

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

¹ When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. ³ The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” Elisha replied, “but do not speak of it.”

⁴ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho. ⁵ The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” he replied, “but do not speak of it.”

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them walked on. ⁷ Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. ⁸ Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied. ¹⁰ “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.”

¹¹ As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. **This is God’s Word for God’s people.**

Dear Friends,

Our gospel lesson for today tells us about the transfiguration of Jesus. That was part of God’s plan to help prepare his disciples for the difficulties they would encounter in the near future. Jesus let them see some of his glory on that mountain so they could understand that he is true God and he is in control. Along with that wonderful display of glory they saw two great prophets from the Old Testament – Moses and Elijah. Our second lesson today talked about Moses and the portion of scripture before us as our sermon text, talks about Elijah.

Today we want to take a look at God’s plan and see that it has a happy ending for believers as the gospel continues to be proclaimed.

I. Elijah is sometimes called the “**Fiery Prophet.**” Some of the main events we associate with Elijah involved fire. When he had his showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel the Lord consumed his altar and offering with a fantastic show of fire. When King Ahaziah sent his soldiers to arrest Elijah and bring him to stand in his court, the soldiers were consumed by fire – This happened not only once but two times. When God took Elijah home to heaven, it was with “**A chariot of fire and horses of fire.**” But as Elijah served the Lord his actions did not always involve fire.

God had Elijah announce a drought on the land for three years as a symbol of how the people had rejected God and were in a spiritual drought. During that time Elijah stayed with a widow in Zarephath. When the widow's son died, Elijah displayed his faith and the power of God by asking God to bring the widow's son back to life. Elijah trusted God to keep him safe. Elijah had to confront King Ahab, who the Bible tells us, **“Did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.”** (1 Kings 16:30) The king and his wife, Jezebel, hated Elijah and his message, but the Lord protected Elijah from any harm that might come from this king.

Yet Elijah was not always strong in his faith. There was a time when he felt he was the only Christian left on earth and he asked God to end his life on this earth. But God reassured him that there were 7000 other Christians and that God still had work for him to do. Work that consumed another 10-15 years of Elijah's life and included calling and training his replacement, Elisha.

Now it's time for Elijah to rest – to go home to heaven. God had certainly blessed Elijah and watched over him throughout his ministry and now God gave Elijah an unusual gift by allowing him to know the day he was going to go home to heaven. God not only let Elijah know but he also let his student, Elisha, know and the various schools of prophets that Elijah was to visit on his last day on earth. We don't know exactly how or why God did this, but He did.

On that last day then, the Lord directed Elijah to visit these various schools and in this way helped prepare Elijah for his departure and Elisha to be his successor. We might wonder if Elijah knew how he would be taken from this earth. We might wonder if Elijah knew he would not die that day but God would take him to heaven body and soul. These are questions that might be interesting to discuss but the end result is the same. Elijah, because of his faith in the Savior who was to come, was taken to heaven at a time of God's choosing. What a glorious and happy ending to a faithful life of service for Elijah!

Death is something we will all face some day. We may know it is coming soon or it might happen without warning. Sometimes the thought of dying scares us or the thought of someone close to us dying brings us a feeling of great sadness.

Death is something we can't avoid. It is part of life but God has removed the sting of death for all believers. Elijah knew that his sins were forgiven because of what the promised Messiah would do. That was God's promise to him and it was the message he was preaching to the people. Elijah didn't know the details of how Jesus would live a perfect life and then offer himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world on the cross but he did know that God demands perfection and we can only have that perfection through faith in Jesus who is perfect for us.

Elijah had only a partial glimpse of the big picture of salvation. We have a full view of God's picture of salvation. We know the rest of the story. We celebrated our Savior's humble birth just 7 weeks ago and this Wednesday begins the season of Lent when we will review our Savior's journey of love to the cross. Jesus defeated sin and death on the cross by paying for our sins and rising from the dead as assurance that the price has been paid in full and our Savior has the power over death for us. Like Elijah, we don't have to fear death, because death is just the front door to our heavenly home.

Like Elijah, we prepare ourselves for that journey home, by staying close to God's Word. Whether we know that death is close or whether it comes unexpectedly, we want to be prepared. That is why God has given us His Word and has given us pastors and teachers and parents and grandparents to proclaim the saving truths of his word to his people. That is why God gave Elisha the responsibility to continue the ministry of Elijah – the ministry of proclaiming God's Word to the people.

II. As Elijah and Elisha visited the various places on that last day, they came to the Jordan River. **“⁷ Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. ⁸ Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.”** This may seem like an insignificant thing that Elijah was able to part the waters of the Jordan with his cloak but it was very important to the beginning of Elisha's ministry. After Elijah is taken to heaven, Elisha returns to the Jordan and parts the waters in the same way Elijah had – using Elijah's cloak. The 50 prophets were still standing there and watched Elisha do this. This miracle symbolized how Elijah's call to serve God's people had been passed onto Elisha. Elisha was now God's messenger to the people

Elisha had also asked Elijah for a special gift to help him in his ministry. **“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,”** was the gift Elisha desired. This shows the maturity of Elisha's faith. He could have asked Elijah for many things, but what he sought was a double portion of the wisdom and strength with which Elijah had served the Lord. This was a gift that Elijah could not grant but he told Elisha, **“If you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.”** Only God can give a spiritual gift such as this and so Elijah told Elisha how he would know if God would grant this request or not.

God did grant that request. Elijah had been Elisha's spiritual father – training him for this special day and the days to come and so when God took Elijah home in that whirlwind and the fiery chariot and horses it was appropriate for Elisha to exclaim, **“My father! My father!”** His next words, **“The chariots and horsemen of Israel!”** note how Elijah had been God's symbol of strength and power among the people even in the midst of the evil kings that ruled the people and the false religions that seemed to prosper. Then Elijah was gone but the need to spread the gospel was still there and Elisha was now God's servant to do just that very thing.

Elisha and Elijah have been gone for a long time and yet the need to spread the gospel still exists. Just like in the days of Elijah and Elisha we have wicked rulers in this world and false religions seem to prosper but the gospel message of Jesus Christ cannot be stopped. It will continue to go out and accomplish its purpose. This portion of scripture and the Gospel lesson describing the transfiguration are here to remind us that God gives us strength to live our lives for him. He keeps his promises and rewards those who are faithful and trust in Jesus as their Savior with an eternal home in heaven.

We probably won't go to heaven in a fiery chariot and God probably will not tell us the day we are going to die. But we believe in the same Savior that Elijah believed in and through faith in Jesus Christ we can look forward to the same reward of eternal life in heaven. Until that time, we have work to do for the Lord. Until that time, we want to use the spiritual gifts that God has

given us to serve the Lord and further his kingdom. May God grant us the desire, the strength, and the opportunity to do that. Amen.