



TAKEAWAY SUNDAY SERMON

Sunday 18th September 2022

Making a difference in the city by Rev Chris Barnard

Matthew 5:13-16 and 2 Kings 2:1-22

What sort of city do you want to live in? how should it be to live in and how would you like it to look? How would you like it to be in 10 years' time for your children for your grandchildren and for your great grandchildren?

Let's listen to the description of the city that Elisha was living in (verse 19) The people of the city said to **Elisha "Look our Lord, this City is well situated, this is a fine city, as you can see one of the best, but it's water is bad and it causes the land to be barren, to be unproductive, badly polluted, nothing grows, it's hard to make a living here"**.

This morning we are going to find out how Elisha deals with this problem. There is serious issue in his city and the people are looking at the man of God to make a difference, to do something about it. They didn't go to the City Council, to the government, or to all of the agencies in the city, they came to Elisha, in whom they sense **the presence of God**. And we see that Elisha doesn't sit around wondering what's going to happen next, we see he doesn't remain in the four walls of his comfort zone.

Let's take a look at what transpires. Elisha was ordained by God to succeed Elijah, and Elijah was to train him and prepare him to follow in his footsteps, before he is taken into heaven.

So, we see in this scripture that Elijah decides to take Elisha on a final journey.

Elijah starts the journey at Gilgal, then he goes to Bethel, then to Jericho and then to the Jordan river. I find this a very interesting tour.

I remember my grandmother . . . took us on a tour . . . significant places in her life, told us the meaningful stories of her life. It was a memorial for her and for us and we learnt some significant history about our family.

Just like in this church, every week we celebrate God's faithfulness, through every Sunday service, every event and project we create a significant memorial, and we hear and listen to the stories of God's hand moving supernaturally on our behalf. And we realize its not just another event.

And for Elisha this was not just a random trip, it was a crucial, and essential, learning experience. It was Elijah taking him from significant place to place and telling him the stories of each one of these places. He wanted him to experience God not just to know about Him but to know Him first-hand, personally.

So, he starts at the beginning in **Gilgal**. So, what's so great about Gilgal, what does Elisha see at Gilgal? He asks: "What are these 12 Stones piled up in a heap all about?" Gilgal is where the people of God first entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua and Caleb. The 12 stones were set up there as a remembrance to tell people what exactly happened. All of those who were born in the wilderness over the 40 years were circumcised as a covenant to God to be consecrated and to be separated unto the Lord. it was a place of new beginnings, starting over, it was a place of salvation, coming out of bondage, leaving Egypt behind forever and starting a new life.

Elijah wanted Elisha to see this is the significant part of life's journey the turning point in one's life, a Gilgal experience, where God provides a salvation experience for His people, the past is forgiven, it's gone.

When you tell your story does it include your "Gilgal" experience? What do the stones of your life say when you tell your story? Do you include Gilgal, the place of leaving the wilderness behind to start a new life: **do people know, do your children, your grandchildren know about your "Gilgal"?**

So, it's time to move on and Elijah says to Elisha you can stay here, the Lord is sending me to Bethel, Elisha responds and says "surely as the Lord lives I will never leave you", so off they went to Bethel.

What is it about Bethel that Elisha needs to learn? What makes this place so important? Why is there a pillar of stone here? We learn this is the place where Jacob rested overnight running in fear of his life, away from his brother, who wanted to kill him for stealing his birthright from him.

Here, Jacob has an encounter with God and God speaks into His life and he calls the place Bethel, the house of God, the place of meeting God's presence. A place where God promises to be with him always.

This is a person who messed up big time! have you ever messed up in your life? Yet God appears to him, and God speaks to him and speaks into his future, and he says I am with you always, it is about God's promise of his presence being with us always.

Years later he comes back to face his brother and God has another encounter with him and changes his name to Israel, and he becomes the father of a great nation. The greatest thing that Elisha needed to learn is that God is with him no matter what. You and I can learn that God is with us even if we have messed up.

Bethel is a place of encounter with the living God's presence, it's a place of transformation a place of discipleship! **Have you been to Bethel and does your story include an encounter with the living God?**

Elijah says to Elisha it's time to move on, you stay here, **I'm going to Jericho**. Elisha says, "No ways I'm not staying behind, where you go, I go!" So, they go together to Jericho. What is it about Jericho that's so important? This is where the wall comes tumbling down.

Gilgal is the first place they came into the promised land and Jericho is the first place where they have a battle in the promised land; but we see it's not an ordinary battle. Joshua was near Jericho and he looks up and sees a man in front of him with a sword in his hand and asks him "Are you for

us or for our enemies, whose side are you on? “Neither” he replies, “I have come to take charge”. Joshua falls face down. He asks: “what message does the Lord have for His servant?”

