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What to Do When God Calls

1115-A

Series: The Will of God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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What to Do When God Calls

WHAT TO LEAVE WHEN YOU LEAVE

The lawyer opened the document with fear and trembling. Gathered before him was a room full of anxious relatives of the dear, departed, deceased. None of them had been as devoted to him as they are right now. There is Uncle Willie. He couldn't stand to be around the old man when he was alive. There is Aunt Samantha. She hadn't said a good word about the guy in years. There is his nephew, Rupert. He had quite a routine he did at parties, mimicking his now-departed uncle, and all he stood for. But now, here they are, gathered around like a bunch of mother hens, or perhaps "like a bunch of vultures", would be more appropriate.

You see, whether or not they respected him when he was alive, now that he is gone, they all want what he left behind. It might be called the "law of the inheritance". It goes like this:

He couldn't take it with him
The dear, departed man.
He couldn't enter glory
With his money in his hand.

So it only stands to reason
With a minimum of fuss,
Since he couldn't take it with him
He would leave it all to us!

And since no one else who knew him
So far as I can see
Had a tenth the smarts that I have
He should leave it all to me!

That's the law of the inheritance. What was theirs, "God rest their souls," now is up for grabs. And he who wants it the most, ought to get the most. How sad it is that families are so often torn asunder permanently at the death of a loved one because of man's incredible greed.

The problem, Beloved, comes from living in the wrong world.

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If we are living in the realm of the Spirit, then the only thing worth leaving behind are the things of the Spirit. The only thing we ought to ask for when someone passes on, is for God to grant us a measure of their character, those things they possessed that touched other lives and made them more godly. Should God in His sovereignty, choose to bequeath to us worldly things, we ought to pray earnestly for the grace to handle them, for not everyone can. But we ought, at funerals, to concentrate on the godly qualities that person had, and ask our God to build those qualities into our lives.

What a blessing it would be if we had the privilege of knowing the most godly man on planet earth, and when he was called home to be with his Father, to be given the right to ask for whatever he had that we wanted. “Oh, to have his humility,” you might say. “God, please give me his discernment,” you might ask. “Lord, if I could just be given a fraction of his hunger for the Word,” you might pray. Do you see the principle? Ask God for character, not things. And let “all these things” be added unto you, only if He chooses.

Elisha enters history possessing the very privilege we have been discussing. He has been called to be a disciple of the most spiritually-powerful man on planet earth. He has been “called alongside” to walk with and talk with and serve Elijah. Just as Elijah is about to make his spectacular departure, Elisha is given the right to ask for anything Elijah had that he wanted. Just how this happened and just what happened after it happened, is the subject of this lesson. It is entitled: What to Do When God Calls.

The outline looks like this:

I- What to Leave When You Leave (II Kings 2:12-18)

II- What to Do When God Calls (I Kings 19:19-21)

A- Elisha: A Double Portion

B- The Shoes He Had to Fill

C- The Place He Happened to Be

D- The Life He Had to Leave

E- The World He Had to Face

F- The Decision He Had to Make

Elisha: A Double Portion

We read about what happened just after Elijah’s ascension to

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be with God in II Kings 2 beginning with verse 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.

He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan.

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.

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.

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.”

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?’”

(II Kings 2:12-18 NKJV)

Look at the first thing they said about this man after Elijah went home. They said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” What an awesome statement. The most spiritually-productive man to set foot on God’s soil in generations has just been taken in an open-air spaceship to Glory. As he departed, he offered his disciple the opportunity to ask for anything he wanted.

Elisha didn’t hesitate. He was humbled, but he didn’t hesitate. His objectives were already formed in his mind. He didn’t ask for Elijah’s credentials. He didn’t ask for anything tangible that Elijah might have had. He asked for Elijah’s spirit to captivate his, to literally overtake his or be actually multiplied by two, as it came into his life.

Now to be brutally honest, Elijah probably didn’t have to have a lawyer to read his will. I doubt if he had anything this world calls negotiable to leave behind other than his mantle, which

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was the symbol of God's authority over his life and the symbol of his office as prophet. Apparently he had no houses or lands. He had no horses or oxen. He had no servants or investments. Apparently all he possessed was a bountiful supply of the nature of God. That's all. In today's world he probably would have been considered below the poverty level, and had he died, he might have been buried in a pauper's grave. But, Beloved, though he had no earthly goods to flaunt before the world, this man's heart was infused with the life of God. By divine standards, he was the richest man alive. And so, when he left this earth, he had more to leave behind than the Rockefellers or the Kennedys or the Hunts. He had the legacy of a life!

