

How Can You Tell?
Week 4
The Four “Never’s” of a Difference Maker
1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-14
2 Kings 2:23-25; 2 King 6:8-23

Introduction

Every true follower of Jesus Christ has a desire to be an effective Ambassador for the Kingdom of God. It is impossible to know Jesus and not want to serve Him. Therefore, it is incumbent upon those of us who have been called by God to be faithful in all that we do, so that when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will hear the words, **"Well done, good and faithful servant"** (**Matthew 25:23**). *The Bible* gives us many great examples to follow as we endeavor to become all that God intends for us in this "Kingdom Calling". One such example is found in the ministry of Elisha the prophet. Very few men of God could ever begin to measure up to the steadfast faithfulness of Elisha. He began his ministry as the aide to the great prophet Elijah and took over Elijah's ministry, when the elder man of God was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot (**2 Kings Chapter 2**). Elisha, whose name means "The Lord Saves", was a powerful force in the nation of Israel at a time, when pagan idolatry threatened to bring the tiny nation into utter destruction. Through every trial and tribulation, Elisha maintained his integrity and never wavered in his faithful service to the Lord. Many things can be gleaned from a careful inspection of Elisha's walk with God. Today we are going to study four important truths from the life of Elisha that every Believer should learn in his/her endeavor to become a person of Godly Character:

1. Never Look Back, 2. Never Give Up, 3. Never Listen to the Critics, 4. Never Forget, that you are Never Alone.

Never Look Back (1 Kings 19:19-21)

Elijah left there and found Elisha son of Shaphat as he was plowing. Twelve teams of oxen were in front of him, and he was with the twelfth team. Elijah walked by him and threw his mantle over him. Elisha left the oxen, ran to follow Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you. "Go on back," he replied, "for what have I done to you?" So he turned back from following him, took the team of oxen, and slaughtered them. With the oxen's wooden yoke and plow, he cooked the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he left, followed Elijah, and served him. **1 Kings 19:19-21**

When Elijah is sent by God to appoint Elisha as his successor, he finds the young man working on his family farm (**vs.19**). Obviously, Elisha's family was wealthy, for the fields were being plowed by twelve pair of oxen. Elijah places his cloak upon Elisha's shoulders, thereby designating Elisha to take his place of leadership. A prophet's cloak was a garment made from animal skin, that signified the authority of the prophet's leadership. Kings also wore similar fur capes in those days as a symbol of their rule. When Elijah placed this cloak upon Elisha, there was no need for any words to be spoken, for everyone knew the intended message; Elisha would one day become Elijah's successor.

Upon receiving the prophet's mantle, Elisha immediately leaves everything he has ever known to answer the call of God. He says goodbye to his family and slaughters the oxen he had been using to plow the fields. He also burns the plow to cook the slaughtered oxen to feed his fellow plowmen. In short, Elisha puts his past life completely behind him in order to follow God. In this very symbolic gesture of slaughtering the oxen and burning his plow, Elisha was in fact saying, "There is no longer anything of value in my former life". Jesus calls us as Believers to follow him with all our hearts. We are not called to

a state of divided loyalty between the love of this world and the love of Christ. Jesus wants ALL of us, not just a part. It is most likely, with Elisha in mind, that the Lord said of His would-be followers, **"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"**. (Luke 9:62).

When you gave your life to Christ, did it change you? Did the old things pass away, and all things become new? (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). When we truly meet Christ, we are forever changed. No change? No relationship. Simple as that. If someone claims to have faith in Christ, but their life is the same as always, then they are merely fooling themselves. To be a true follower of Christ, we must surrender our all to Him, and then, never look back.

Never Give Up (2 Kings 2:1-14)

The time had come for the Lord to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal, and Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the Lord is sending me on to Bethel." But Elisha replied, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. Then the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said, "Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from you today?" He said, "Yes, I know. Be quiet." Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; the Lord is sending me to Jericho." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went to Jericho. Then the sons of the prophets who were in Jericho came up to Elisha and said, "Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from you today?" He said, "Yes, I know. Be quiet." Elijah said to him, "Stay here; the Lord is sending me to the Jordan." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men from the sons of the prophets came and stood observing them at a distance while the two of them stood by the Jordan. Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water, which parted to the right and left. Then the two of them crossed over on dry ground. When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha answered, "Please, let me inherit two shares of your spirit." Elijah replied, "You have asked for something difficult. If you see me being taken from you, you will have it. If not, you won't." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire with horses of fire suddenly appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went up into heaven in the whirlwind. As Elisha watched, he kept crying out, "My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!"

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

When he could see him no longer, he took hold of his own clothes, tore them in two, picked up the mantle that had fallen off Elijah, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle Elijah had dropped, and he struck the water. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" he asked. He struck the water himself, and it parted to the right and the left, and Elisha crossed over. 2 Kings 2:1-14

For several years, Elisha served faithfully at Elijah's side. He didn't become "The Great Prophet" overnight. He faithfully worked in the shadows until God saw fit to raise him up. So many people in the church today will quit the ministry when times get tough or when things don't work out the way we plan. I've personally witnessed over the years, several good men, who walked away from their calling during times of testing. We should never be surprised when God tests us. Testing is an integral part of spiritual growth (**James 1:2-15**). God always tests His followers. He even tested His only Son in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-11**). A follower of Christ, who fails his/her "wilderness test", can never go on to do great things in the kingdom of God.

