

Sunday 23rd October 22

When God Calls...

1 Kings 19:19-21

The Call of Elisha

¹⁹ So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. ²⁰ Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you."

"Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"

²¹ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.

Luke 9:57-62

The Cost of Following Jesus

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

⁵⁹ He said to another man, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

⁶¹ Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Sermon: When God Calls

[It would be good to have your Bibles opened at 1 Kings chapter 19 – let me pray before we begin]

Context

Just a **recap** where we got up to **last week**

[Slide 1-Context]

We saw how **Elijah** had been **given a death threat** from King Ahab’s wife **Jezebel** – and **Elijah** had **run off** to southern Judah – to **Beersheba**

We saw how **Elijah was a broken man** and even said “*he’d had enough and wanted to die!*”

Elijah **felt a failure** – his ministry hadn’t gone as he thought – he’d underestimated what had been achieved – and he was **very discouraged by the people of Israel rejecting their God** – and he **felt** he was **all alone!**

But **God** was **gracious** to **Elijah**

God brought Elijah to Mount Horeb/Sinai – to **refresh** Elijah **physically** and **spiritually**.

And in vv15-18 – **God tells Elijah** to make **three new appointments** – Elijah was to anoint **Hazael** as King of Aram (aka Syria) – he was to anoint **Jehu** to replace King Ahab – and he was to anoint **Elisha** as his successor.

These **three appointments** are **God’s** way of bringing about **judgment on** the people of **Israel** who have **rebelled** against Him.

God will not stand for apostasy (a revolt against God – and going after a false god). **He will punish evil.**

And we finished up last week – where **God answered Elijah’s dilemma of feeling alone** – in v18 – **and God told Elijah God himself has reserved 7000 people** in Israel who are **still faithful to Him** and haven’t worshipped the false god Baal.

Now we’re **not** going to **look at** the appointment of King **Hazael** or King **Jehu** just yet – that’s for another day – this morning we are **focusing solely** on the **appointment of Elisha.**

[Slide 2-Heading]

Our focus is on **God calling Elisha** as His prophet **to replace Elijah**

And we **need to understand** up front that the calling of **Elisha is a special case** – we shouldn’t put ourselves in Elisha’s shoes in one sense – it’s not like **God is going to call us to be prophets.**

But in another sense – we are all like Elisha – as Christians – when we first believe – we are **called to follow Jesus** – this may be a gradual thing – like we **grew up in a Christian home** – or it could be a dramatic thing – where we **can pin-point the actual day we became a Christian.** Either way, we are called to follow Jesus.

And once we are Christians – we’re also **called to serve the Lord** in different ways – it may be a call into full-time ministry, or part-time ministry – or a call to serve the Lord in a particular way at church – or a call to serve the Lord in our community – or a call to serve the Lord in our job

So, as Christians, we are **CALLED to FOLLOW Jesus** – and **CALLED to SERVE**

Let’s see how **God’s call of Elisha** – applies to us

We’re going to look at **3 points**

[Slide 2a-External]

First, **God's call is external as well as internal – and must be listened to and obeyed.**

God's call is external as well as internal – and must be listened to and obeyed (1 Kings 19:19)

We pick up the story in verse 19

Where Elijah finds **Elisha plowing a field** with a **team of 12 oxen** – and Elisha himself is **driving the 12th pair**.

Elisha is oblivious to the fact that he is about to be called – he has **no prior knowledge** of this – he's **just simply going about his normal working day** – he's no idea **God's** about to **call him** to be a **prophet**.

It's not like he's thinking to himself - **internally** – oh – *“I'd like to be God's prophet”*

No – the call is coming – **externally** – and unexpectedly from Elijah – who is **sent by God**

And it's quite unusual how **Elijah calls Elisha**

Look at V19 -Elijah **throws his cloak around** Elisha

In the older King James Version of the Bible - it says Elijah **cast his mantle upon Elisha**

Mantle is used in our language today – when **someone takes on a role or position from someone else** – we say they've taken up the mantle.

Elijah's cloak/mantle is symbolic of the office of prophet – being transferred from Elijah to Elisha

The Hebrew word for cloak/mantle – can also **mean glory or honour** – so it's like **God's glory in this office of prophet** is being **transferred to Elisha**

Elisha understands the meaning of Elijah's cloak being thrown over him!

Application:

For us – we need to understand that as well as us having an **internal call from God** – something like an inner voice – a gentile whisper - an inclination – an inner desire - a

thought - **to follow Jesus** or to serve God in a particular way – often **God uses external means** too.

It may be someone telling a person why they follow Jesus – which leads that person to also follow Jesus.