What about you? What are you giving your life for? To accumulate things that will dissolve at the end of this age, and only leave additional grief when you pass on, as your relatives fight for whatever you've left behind? Or is your every breath the breath of God? Is your life so godly that the mark of your life on other lives will engrave the name "Jesus" on heart after heart after heart, wherever you walk this earth? If so, Beloved, when you leave this earth, you won't really leave. Your life will remain as an eternal reminder of the grace and power of God.

Elijah left nothing but his spirit and that's all Elisha wanted. So the ministry and the message of this man of God lived on for another generation through the life of his disciple. What will you leave your children? Things they cannot handle? Goods they do not need? Your character? They can live without wealth. They cannot really live without the life of God. Leave them what they need not what they want. Leave them the legacy of a life that belonged to God.

The world won't understand. Don't worry about it. Even these fifty prophets who stood by didn't understand. Their big worry was that Elijah had been caught up in this big storm and accidentally dropped somewhere, either on top of a mountain or down in a valley. So they wanted Elisha's permission to send out a search team to try to find their missing hero before it was too late. Elisha refused. They begged and they begged, until finally the young man relented. But, of course, Elijah was nowhere to be found. Not on *this* earth anyway. Elijah was resting in the arms of the God he had so faithfully served. The world had no explanation, but they didn't believe. And the same will be true at the rapture of the church. The world won't have an explanation,

but the world won't believe.

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So "Elijah Jr." (or Elisha as we know him) now wears the mantle of his spiritual father. He wears the mantle because a sovereign God appointed him and because an obedient Elijah anointed him. But it must not have been quite that simple. It never is. When God calls a man to leave everything to have nothing, it's never simple. When God calls a man from a world of safety into a world of persecution and danger, it's never simple. When God calls a man from the back "forty" of the family farm and places him in the forefront of international intrigue and spiritual warfare, it involves a decision on the part of that person, a decision to give up one world for another.

God may be calling some of us to make that kind of decision, even now. If so, it might be interesting to watch Elisha and the scenario the Scripture describes as he answers the call of God, and follows the man of God into a world he knows not. That story is found back in I Kings 19 beginning with verse 19. It reads:

So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

(I Kings 19:19-21 NKJV)

It will be our objective for the remainder of this lesson to look at the realities of Elisha's calling and his response to that calling. It will be our goal to look at it in the light of how God calls His children; from what, to what, when, where and why. As you saw in our outline, it will be divided into five basic parts.

The Shoes He Had to Fill

Elisha's calling was a call that you and I can hardly fathom. It would be much like God tapping you on the shoulder and asking

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you to preach in Billy Graham's place on worldwide television next Sunday. In all likelihood, Elisha was not trained in the finest schools, nor was he noted for his polish as a preacher or a prophet before Elijah's mantle fell on his shoulders. But you and I and Elisha belong to a God who calls the likes of fishermen and tax collectors and carpenters and farmers to express His likeness to a searching, dying world. He calls men who, in and of themselves have nothing, are nothing and can do nothing, apart from Him. That's the secret of God's call. If you are convinced that God cannot be calling you to some high and noble ministry of Grace because you lack the eloquence, the skills or the experience needed to be accepted by the religious elite of our day, take heart, Beloved, that may be just why God is calling you. No one can ever say, "Look what education can do," or "Look what talent can do," or "Look what influence can do." They can only marvel at what God can do when He has nothing to work with but Grace.

No, I believe that the very fact that Elisha's feet were so small, figuratively speaking, might well have justified his refusing to follow God's call to replace Elijah as His spokesman. These were shoes far too big for an untrained farmer. We see no evidence that he had the kind of ego that would have been tickled by such a challenge. He simply knew a God whose power knew no boundaries. Such power could even use the likes of him.

