



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Transfiguration

Sermon Text: [2 Kings 2:1-12a](#) & [Mark 9:4-5](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [2 Kings 2:1-12a](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 148](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 9:2-9](#)

God Reveals His Glory Through Elijah

At His Departure

At His Return

There's an old saying, isn't there, that says "Only two things in life are certain...death and taxes." You've heard that, right? Not so fast my friends. This morning we are kind of told death wasn't a certainty for everyone, right? There are two people that we know of in Scripture that never tasted death...Enoch and then Elijah as we meet him today. There is a part of us that probably wants to think a lot about Elijah. If God never had Elijah experience death, what do I have to do to be like him? I don't want to have to go through that. But in reality, I think we are better off focusing on God instead of focusing on Elijah and how God reveals his glory through Elijah. That shows us also how God is going to want to reveal his glory through us. As we face all the certainties and uncertainties of life, God is going to want to reveal his glory through us. So this morning, let's take a look at how God reveals his glory through Elijah at his departure and at his return on the Mount of Transfiguration.

So what do you remember about Elijah? Just that his name is real close to his right-hand man, Elisha? Is there anything else you remember about him? He was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. After the Ten Northern Tribes had broken away from the Two Southern Tribes, the Northern Tribes became known as the Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Tribes became known as the Kingdom of Judah. To be a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel was no easy thing. For political reasons, the kings of Israel turned their backs on the Lord and set up worship of golden calves in Dan and Bethel so the people wouldn't go down to Jerusalem to worship the true Lord. They set up this worship of false gods. They embraced gods like Baal. They did a lot of things that were detestable to the Lord.

You might remember the story of Elijah...first iron chef, right? That great bull cook off that they had on Mount Carmel. The kitchen stadium was Mount Carmel; 450 prophets of Baal chopped up a bull, put it on an altar and called on Baal to burn it up. Nothing happened. Elijah chops up a bull, puts it on the altar, calls on God and God consumes it with fire. Elijah is all fired up, literally. Now he thinks Ahab and Jezebel, the king and queen, are going to turn back to the Lord, and the people are going to turn back to the Lord. Then he prays and God causes rain to come again after this drought and he is certain that this is going to be the way it is going to be. Then he gets back and hears that Jezebel wants to kill him all the more. She says, "May I be killed if I don't do to you what you did to the prophets of Baal" because after that sacrifice was consumed by fire,

the people grabbed their spears and killed the prophet of Baal. So if you remember, Elijah ran off and hid. He was depressed and said, "God, just take my life. I'm no better than these other people, like all the prophets before me. I'm the only one left and the people don't listen to me, just like they didn't listen to the others. I've had enough, Lord." Not an easy thing to be a prophet in the Northern Kingdom. It's not like Elijah was perfect in all that he did. When you see him at those times, you see him in the depths of despair. You see him doubting God's promises. You see him struggling. Yet his Lord kept him faithful.

As he kept looking back to the Lord, he kept instructing like these company of the prophets that he made the tour of on the last day of his life. Somehow God had told him "This is the last day of your life." We don't know how. Elijah knew it. Elisha knew it. The prophets at these different places, at Bethel, and at Jericho knew it. But they didn't want to talk about it. So whatever he is doing, Elijah is going around saying goodbye to the company of prophets, people that I am assuming he was kind of mentoring and instructing to be prophets of the Lord because Jezebel had killed a lot of them. So now maybe these are the guys he is raising up to be the prophet's son, so to speak.

Elisha appears to have been the right-hand man. So Elisha goes with him. Elijah tells him to stay. Elisha says "No, I'm going with you." They walk seven miles from Gilgal to Bethel. They walk about 17 miles from Bethel to Jericho. Then they go down from Jericho to the Jordan. As they go down to the Jordan, they get a platoon of prophets escorting them...50 prophets standing there at a distance. They see this miracle that God does through Elijah. He pulls up his cloak, hits the water, the water separates just like when they had come into the Promised Land. God is showing his favor rested on Elijah and he was about to show it in a way that was amazing. His favor rested on Elijah.

When they finally get across the Jordan, Elijah says, "Elisha, what would you like me to do for you before God takes me out of this world?" He says, "Let me receive a double portion of your spirit." It's a fascinating request. When Elijah says this is a hard thing, he's not saying it's hard to do because he wasn't going to do it. This was something God would do, right? God gives us the spirit of service, the spirit of faithfulness. That's what God works in us. But when he says, "This is a hard thing that you are asking," he's saying "What you are asking for is going to make your life not always pleasant." God reveals his glory not in grand and glorious victories. Sometimes he does, like on Mount Carmel, but at times God reveals his glory in simple ways of keeping his people faithful in the face of persecution. God reveals his glory like he revealed it through Elijah, by keeping Elijah faithful when everyone around him seemed to be pressuring him to turn his back on the Lord, to change his message from the Lord, to make his life easier and not have to run away from Jezebel because she wanted to kill him, by caving in. He got depressed as he did it. He got downcast, sure, but he looked to the Lord and the Lord overcame Elijah's weakness, and the Spirit of faithfulness that God gave him kept him serving and kept him faithful to his God.