It may be someone teaching children Scripture at school or at Jaffa youth group – and then a child comes to believe and follow Jesus

It may be someone saying to a person – ***'have you thought of serving God in a particular way'*** – ***'because you have a particular gift which can be used to glorify God and serve others'***

Sometimes God puts people in our lives to call us or encourage us to serve the Lord.

When that happens – it may come as a complete surprise to the person being called (as it would have with Elisha) **but God's calling should NEVER be ignored!**

Last week God spoke to Elijah with a gentle whisper – telling him to go and anoint Elisha - and Elijah listened – and this week Elijah acted upon it– by obediently going to anoint Elisha

Now this week – it's Elisha who must listen to God's gentle whisper as Elijah comes calling...

So - the first point then is – **God's call is external as well as internal** – and **must be listened to and obeyed**.

God's call requires commitment and sacrifice (1 Kings 19:20-21a and Luke 9:57-62)

[Slide 2b-Commitment/Sacrifice]

Which brings us to the second point – **God’s call requires commitment and sacrifice** – that’s in verses 20 and 21

Look how Elisha responds in v20

Elisha **left his oxen** and **went after Elijah** – but he also **wants to first** say goodbye to his **mum and dad** – and then **he will go with Elijah**.

Please don’t think Elisha is making excuses here – like the people that Jesus spoke to in our New Testament reading from Luke 9:57-62.

The people that Jesus spoke to had a far inferior commitment to follow the Lord – than Elisha had.

The people Jesus spoke to were putting obstacles in the way so that they can delay their commitment to follow the Lord –

The people Jesus spoke to wanted to delay following Jesus – one by burying his father – and his father might not even be sick or dead yet! So, how long will that delay be?

Another person wants to say goodbye to his family (not just his mum and dad) how long will that take?

Whereas Elisha wants to go and say good bye to his mum and dad - so he can sever his connections – not to delay his commitment to the Lord.

Elisha is both obedient to the call but yet also respectful to his father and mother (Exodus 20:12).

Elijah’s reply to Elisha’s request to say goodbye to his parents is a strange one – Elijah says “*what have I done to you?*”

Paraphrasing what Elijah is saying here – He’s saying: “*Don’t be long, Elisha, it’s not me who called you – it’s God; I’m just God’s instrument to call you, don’t hang about!*”

V21 shows just how committed Elisha is.

The fact that Elisha's father, Shaphat, has **12 pair of oxen** means Elisha has a degree of **comfort and security living on the farm.**

But Elisha is prepared to **burn the plow** and **cook the cow.**

In doing so – he is **getting rid of his tools of trade** – the plow and his pair of oxen

And at the same time, he **gives the people of the town a farewell BBQ.**

This is a **great sacrifice by Elisha** – and **he's made it impossible to return to his farm work** – he is focused on God's work now

Elisha's response to the call from God **shows commitment and sacrifice**

Application: And it's the same for us.

When we are first called to follow Jesus as a Christian.

We **have to commit to Him** – whole heartedly – not half-heartedly.

And we have to **get rid of obstacles in our lives** that hinder that commitment.

We have to forsake aspects of our lifestyle that are sinful –our foul language – our sexually immoral behaviour – our indulgences (alcohol, drugs, gambling) – and we have to forsake people and things that we've made idols of in our lives

Jesus says we have to **commit to putting Him as first priority in our lives** – before everyone and anything.

Jesus says we are to love Him **more than anyone or anything!**

We are to **live our lives for the Lord** – not for ourselves.

That's a tall order – isn't it?

That's why Jesus says in Luke 14 – before following Him – **a person has to count the cost** –

By following Jesus – **some family members and friends may desert us** – because they don't believe in Jesus – and they think we've gone all weird.

We may lose our job – because we are a Christian – ask the CEO of Essendon Football Club – or Israel Folau?

We may get persecuted, ridiculed – emotionally abused – even physically hurt!

Jesus is not a false recruiter

Jesus warns people upfront that there's a cost to follow Him!

Then second – when we are a Christian and we are called to serve the Lord in some way

There's more commitment and sacrifices to be made to serve the Lord and others.

Whether we are serving the Lord in: preaching, teaching, praying, evangelising,

hospitality, administration, practical help, pastoral care – whatever way we serve

It will require us - Giving up some of our time – giving up some of our money – giving

up something we enjoy because it clashes with the service we've been called to do

It may mean giving up some of the dreams we had for our lives!

