

# The Two Great Prophets

A Sermon by Rev. Rev. Peter M. Buss, Sr.

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*And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." And he saw him no more. (2 Kings 2:12)*

What an amazing miracle. Picture the story. Two prophets walking on the other side of Jordan, knowing that this was their last time together on earth. Suddenly a chariot and horses of fire appear and Elijah, with no fear, climbs into it, and is not consumed, for it is spiritual fire. He drops his mantle, perhaps waves to Elisha, and is carried up into the air and disappears. And he saw him no more; no trace of his body was ever found upon earth, though fifty of the sons of the prophets searched for three days.

Single-handedly Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, wiped the worship of Baal from Israel and restored the worship of Jehovah. It was a huge accomplishment. But, that was not all that needed to be done. He needed a prophet to follow him and consolidate his work.

Their story is a tale of our journey towards the Lord, and their miracles tell of wonders He works in our minds and hearts. The secret of their representation in the internal sense is in their names. For Elijah means He who's God is Jehovah, and Elisha, like Joshua and in fact Jesus, means God is the saviour, or God is his salvation. They represent two parts of our journey toward true worship of and obedience to the Lord, one following the other.

The stories about both of them are telling. Elijah, the greatest prophet, the one who would later appear with Jesus at the transfiguration, called Elisha to be his servant. When it was time for him to die he went from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, to Jordan, and they journeyed in Gilead beyond Jordan. Each time Elijah told Elisha to leave him, and each time Elisha said, "As Jehovah lives, and as your soul lives, I will

not leave you.” So Elijah asked him what he could do for him, and Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” That didn’t mean that he would have twice Elijah’s prophetic power. The double portion was the legacy of the oldest son of a house. Elisha was asking; please make me your son and heir.

Elijah’s story is about our earlier attempts to follow the Lord. It is the tale of our conscious efforts to shun evils and to do what is right. His miracles tell of how the Lord helps us to resist actual evil - to stop worshiping and following the things that the Ten Commandments forbid. He represents the Lord’s Word and how it gives us the strength to do this, to repent and begin a heavenly life.

But, as our life goes on, there comes a time when we stop working just from conviction, or from self-compulsion, using the truths of the Word. A different prophet, representing a different power of the Lord’s Word, replaces him, and the manner of the changeover is a miracle the Lord does in us. We won’t fully see in ourselves, yet it is a huge progress toward heaven.

The story starts with a journey and each step represents part of Elijah’s contributions. We go from the spiritual Gilgal, which speaks of our longing for ideals, our hopes and dreams for our spiritual life, to Bethel, the knowledge of truth from the Word, which shows us how to reach those dreams. We go down to Jericho by the river Jordan, representing lower moral principles, and practical truths about how to behave. Then we have to cross the Jordan barrier, false ideas and worldly values which could stop us putting our beliefs into practice. The Word banishes these, as Elijah parted the waters. Finally, we walk in Gilead, the land beyond Jordan, the world of external practice, of daily obedience to the truth.

We long for true ideals, we learn about them from the Word, we add moral principles to make them real, we get rid of false notions, and then we actually seek them. We walk the walk of life, the spiritual Gilead.

And at each step there is Elisha, the promise of saving truth. So what is the miracle of Elijah's disappearance from this earth? It represents that the Elijah truths, the ones we use to force ourselves to obey the Lord, and to shun our evils, disappear from our conscious minds on the journey to heaven. When we practice repentance and the life of charity, truths that we have been using to do this disappear. They are lifted up out of our natural consciousness into our interior beings, and we stop thinking of them, we just do them.

Consider a person who is learning to play the piano. At first she has to practice all the tools of playing - the right fingering, the scales, the arpeggios, and so on, and she learns to play pieces of music from rote. It works. She doesn't play very well, but she's doing the right thing. After long practice, however, playing becomes automatic, and then she stops thinking of how to put her fingers in the right place, or even where the keys are. It becomes so automatic that she would have difficulty going back to the conscious practice that she worked so hard at. When that happens she begins to become, not a piano player, but a musician. She can interpret the music, put her heart into it, even begin to invent new music. She still has much to learn, but it is a totally different kind of learning.

That is only an external example. The spiritual story of Elijah's disappearance is something the Lord Himself does in us. The Elijah truths are raised up by the Lord into our deeper minds, and become, at first habitual, then spontaneous, a matter of life, not self-compulsion. These truths ascend up into heaven surrounded by the fire of the Lord's love for us. And he saw him no more.