The Place He Happened to Be

Now let's look at *where* God found him. He was out in the field plowing behind twelve yoke of oxen. Plows in Elisha's day were often incredibly crude and simple in nature. Often they were nothing more than a young tree having two branches spreading in opposite directions. The more sophisticated ones however had handles and plowshares and were pulled by two oxen at a time. So either 24 oxen or 12 pairs of oxen were involved here and at the end of the line, bringing up the rear was farmer Elisha tilling the soil. Here is where God often calls a man or a woman. He calls them in the fields of life, laboring diligently, honoring God's admonition to either work or not eat. He did not find His man in the classroom, or in the sanctuary, or even in the prayer closet, although no doubt all of those places were familiar to him. God tapped him on a shoulder bathed in sweat, in a field, surrounded by workers and said, "Come, follow Me." Jesus called His disciples in exactly the same way. They were doing the tasks when the Master whispered, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers

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of men.” And *immediately* they followed Him. Elisha immediately responded as well. The passage reads, “*And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah...*”

Elisha didn’t send in a resume applying for the job. He just went about doing what he was supposed to do, earn a living. As he was laboring, God spoke to him through His prophet and said, “Come, follow Me.” Elisha left the oxen and ran to say, “Yes!” Look where God found Elisha. Study it carefully. It may well be where you will be when God touches you for some special calling of Grace.

The Life He Had to Leave

You may be saying, “But look at the excitement. Look at the challenge. Look at the prestige of the office.” Nonsense. We’ll get to that. Instead, let’s look first at what Elisha *had to leave behind*. He had to leave his family and it wasn’t easy. We know it wasn’t easy because the first thing he did was run to Elijah and ask permission to first bid farewell to his mother and father. This was no problem for Elijah. In fact, his literal reply was, “Of course, I have no problem with that.” This was not like the lad in Luke 9:61 who used his family as an excuse to delay his following the Lord. This was a genuine act of respect for a son to pay to his parents before he left home for good. There is no indication that his going would be predicated on their approval. He was a grown man. He simply wanted to say goodbye.

Not only did he leave his family, but he left his wealth also. Commentators all seem to agree that the size of the group that was plowing and the kind of farewell party he threw for his employees indicate that he was a man of more than moderate means. But his wealth would be worthless where he was going. But then, his wealth would be worthless in eternity, anyway, and eternity was where he was ultimately going. He left familiar surroundings and a host of friends. We will see that as he bids them all goodbye.

What he was leaving behind, however, did not seem to enter into Elisha’s decision at all. His God was calling, Beloved. When God calls, and *you know it is God calling*, the other factors fade into insignificance because whatever you give up to do God’s will, God will return to you in the spiritual realm, pressed down and overflowing. Elisha knew that. Do you?

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The World He Had to Face

Elisha was leaving the comfort and security of the family farm to face the meanest woman in the world. He would face a nation steeped in idolatry. He was going to face a religious revival gone awry. The political and spiritual temperature in the nation was not healthy. No one in his right mind would campaign for this job. Few if any who were dealing with the issues apart from God would take it. It was, to put it mildly, a vicious world out there, and the mantle he took upon his shoulders was presently worn by a man not elected by popular demand, but tolerated by godly design. Elijah's reputation would also be imputed to Elisha. He would be known before he ever said a word as the protégé of a man who dried up a nation's water supply for three years. This same man called down fire from heaven and scared the world half to death. This was the man who brutally murdered every religious leader in the country who claimed to follow Baal. He also hightailed it out of town on a four-speed camel the minute Queen Jezebel threatened his life. To be known as Elijah's disciple would be an honor for us. In Elisha's day however, it meant leaving the confines of friendly soil for a world that was simply waiting for a chance to do him in. This was the same world that would one day wait for its chance to crucify the Lord of Glory.

So Elisha was looking at shoes he couldn't fill; at leaving a life of comfort and ease; of facing a world of hostility and enmity. All he had in his favor was one thing, the Living God. This was the same God who had framed the heavens and designed the earth. The same One who had spoken the worlds into being and who had literally knit him together in his mother's womb, had touched him on the shoulder and said, "Come, follow Me."

Elisha had a thousand reasons to say, "No," and only one reason to say, "Yes." Beloved, those are the odds you'll face if God calls you to go somewhere or be someone or do something you never dreamed possible. There will possibly be no reason, humanly speaking, to go or do or be. So don't seek your counsel from those who do not have the mind of God. Their advice will be of one accord and it will be wrong. Instead, look to the Word of God and the people of God who wisely live the life of God.

