

## 2. End and beginning

May 3, 2009

We find several examples of ministry transition in the Bible. Good and bad... First, Moses passed his baton to Joshua right before the over-two-million Israelites entered into the Promised Land. After 40 years journey throughout the wilderness between Egypt and the land of Canaan where the first generation adults were laid in the graves of the wind swept hills and deserts.

Second, the high priest Eli who didn't control his two wild sons while they were growing up. They became so bad that the Israel people didn't want to come and offer their sacrifices to the Lord. Eli knew, but he didn't do anything about it. So God chose young child Samuel to take over the ministry of the high priest to the ministry of the prophet by killing Eli and his two sons.

Third, apostle Paul spoke from his heart to his young protege Timothy and encouraged him to stay with the truth of God no matter what and be prepared to give defense of what he believed in season and out of season. We can find his emotional talk in his swan song epistle 2 Timothy.

Fourth, Jesus before He was crucified, at the upper room, He told them to love one another, as well as the Holy Spirit's arrival right after His departure in John 13-16.

And now we find another great example of ministry transition between Elijah and Elisha this morning. Since I said, "ministry transition", some of you are thinking, "OK, this teaching is not for me. Because I am not in a ministry." I beg you the difference. Whether you are young or old, we all face generational transitions in our lifetime.

I am not only talking about physical age, because I've seen many physically aged Christians who are extremely immature. At the same time, I have had privileges to meet some young people who are mature in the Lord beyond their years.

Since we do not know when the Lord is going to take us to heaven, we must train the next generation to carry the torch of the truth that comes from Jesus Christ through the Word of God. You may have heard this: "The work of the Lord is always one generation short of extinction."

Rather than complaining about the lack of wisdom and experience of the younger generation, we need to come along their side to help them. If you are a part of the younger generation, you should have willingness to learn from those who have been there and done that.

As a matter of fact, I am starting to think about raising a young man whom the Lord would use to take over this church before I kick the bucket or end up in prison for teaching what the federal government doesn't like. Not only for our church, but also to send young people out to wherever the Lord leads them to start a brand new work of God. Do you feel that God is calling you to pastoral ministry? Just be available with humility. That is the only qualification you need. However, the most important thing you need is the calling of God in your life to be a pastor. Without it, you are going nowhere.

## A. ELIJAH'S DEPARTURE

2 Kings 2:1-8 And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel. 3 Now the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" 4 Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they came to Jericho. 5 Now the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!" 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on. 7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. 8 Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

At Bethel, Jericho and Gilgal, these two men met the sons of the prophets. These are companies of dedicated men who were called by God to study the Scriptures and teach the people. You can consider them like Bible seminary students.

It almost was Elijah was doing his best to ditch Elisha from following him. Actually, I believe that it was Elijah's test to see how dedicated and serious Elisha was following the Lord.

Note the cities they visited, please – Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan River. These are all important places in the Jewish history. I am sure that Elijah taught his student Elisha about each location and its history during their journey.

The past is not an anchor to hold us back, but it should be a rudder to guide us on a better course. The Lord can use our tangible memories to strengthen our faith in Him. That is why it is so important for us to keep our prayer journal to see where we were spiritually and how faithful our God was in times of our difficulties so that they would remind us about His faithfulness.

## B. ASK, WHAT MAY I DO FOR YOU?

2 Kings 2:9-10 And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." 10 So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so."

Elijah didn't give his successor three wishes like a genie from some silly tales. He simply asked Elisha to name the one gift he wanted more than anything else. What is in our heart eventually comes out when that person is offered with a blank check like this.

If somebody asks me what my wish is in one sentence, I would not hesitate one moment to answer: being just like Jesus. I am not looking for His miraculous power, even though that might be awesome to have them. Nor I am looking for the way He

can communicate, even though it would be great to penetrate the hearts of the listeners all the way. What impressed me most is that Jesus did everything to please the Father in heaven with complete obedience. That is what I truly want.

So, I ask you to do this today. Set aside about 15-20 minutes and be with the Lord in prayer. Ask Him what He wants in your life. Some of you may be afraid to ask Him that kind of question, because He might tell you to go to a deep jungle in Kenya, Africa. Well, it could be Hawaii as a missionary. Then you will really suffer for Jesus in Hawaii. It is always better to do what the Lord wants than what we want, because when we do what He wants, we have His presence and strength.

Elisha's answer is not about getting twice as much of the Holy Spirit, nor having a ministry twice as great as Elijah. This is based on the law of inheritance for the firstborn.

*Deuteronomy 21:17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

In saying this, Elisha was accepting the prophetic ministry that Elijah had begun and declaring that he would carry it on to completion, with God's help.