This is how the Word of the Lord's Second advent expresses it. When truth becomes a matter of life, then - through the person's habitual reliance on it - that truth permeates his whole being ... And when it permeates him in this way it flows so to speak spontaneously into action - without his thinking about any fact he has learned regarding that truth. The teaching adds, the situation with all truth is that at its earliest stage it is merely something known, but as it develops with a person it becomes a matter of life.

And they give us a most practical simile. It is like it is with young children when they learn to walk, to talk, to think, and to use their intelligence and make sensible judgements. Once these activities - through habitual engagement in them - have become unpremeditated and so spontaneous, they disappear from among the facts they possess about how to do those things, because they are now instinctive. (*Secrets of Heaven* §3203).

Elijah disappeared from this earth, and was never seen again. So truth that we work hard to obey and use is lifted up into our spiritual minds, and vanishes from our conscious thought. But it is then even more useful, for it is a part of our lives.

The Lord's sun of heaven warms our truths, and lifts them up, and we begin to love them almost unconsciously. For example, we all need to work hard against anger and hatred. We practice and practice every time someone annoys us. Over the years we no longer have to tell ourselves the truth about self-control in these situations, it becomes our automatic reaction.

This is one of the things the Lord meant when He said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." (John 2:32) And similarly, "No one has ascended up to heaven, but He who came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so

must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:13-15). The Son of Man is the Lord as to His truth.

So what happens when this miracle takes place in our minds. That is the story of Elisha and his miracles. We begin to experience something of salvation. God is now our Saviour - which is what Elisha means.

We can see a hint of the difference between these two states in the stories of the two prophets. Elijah was the dramatic, powerful instigator of the deliverance of Israel from Baal, and its return to Jehovah. He is remembered as the great prophet. He was a lonely man, perhaps even living out in the open, as he did at the brook Cherith when he was fed by ravens. He was wild, and wore rough hairy clothes, his words were often harsh and very decided. He was very brave in the face of evil people, and the kings and the queen were his enemies. His hand was alone against the forces of evil. “I have been very zealous for Jehovah of hosts.... and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” We even learn how he despaired and asked Jehovah to take away his life, and how Jehovah reproved him and said he was not alone, there were 7000 Children of Israel who had never worshiped any but Jehovah. And He told Elijah that the work would go on, to anoint two kings to carry it on, and to anoint Elisha as his heir.

Elisha lived very differently. The kings often were friendly or grateful to him. He dwelt in a house. We never hear that he doubted his power. Elijah’s miracles often brought punishment on the rulers - such as when Naboth was killed so Ahab could take his vineyard. Or they manifested Jehovah’s power - as when he called fire down to burn up his offering. Elisha often did favours for people, and helped Israel defeat its enemies. When the King of Syria sent an army to arrest him, he wasn’t worried, for he said, “Those that be with us are more than they that be with them,” for

indeed there were horses and chariots of fire all round him; and he led that army, blinded, into the capital city - which actually represented a conversion to the true faith. And when he was to die, the King came to him and said the same words that Elisha had said to Elijah: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." (2 Kings 13:14). He was more accepted and respected, but not as much feared.

When we pass from consciously fighting evil and doing what is right into a deeper state, when the Lord's salvation is being made real in us, we are more at peace, we are able to do things we could not do before, we feel less anxiety and doubt. Elisha lived a quiet life, much unlike that of Elijah.

The point is that the Lord leads us through states which are very different, and He alone knows when to introduce us to them. We pass from conscious obedience to a state of relative warmth and peace. The peace is not always there - we still have to fight hard at times - but as salvation is born in us, we come to do the Lord's will more easily and often without reflecting on the self-compulsion that we used to need. The love that He is sowing in us makes it easier and makes us calmer and more warm, even loving, in our dedication to Him and His Word., and in our relations with others.

That is the miracle in our journey to heaven ,which is represented, first in Elijah's miraculous translation into heaven, and in the friendship and works of these two prophets. The Word fo the New Church has so many teachings about the difference between acting from self-compulsion - which is good - and acting from a life principle - which is very good. Knowing that the second state is coming is so comforting to us in the tough times when we are working so hard, and, perhaps, not feeling that we are not making progress - as Elijah did when he asked Jehovah to let

him die. There is going to come a time when the battle is easier and calmer and our feelings more settled and warm towards others. We will still have to work hard to follow Him, but He as been drawing us up to Himself in heaven, and we will feel something of that uplifting.

*Amen.*