And once we give it up those things – we're not to yearn for them – *God loves a*

cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7)

Isn't that what Jesus is saying in our NT reading from Luke 9:62:

“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Personally - this verse was a constant thorn in my side throughout Bible College – it was

hard doing Bible college and only being able to work part-time – and still trying to pay

all the bills – and when it got tough – I found myself looking back and saying it would

be some much easier if I was working full time – and every time I did that God kept

giving me an uppercut – saying “*keep your eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1) – don't*

keep looking back”

God's Word does that doesn't it – *it's sharper than a double-edged sword - it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12)

(pause)

From Elisha's call and response - and from Jesus' conversation with the people in Luke 9 – **what God is saying to us this morning**

When it comes to following and serving the Lord – **don't make excuses...**

Excuses like – *'I'll follow and serve Jesus – once I've finished school or Uni – I'll have more time then'*

Or like – *'I'll follow and serve Jesus – once I've established my career – or once I get married – or once I have kids – or once the kids leave home – or when I retire – I'll have more time then – God will understand'*

No – He won't!

Perhaps it's worth asking ourselves this morning:

What is God calling us to do – but we're ignoring it?

(pause)

Has God sent someone to call us into service – but we're ignoring it?

(pause)

They'll always be an excuse to procrastinate - if we look hard enough!

(pause)

Jesus says **FOLLOW me NOW** – not later!

Jesus says **SERVE me NOW** – not later!

Once we obey God's calling and commit to Him

This leads to our third point – **God's call means being an apprentice and a servant**

[Slide 2c-Apprenticeship]

God's call means being an apprentice and a servant (1 Kings 19:21b)

Notice at the end of v21 when Elisha followed Elijah – *he became Elijah's servant*

The **Hebrew word** used for servant here means: someone who serves, someone who waits upon others, someone who ministers.

Elisha **didn't become a prophet overnight** – he **had to learn the ropes first**

Elisha was Elijah's apprentice for some time – it **wasn't glamorous** at all

Elisha even had to do **inglorious mundane things like** "*pour water on the hands of Elisha*" (2 Kings 3:11) – not very prophet-like or spiritual.

For me to become a minister, for example, – I'd say it was **10-15 years in the making** if not longer – each ministry I was involved in – was a stepping stone on the way – and a lot of that – was behind the scenes work – sometimes mundane work – and not out the front work or leadership roles

To be a scripture teacher - for example – requires 7 modules of training – and then perhaps spending time as a helper with another scripture teacher – before teaching a class on your own. It's a rewarding ministry – but there are times when a scripture teacher may have to deal with difficult kids – or badly behaved kids – it's also hard work and sometimes stressful!

To be a Jaffa youth leader on Friday night – there’s a **commitment to serve the Jaffa children and their parents** - it’s not always the nice stuff like teaching the kids about Jesus and playing fun games – there’s things like cooking the food, washing up, tidying the hall, having difficult conversations with parents – it’s hard work too – and the leaders give up time with their families – or miss out going out on a Friday night with family and friends

It’s the same when we commit to a bible study group – **we’re saying that we’re committed to servicing the group** – with our insights from the Bible – with our prayers – with our pastoral care – and we’re saying that day and that time-slot are not available in our calendar anymore!

Whatever way we serve the Lord – it’s **not our ministry** – it’s **not about us** – and **not about getting a pat on the back** - it’s the Lord’s ministry – we’re not the boss or the master – **we are the Lord’s servants**

If God calls us to pour water on Elijah’s hands – so to speak – that that’s what we do – because we’re doing God’s will – and **nothing else matters!**

Jesus says in Mark 10:45:

“For even the Son of Man [JESUS] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus came and served in the most amazing way

Laying down His life – on a cruel cross – taking our punishment for our sins - so that we can have our sins forgiven – **paying the ransom** – so we could be bought back to God – and **receive eternal life.**

If Jesus – the Master - **came to serve like this** – can we His followers – **expect anything different than our Master** – **we are called to serve too!**

Conclusion

To finish up then

The calling Elisha had and the calling we have is: **to serve** – and **to bring glory to the Lord** – not **glory to ourselves**

[Slide 3-Conclusion]

Let us finish with 1 Peter 4:10-11

*¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to **serve others**, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, **so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.***

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you that you call us to follow and serve

Thank you that you call us – both internally and externally.

Help us to listen to and obey your calling to us.

Help us through your Spirit and your Word – to commit to following and serving you

Help us to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to become your servants.

Help us to serve you wholeheartedly.

Thank you that Jesus laid down His life for us – and that He came to serve – and not to be served.

Thank you that Jesus left us an example of how to live a life that brings glory to you.

In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.