### **C. WHAT A WAY TO DEPART**

*2 Kings 2:11-14 Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. 13 He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. 14 Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.*

What a way to depart this earth to heaven! But don't be jealous. Our way will be far better. If you are a born-again Christian and you are anxiously waiting for the return of the Lord for the rapture, that would be the best way to leave this world. Not only we are going to leave here, but also we will get to meet our Savior in the air.

*1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*

If you are not a born-again Christian, you are thinking now, "Wow, these people really went off the deep end." No, we are very much sane.

When the rapture happens, you will hear that millions of people around the world disappeared and they would say that aliens have taken them. Even the liberal TV networks, like CNN, MSNBC, CBS, ABC, NBC and PBS will not be able to keep it quiet, because those millions of people in America will no longer make their mortgage payments, car payments and credit card payments. The economy will go down worse than the Great Depression in 1930s.

None of the stimulus packages will work. The American economy will totally collapse to the point of no return. That is why you don't see America mentioned anywhere in the Book of Revelation. America had enough chances to repent to the Lord and turn away from her sins. She completely turned away from God, so He simply is allowing her to ride the course of self-destruction.

Then it will be too late for you, who are not born\_Christians, to be raptured. You have to go through that horrible Great Tribulation for seven years if you can survive. According to the last Book of the Bible Revelation in chapter 8, mountains will be burning and thrown into the sea, which means tremendous earthquakes; 1/3 of the sea becomes blood; 1/3 of the sea creatures die; 1/3 of the ships are destroyed. That is not a good time to have sushi. In chapter 9, 1/3 of the world population will be killed by the wrath of the Holy and Righteous God because they reject Him. During that time, people will be scarce, because many billions will be dead. Can you imagine the rotting smell of dead bodies everywhere you turn?

If you don't want to stick around during that time of the Great Tribulation, I have a wonderful escape plan for you at the end of this service courtesy of Jesus Christ.

The power is not in the mantle nor in Elijah. Rather the power is in God, and Elisha knows that. Please notice the question, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" He didn't ask, "Where is Elijah?" Elijah was gone, but his God is not. We are serving the ever-present Almighty God, amen?

#### **D. WASTEFUL HUMAN EFFORT**

*2 Kings 2:15-18 Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. 16 Then they said to him, "Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send anyone." 17 But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, "Send them!" Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days but did not find him. 18 And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?"*

Obviously, these sons of the prophets did not understand what God the Lord did. Like them, we often try to comprehend what the Lord is doing in our lives with our limited intelligence and understanding. We cannot. That is where faith comes.

*Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

#### **E. ELISHA'S SECOND MIRACLE**

*2 Kings 2:19-22 Then the men of the city said to Elisha, "Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren." 20 And he said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. 21 Then he went out to the source of the water, and cast in the salt there, and said, "Thus says the LORD: 'I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.'" 22 So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.*

It should be no surprise to us that the water at Jericho was distasteful and the soil unproductive, because the city was under a curse according to Joshua 6:26. The salt didn't purify the water or heal the soil. It was the work of God. If you visit Jericho today, tour guides will point out "Elisha's Spring" and invite you to take a drink.

## **F. DO NOT MOCK BALDHEAD**

*2 Kings 2:23-25 Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" 24 So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. 25 Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.*

This is one of those portions if you don't understand the historical and linguistic background, you would think that our God is cruel and his servant Elisha is a cold blooded person.

The word 'youth' in v23 is not our idea of children. The Hebrew word for 'youth' is "na'ar". This is for the age 20-30 years old. I often refer the Pima County Regional SWAT operators as "my SWAT boys", because I am their fathers' age to some of them. Do I mean they are teenage boys with machine guns? That would be a scary thought by the way.

When these thugs said, "Go up, you baldhead," they meant, "If you are a man of God, why don't you get out of here and go to heaven the way Elijah did?" These young people who were mocking Elisha were a gang of smart-alecks who ridiculed the God of Israel and His servant. So what did God do? He sent a couple of care-bears to give them good bear hugs. Next time when you see upper hair challenged people, show some respect, please.

Speaking of young thugs. Hoodlum rappers, such as Eminem and Ludacris can make lyrics about extreme graphic mutilation and rape of women in their hip hop music and sell millions of CDs. What they do is protected as their Constitutional rights for freedom of speech, but if I as a Christian pastor talks against homosexuality, abortion and liberal politicians, I will be thrown in jail for being against homosexuality and I will be profiled as a domestic terrorist for teaching the end-time Bible prophecies according to Janet Napolitano, the secretary of the Homeland Security. So, I have an idea, from now on, I am gonna teach the Bible in rap music.

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) The past is not an anchor to hold us back, but it should be a rudder to guide us on a better course.
- 2) It is always better to do what the Lord wants than what we want, because when we do what the He wants, we have His presence and strength.
- 3) The work of God can be accepted only through faith in Him, not through our intelligence.