggled with so much they struggled with the exclusivity of the living God and of his loving and gracious demands on them and the responsibility to deny all others and yet this love of which we are have taken hold of is a preeminent love for us and we need to recognize that it was over and obviously as mentioned this morning at St Andrews on

Friday at Matt and George's wedding and you know that there's no there's no kind of half hearted vows that you do at a wedding you can't say okay well I vow to love you some of the time I'll be your faithful exclusive husband or wife when you're around you know it'll not happen when we're in holiday or things like that you know you can't do it that way the vows that we take at wedding are pretty exclusive vows they're lifelong they're about faithfulness that you're denying all others and that's just in a human relationship of love and that's how it has to be and so it is in a real but a million times more in a relationship with Jesus that there's this great sense of wholehearted commitment the Bible often speaks about complacency or mediocrity or lukewarmness and it's a horrible thing isn't it to be a Christian living in the shadow lands living far from Jesus and not embracing him but being a stranger to him living in the spiritual red light district prostituting ourselves and not knowing and sharing his love and his grace wholehearted commitment but also think briefly and just as we draw to a close you see with Alicia there's a such a genuine humanity about him particularly in this little passage where the mantle is being passed on between Elijah and Alicia there's it's very real and very tender the student and the teacher and the student knows that the teacher is about to go the way of the world he's about to be taken from him death was near and that was that was hurtful he didn't want to talk about it you know when the different guys said you know that you know the Lord's gonna take Elijah from you to say I know I know don't talk about it I don't want to talk about it I don't want to talk about death I don't want to talk about the separation there's this kind of emotional battle that he's going through but he knows that Elijah is his father as it were is going to be taken from him and yet there's a sense in which death and I know Alicia's Elijah's death is kind of unusual and unique in biblical terms but nonetheless there was that separation and there's a great humanity about Alicia here that he doesn't want that to happen and let's never forget that let's never forget the humanity of belonging to this world in which we live I just find it weird when Christians kind of celebrate death which maybe sometimes they do I think death is a defeated enemy undoubtedly for the Christian and we don't mourn as those without hope but it's still an enemy it's still the antithesis of all that we want and all that are very being gravitates towards it's not the same what it's not what we want Christ wept when he saw the effects of death and separation when he went to his friends home and Lazarus had died and it's not right for us as Christians to have this kind of stoic unnatural acceptance of death just because we know we can explain it spiritually and because we understand the spiritual dynamics and the reality behind it doesn't mean that we still don't recoil

from it that are very body every fiber of our beings resists the reality of death not because we don't want to be with Jesus you know yes for us to live as Christ and to die again we know these truths but the reality is that death remains for us that valley of the shadow which we need to walk through which is still even though it's an enemy a defeated enemy remains an enemy and in our humanity let us remember that particularly as we mourn and grieve along with others that we have an empathy and a sympathy and we don't make light of that or act in a way that it is less than human and lastly I think we also see the great and I haven't really gone into the character much here of Alicia but his great request in verse 9 when they're about to part when they cross to Elijah said to Alicia tell me what can I do for you before I'm taken from you and he says let me inherit a double portion of your spirit it's a tremendous prayer tremendous request that he makes he knows that there's this passing on of of work between the prophets he recognizes and sees and knows that they were God's messengers and there was a continuation of their work on and on and he knows that although Elijah this great great prophet of God is about to go that the work must go on and so he makes a fantastic prayer that reveals his humility and also his sense of understanding of what is important a double portion of the spirit of God in his life and that's there's lots of different angles that will one of the great things is he recognized success the importance of succession the importance of the work being what's important not just the individual you know and it's not about the individuals about God passing on the blessing and the work carrying on and that's a great thing what I one of the things

I want to teach again again to young guys coming into the ministry is the importance of basically what they're doing is they want to work in a congregation work themselves out of a job because they're working to pass on the work to the next person it's not about them it's not their work it's not they're not building up anything around their personality it's simply moving on God's work they're doing God's work for a season then they'll be taken off the scene of time and someone else will do and I'll do fine without them and I'll do fine without us and that's a great thing he wanted that double portion I remember when when I was to be ordained in my first congregation in Raskin which was in 1991 for some of the people here were born my dad at that time was just retired as a minister he'd been the minister here in the congregation some of you will know but he was he was unable to he was unable to be at my ordination he was in the area he was in the home of friends but he was laid up in bed because at that time he had a very bad back and he wasn't able to make the induct the ordination induction he actually ended up being well enough to preach from a bar stool not in a bar but from a bar stool in the pulpit he wasn't fit enough to stand but he could sit so he was in a kind of high stool preaching on the Sunday but he wasn't able to be there on the Friday but he's he said that to me when I went to visit him before the ordination he said you know I want you to have a double portion of God's

Spirit because he understood it wasn't about him and it wasn't about me it was about God blessing us and giving us what we needed for the next portion of the tat for the next portion of the work and and that's such a great thing for us to pray for isn't it it's a recognition that we don't live in the past it's a recognition that we are not just happy with what we've got it's a recognition of what need there is in our lives for more of God's blessing and God's spirit we can't be content with mediocrity we can't be content just with kind of half empty churches we can't be content with habitual Christianity that we're looking for a double portion of God's Spirit so that we will have more you know it's not it's not that God is me miserly or meager with what he gives but he looks for us to have a hunger to want more and to want more of his spirit and to grow and to hunger and to develop and to thirst and that's my prayer and I want you to make that your prayer force you to have that as your prayer but I want you to make that your prayer that you will have a double portion of God's spirit in your life a double portion from your parents or a double portion from your minister a double portion that you've had up to this point and it fills you with this great sense of being able to serve God and do God's will because he is promised to resource us he's promised to fill us he's promised that it's not in our own strength it's his work we needn't be afraid that somehow we're holding the banner on our own that it's his work and we are simply on this scene for a few moments but he wants us to be blessed and he wants us to be useful and used wherever we are whatever you're doing and you whatever workplace you're in that you will serve him and follow him and love him and that you will find Christ to be the greatest of saviours amen let's pray Lord God bless we pray our thoughts around your word and help us to know and love you better and better may we learn from the example of the prayers and the obedience and the commitment of Elisha and the life that he led and learn for ourselves the principles and the truths that will apply to our situation we do pray Lord

[38 : 42] God for a double portion of your spirit in this church this congregation you pour out your spirit on is that our lives and our hearts wouldn't be so kind of jam packed full of other things that are wrestling with our battling in our hearts for supremacy that there's no room for the spirit that we would not be people whose hearts are divided or whose hearts are cold or disinterested but we'd be wholehearted and that we would be rooting out sin and selfishness and idolatry and greed and bitterness and pride selfishness and envy and gossiping and drunkenness and all these things that public and private that sometimes just atrophies our hearts and causes to grow cold and not to know and experience that love which you have for us and that power and that grace and that glory that you want your children to have and maybe then know that double portion of your spirit in our lives and our hearts for Jesus sake we ask these things amen