The Decision He Had to Make

His decision was whether to do the "logical" thing or to listen to the voice of God. It was interesting that when he asked Elijah

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permission to go say goodbye to his parents, Elijah's response was in effect, "Do what you must. There will be no coercion on my part. This is your decision." So often we construe a "way out" to be a sign that God isn't in it. We want God to box us in so that we have no choice but to follow. But God doesn't work that way. Were He to leave us no choice, it would require no decision. No decision means no commitment. No commitment means no fruitfulness. So whenever God is calling you to some new heights, look and see if there isn't also a way of escape. The way of escape isn't God trying to confuse you. It is God trying to confirm to you that the decision is yours and that there are options open to you other than doing the will of God.

Elisha bid his friends farewell in fine style. He cut up his plow (symbolizing that he was leaving his security) and he used it to build a fire. He roasted on that fire the oxen he used to plow with (symbolizing that he was leaving his vocation). He gave it to his friends and servants and they had a party together (symbolizing that this was a time of great joy rather than a time of dutiful obedience.) And then "he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him." In essence he became his servant.

He didn't start out at the top telling the prophet how to rearrange the kingdom. He didn't begin implementing his nine-point plan to salvage the nation. He humbled himself and became the slave of the one who called him. He simply acknowledged the Scriptural admonition, "He that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." In due time, Elisha would rise to wear the mantle he now carried. But for a season, he was a learner, a foot washer, a servant. If he was ever going to learn to be a servant of God, he had to first learn to be a servant of man. So he simply made himself available to the greatest prophet in the then-known world and learned of him.

That's a step we so often miss in seeking the will of God. We assume that if it's God's will, it will be a step up the ladder of success. That simply doesn't follow in Scripture. Moses had to become a lonely shepherd. Joseph had to become a slave, even a prisoner, before he was ready to reign. So much counsel on the "Will of God" today is the result of trying to mix the Word of God with the world's ways. It demands exaltation and success to prove that God is in it. Nonsense. If God is calling you to dine with princes and kings, there's a good chance He will start you out peeling potatoes in the kitchen. If God is calling you to stand

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before nations, don't be surprised if He starts with you kneeling by a dying brook with only ravens for an audience.

Elisha had a decision to make. Maybe some day soon, so will some of us. We may not be asked to leave those we love, but we may. We may not be asked to forsake our wealth or prestige, but we may. We may not be asked to face a world of hostility and enmity, but we may. We may simply be asked to stay where we are when we thought God was going to send us to some exotic assignment. The issue isn't whether or not it is logical. The issue isn't whether or not it is acceptable. The issue isn't whether or not it is profitable. The issue is whether or not God is calling. If He is, go. If He's not, don't go. If you're not sure, wait.

Elisha *knew God was calling him*. He wasn't sure to what, or for what or for how long. But those weren't answers he needed. He was only sure of one thing. God said, "Follow Me" and a man who knew what to do when God called, answered, "*Here am I Lord, use me.*"

You and I need no more confirmation than that. I do not know whether or not God is calling you to something special. I do not know whether or not God is calling you to some special kind of persecution, or adversity or training. I do not know if in the days just ahead, He may call you or call me to something totally different than we ever imagined. One thing I do know is that if He does, there are three possible answers. We can say, "Yes," or we can say, "No," or we can say nothing. God help us to say nothing but "Yes."

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FOR FURTHER STUDY AND APPLICATION

1- Think back to the last funeral you attended. How did you view the deceased? Did you think of what they had accomplished in this world or did you think of what they had laid up as treasures in heaven? Did you consciously think of the qualities in their lives you desire for your own? Can you think of two reasons why God might not have allowed you to receive a large inheritance in this world? Can you thank Him for that?

2- What three things would you like the most to leave behind as a legacy when you are called home? Begin praying now every day that God will begin building those qualities into the lives of your children, your disciples, and those to whom you minister, either directly or indirectly. Be specific.

3- Have you ever refused to answer a call from God to a certain task because you “weren’t qualified”? Was Elisha “qualified”? What qualifies a man or woman to a task God calls them to?

4- Where is God most likely to call you to that task? (doing nothing, or doing what you know to do where you are?)

5- Review the great lives in Scripture such as Jesus, Joseph, Moses, Abraham and others to see if they had to leave anything behind to do God’s will. Now take those same lives and see what God returned to them in exchange for what they gave up.

6- Does the fact that you face two logical choices mean that God is not leading you into something? Why doesn’t God just eliminate one so we don’t have to choose?

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