He is instructed to walk around seven times, and say nothing, fully armed, but no shooting, just blow the trumpets on the last round and shout. How on earth do you fight a war like this?

So, what did they learn? to walk by faith. They encountered the supernatural victory which comes by the spirit, through obedience!

The scripture says, “not by might nor by power, not by weapons, not by sword, but by my spirit says the Lord.” God was teaching them a new principle of how to walk by faith. In the midst of problems God wants us to walk by faith not by sight.

This was a great lesson for Elisha and it’s a lesson for us that we too need to trust God!

Have you been to Jericho? The place where God fights your battles and gives you victory without your man-made plans?

Again, Elijah says to Elisha You stay here, the Lord is calling me to go to the Jordan river. “No ways I’m not staying behind.”

What do you think it is that Elisha needs to learn at the Jordan river?

We know this is where the people of God had to cross into the promised land. The river separated the land of promise from the wanderings in the wilderness. This is a highly significant place in their history. God miraculously separates the waters. As they pass through dried land, they pick up 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan and set up a memorial when they get on the other side so that no one will ever forget.

It’s the place of baptism, it’s on the other side, the place of commissioning.

So, Elisha follows Elijah to the Jordan river, Elijah took off his coat rolled it up and struck the water and the water divided so he and Elisha crossed over to the other side, what is it that happens on the other side of the Jordan? Elijah looks at Elisha and says to Elisha, you are still with me? What is it that you want from me Elisha?

Now you need to understand that at any time Elisha had the choice to stay behind and not to follow, **he could have stayed at Gilgal** and rejoiced in his salvation, stayed in his comfort zone shouting: “Hallelujah **I’m saved! I’ve made it!**”

He could have stayed **behind at Bethel**, “I’ve got the presence of the Lord and I’m full of the spirit,”. He could have **stayed at Jericho**, walking by faith, but he continued to follow Elijah. It was not enough for Elisha just to be saved, not enough just to have God’s presence, not enough just to walk by faith, he wanted more, he wanted a double portion, He wanted a double portion of what Elijah had.

He says to Elijah: “I’ve seen what you do Elijah, you make a difference wherever you go. When you pray the sick are touched, the dead come alive, fire comes from heaven. I saw the joy of the mother when a child came back to life, I saw the leper being healed, I saw him on the outskirts of the city, his children and wife looking at him from a distance and in his eyes, he was longing to hold his children in his arms, but he couldn’t. I saw the joy in his eyes when he was healed and he was hugging them and kissing them, I saw that drug addict, that alcoholic, that prostitute, that woman who had been beaten up, and had no place of refuge. I saw the child who had no clothes, who had no breakfast, to eat. I saw the stranger who was lost and lonely, I saw them and you, Elijah, brought them new hope. That’s what I want for our city Elijah. I want to do the same and even more than what you have done.”

“Elijah, you see my city needs to be transformed, and I want to be like you and make things happen. I don’t want to sit around and wait for someone else to sort out the problems.”

Elijah says to him: “It’s not an easy thing that you are asking for Elisha, because to receive it you need to be present, you need to have skin in the game, you need to be here, with me all the way.”

While they were talking, Elijah was taken in a chariot of fire. Elisha cried out: "My father, you're gone!" In grief he tore his cloak in two and took Elijah's cloak and struck the water crying: "Where is the Lord the God of Elijah?" Nothing happened when he struck the water. He struck the water again and it divided and he walked to the other side a changed person! Commissioned for the tasks ahead of him.

The 50 prophets saw what happened and acknowledged the power of God upon Elisha. They wanted to go look for Elijah. "No don't go," Elisha said, but they insisted. But they did not find him because they seeking the past. They were yearning for the good old days with Elijah.

Maybe God is waiting for the church to acknowledge the good old days are gone, we can't find them anymore, so let's move on.

We see that some of the men from the city, came knocking on the door of Elisha's home saying: "Elisha, this is a fine city, a nice place, possibly the best city in the world to live-in, but we have issues with the water, it's bad, it brings death, it's barren, it's non-productive. People are poor, people who are sick, people are caught up in in suicide, in struggles, in drugs, in violence, in abuse, sad things happen here in this city." Elisha says: "Bring me salt. The Lord will make the water pure again, there will no longer be deaths! Nor barrenness."

Do you want a double portion? Do you want to be commissioned to be the salt and the light in St Heliers, in Auckland, in New Zealand?

How many of you want to be commissioned or are you content to stay in Gilgal, claiming: "I'm saved. Hallelujah!" How many of you are content to stay in Bethel, where you're full of the Holy Spirit? Maybe you're in Jericho, walking in faith, keen to find out what's on the other side of the Jordan. You want to be commissioned to make a difference, to be a transformer of our city.

Make a choice today to make a difference. To be present and have skin in the game.

Amen.