So when Elisha asked for a double portion of that spirit, it's really saying, "God, help me to be twice as faithful as Elijah," which probably means you are going to face twice as much persecution, attacks and difficulty.

Think about that for a moment. How often are you and I tempted to cave in and not be faithful to God's Word because we are facing some kind of pressure? Maybe it's the pressure that comes from family members not to talk about God stuff. "You believe what you want. I'll believe what I want." How often do we not want to say what God says is sin, is sin, with our own family members because we don't want to create waves? How often are we tempted to let people go merrily on their way, farther and farther away from God, and put their faith in danger because we don't want to make waves? That's not a spirit of faithfulness that reveals God's glory. That's a spirit of selfishness that reveals Satan's fingerprints when we don't want to do what God has called us to do because it's going to put us at risk.

Our idea of God revealing his glory is making everything go wonderfully well in our life so that we are always happy. Christian joy and happiness are not the same thing. Christian joy comes in knowing that God sustains us in spite of our weakness. God loves us in spite of our sin. God forgives us in spite of our failings. Happiness is not always coexisting side by side. Ask Elijah. Ask Elisha.

Elijah tells Elisha, "If you see me when I go, I guess the Lord has given you that. If not, then he's not going to give you that." I have to wonder if a part of Elijah said, "I don't know which is better for you. I guess that's in God's hands."

Then come the chariot of fire and horses of fire and God's angels and some apparition coming down, separates the two of them, takes Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind and Elisha cries out, "My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel." The chariots and horsemen of Israel...I don't think he's talking about the fiery apparitions. I think he's talking about Elijah. Think about it at that time...what were the chariots and horsemen of Israel? What were the chariots and horsemen of Ahab? He was the king of Israel at that time. What were the chariots and horsemen? They were his defenders. That was his army. That was his smart bomb, right? "Unleash the chariots and the horsemen!" That was his smart bomb to tear apart his enemies on the battlefield. That was the height of the weaponry at that time, right? Elisha is saying Elijah is the chariot and horsemen of Israel. He is God's weapon that defends God's people because he spoke God's Word faithfully. God reveals his glory through faithful servants who speak his Word faithfully. There is nothing in Elijah that deserved being taken to heaven in a whirlwind. There's nothing in Elijah that deserved not tasting death, because Elijah was a sinner like you and me. But God, in his grace, for whatever reason saw fit not to have him taste death.

That just shows us God's glory. It shows us God does not treat us as our sins deserve. That's something that you and I should treasure every moment of every day because we know our sins. We know our failings. We can see them in the other person better than we see them in ourselves, but in moments of clarity and honesty, we see them in

ourselves. We don't deserve forgiveness, but our God gives it to us through the life and death of Christ. God reveals his glory in people like you and like me, just like he did through Elijah and Elisha. He does it when his spirit strengthens us so that we overcome our shortcomings and serve him in the power of his Spirit and serve him with willingness and serve him by pointing one another back to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I suppose that's how you see God revealing his glory through Elijah when Elijah came back on that Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus reveals his glory shortly before he is going to go suffer and die. The giver of the Law, Moses, appears with Jesus. The greatest of the prophets some have called Elijah, appears with Jesus. The other Gospel writers tell us they were talking about his impending departure. It's kind of interesting that God brings back a guy who never tasted death to talk to Jesus about his upcoming death. But that's what happened.

We hear those words of the Father that we are to listen to Jesus and we are to pay attention to him and his Word and keep our eyes on him because that's where we find forgiveness for all of our failings. That's where we find power to serve. And that's where God's glory is revealed. It's an apparent defeat. He is crucified. He is speared. He is pierced by thorns and he dies. Yet in that death, we have victory. God's glory is hidden in simple things. God's glory is hidden in simple things like the person in front of you, behind you and next to you. God's glory is hidden in us who are jars of clay. Yet he empowers us to be faithful like Moses and Elijah, not to be perfect, because they weren't perfect, but he considers us perfect through the life and death of Christ, and that empowers us to want to live for him, to want to be faithful as we encourage one another, as we admonish one another, to live for God. In a very real way, you and I have become the smart bombs of God, the chariots and horsemen of Israel. The same words that a king spoke over Elisha, God longs to speak over us as we serve him faithfully.

With our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, we will be the chariots and horsemen of Israel.