

A Lasting Memorial to a Father (2 Kings 2:9-14; 13:14-25)

Introduction:-

Today's passages raises a number of different questions as well as challenges for Christian faith today. In them, both Elijah and Elisha on their death-beds, are addressed with the words, "My Father, My Father, the Chariots and horsemen of Israel" (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14). What did this mean for both prophets, and what can it mean for us today? Let us now begin to address some of the issues, challenges, and blessings that this passage leaves with us today, especially for men and Fathers.

1. First we begin with an acknowledgment of Israel's True Strength and Protection (verses 14-19).

Here we may open with a question. Where does a nation's true strength lie? In different political agendas or defense strategies? In this passage Jehoash the king of Israel made the same confession that Elisha made about Elijah back at 2 Kings 2:12. "My Father, My Father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel." Elisha was suffering from an illness from which he would eventually die. But clearly Jehoash was very upset that Elisha was about to die, and so he wept over him. He recognized in his confession that Elisha, like Elijah before him, was of greater significance for Israel's military success than any of Israel's military combined (2 Kings 6:8-23). Also the cry was particularly poignant in view of the fact that Israel's literal "chariots and horsemen" had all but been destroyed according to verse 7, under Jehoash's father's reign, except for fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers, which would earlier have only been a contingent of Israel's army, while now it represented the entire Israelite infantry (cf. 1 Kings 20:29). What led to Jehoash's remorse? And what kind of remorse was it? Did some kind of light suddenly break through, even though both Elijah and Elisha had suffered opposition, rejection, and even persecution at the hands of Israel's leadership? And now there was a recognition that these prophets had done more by their spiritual leadership for the protection and well-being of the nation than all the chariots and horsemen of Israel put together, including their subtle political machinations as well. Can it be also said of us at the end of our life stories, that we did more for our country and world within the spiritual realm of piety and prayer, than any human army, government, or human agency? James 5:16-18 says: "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a person just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." May we, as Fathers and mentors, also merit the distinction in God's Heavenly archives, as "the chariots and horseman of Israel" as we protect and uphold our country and world in prayer and holy living. Finally in this section, Elisha encouraged the king through a symbolic action involving a bow and arrow. By putting his hands on the king's hands, this symbolic act indicated that Jehoash was to engage the Arameans in battle with the Lord's blessing of victory on him. But by only striking the ground three times with his arrows, instead of five or six times, Israel's victories over Aram would not be complete. Failure to believe God wholeheartedly always has its consequences. It would be left for Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, to gain complete victory over the Arameans (2 Kings 14:25, 28). Paul puts it this way - "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). Will Israel move from sin to life?"

2. Secondly, we learn of the possibilities of Life beyond Death (verses 20-21)

This next section is a striking answer to our last question!! Beginning simply that Elisha died and was buried (v.20), it ends with a dead man who touched Elisha's

bones and came to life (v.21). The mention of Moabite raiders sets the scene for confused mourners throwing the man's body (lit. "the man") into Elisha's grave. Elisha's ministry resulted in several life-giving events, and the power of life that has been operative in Israel through this enigmatic figure is still at work beyond death. I am reminded here of the many testimonies worldwide, from those who have read C.H. Spurgeon's sermons down through the years, and in so doing, have found new life in Christ, even though the prince of preachers died in 1892. And in Elisha's case, even in times of attack, confusion, and death itself, there was life through the prophet. The event may be unique, but readers of this story in Babylonian exile may have seen a pointer to life after death for a people who have been attacked and "thrown away" (the same Hebrew word is used in verse 23 = "banish"). Did this inspire Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones at Ezekiel 37:1-14? But more importantly here, it symbolizes the fact that Elisha's action in the previous verses brought Israel new life after his death. And in like manner, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings new life to our bodies as Paul puts it at Romans 8:11, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies, through his Spirit, who lives in you." Also at this point, the witness of Christ's death in Matthew's Gospel should be considered, reflecting the Elijah and Elisha traditions at Matthew 27:45-54, when many people came forth from their graves after Jesus had died, signifying new life in the cross.

3. Thirdly, Israel's Deliverance Begins in fulfillment of the Prophet's Word (verses 22-25)

In this last section, the word of hope is presented differently. Framing verses narrate the fulfilment of the "three" times victory of Jehoash, reversing the earlier defeat of his father Jehoahaz at the hands of Hazael, king of Aram. And now, Jehoash recaptures from Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, the towns taken from his father Jehoahaz, probably west of the Jordan. But standing out prominently in the middle of this section at verse 23, is a most unexpected theological statement, unique to the books of Kings involving God's "grace" and "compassion" (cf. Exodus 33:19; 34:6; Note - coming after the golden calf incident, which sin involved every king in Israel, beginning with Jeroboam I). Finally, the tradition pushes back to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Elijah at 1 Kings 18:36). Just as Judah's covenant related to David, so Israel's covenant went back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But even so, this covenant was hanging by a slender thread, and was dependent upon the Lord showing future kindness and compassion to his people after the judgment of exile, in such texts as Deuteronomy 4:25-31; and 30:1-10.

Conclusion:-

What is the source of a nation's strength? We have often heard it from our politicians like a worn-out record. Economic growth, technological expertise, democratic government, and more jobs for the people. But what was Israel's real defence? Men of God is Scriptures' answer, first from a prophet, and then from a king. "My Father, My Father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel." Are these words sentimental nonsense? The question is not irrelevant in terms of how the nations of the world view power and success today. But what are its real defences in God's eyes? Men of the stature and faith of Elijah and Elisha, who actively believed in the Word of God, and stood in the council of God, to hear his Word. When this happens, there is a source of strength, hope, ultimate defence, and blessing, for family, church, nation, and world. Amen.