Elisha followed faithfully in the shadow of Elijah, and even when the time came for Elijah to take his famous chariot ride, he attempted to discourage Elisha from following. Elijah went to four separate locations and at each stop commanded Elisha not to follow any further, but Elisha refused to stay behind. He desperately longed for the things of God and was willing to make a difficult journey in order to obtain God's blessing. In short, he passed his *wilderness test!* When Elijah was taken up to heaven, his prophetic power was passed on to Elisha. Christian, ***never give up***, when you are in the wilderness, because what you do in the wilderness determines how you will be blessed in the end. Don't quit on God, He has great plans for those who endure to the end.

Never Listen To The Critics (2 Kings 2:23-25)

From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking up the path, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, chanting, "Go on up, baldy! Go up, baldy!" He turned around, looked at them, and cursed them in The Name of The LORD. Then two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the children. From there Elisha went to Mount Carmel, and then he returned to Samaria.

2 Kings 2:23-25

Shortly after Elisha has taken over Elijah's ministry, he journeyed to the town of Bethel. As he was walking along the road he was jeered by some boys who shout, "go on up, you bald head!". While it is quite possible that Elisha may have indeed been a bald man, it is more likely that the young men were comparing him to a leper. Just as a leper would have been unclean, and therefore, unwanted in the community, these youths had the same disdain for Elisha. They wanted no part of his ministry and message. This was a time when Israel had plunged herself into idolatry and the Word of the Lord was unwelcome in many circles. These young men were attempting to cast Elisha from their presence. Elisha responds by turning the matter over to God, Who allows the foolish young idolaters to be mauled by bears (***vs. 24***).

Jesus warned His disciples that the world would hate us, because it had hated Him (***John 15:18-25***). Be forewarned, if you intend to take a *real* stand for Christ, you *will* be despised for it. Oh, you can go to church and be semi-religious, and no one will pay much heed, but the very moment you decide to take a strong stand for your faith, the very guns of hell will be turned upon you. The devil doesn't shoot at "sleeping" Christians, for they are no threat to him. However, a faithful man or woman of God can pretty much keep him up nights. As Believers, we cannot let the critics keep us from our mission, nor our message. Just as Elisha kept walking and let the Lord deal with his critics, we must do the same. Don't allow the critics to pull you off course! In many years of ministry, I have been insulted in every way imaginable, by some of the nastiest people imaginable, but I have learned one thing: those people never amount to anything, and when I continue to obey the Word of The Lord, my efforts have *always* been blessed. The critics are here today, and then gone tomorrow, but Jesus is forever!

Never Forget, You Are Never Alone (2 Kings 6:8-23)

When the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he conferred with his servants, "My camp will be at such and such a place." But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Be careful passing by this place, for the Arameans are going down there." Consequently, the king of Israel sent word to the place the man of God had told him about. The man of God repeatedly warned the king, so the king would be on his guard. The king of Aram was enraged because of this matter, and he called his servants and demanded of them, "Tell me, which one of us is for the king of Israel?" One of his servants said, "No one, my lord the king. Elisha, the prophet in Israel, tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in your bedroom." So the king said, "Go and see where he is, so I can send men to capture him."

When he was told, "Elisha is in Dothan," he sent horses, chariots, and a massive army there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up early and went out, he discovered an army with horses and chariots surrounding the city. So he asked Elisha, "Oh, my master, what are we to do?" Elisha said, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us outnumber those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "Lord, please open his eyes and let him see." So the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. When the Arameans came against him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Please strike this nation with blindness." So He struck them with blindness, according to Elisha's word. Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will take you to the man you're looking for." And he led them to Samaria. When they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "Lord, open these men's eyes and let them see." So the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw that they were in the middle of Samaria. When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Should I kill them, should I kill them, my father?" Elisha replied, "Don't kill them. Do you kill those you have captured with your sword or your bow? Set food and water in front of them so they can eat and drink and go to their master." So he prepared a big feast for them. When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. The Aramean raiders did not come into Israel's land again. **2 Kings 6:8-23**

When Elisha began his ministry he struck the water of the Jordan with Elijah's cloak and prayed, **"Where is the God of Elijah?" (2 Kings 2:14)**. From that moment, God had revealed Himself over and over again to His anointed servant. Elisha served God faithfully, and over the course of time, he performed many miracles in The Name of The Lord. No longer was he jeered, but rather feared. His powerful reputation had even reached into the palaces of pagan kings, who wished to destroy Israel. Ben-Hadad II, king of Aram, had been trying to kill or capture Joram the King of Israel, but every time he would set a trap for him, Elisha would warn Joram to avoid the ambush. The Aramean king was furious, and decided to send troops to capture Elisha instead (**vs. 13**).

Upon awakening the next morning, Elisha finds his home surrounded by chariots and warriors. His young servant begins to panic and asks Elisha, **"What shall we do?" (vs. 15)**. The old prophet calmly prays that the servant's eyes be opened, so that he could see the hosts of heaven who had come to their rescue. Elisha had spent his lifetime living by faith, and he knew that he was not alone, for God had been with him from the very first day.

Every child of God, who is walking in the will of God, must never forget that they are never alone! Jesus said in **John Chapter 14:21, "The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I also will love him and REVEAL MYSELF TO HIM."** (emphasis added). When we dedicate our lives to not just believe in Christ, but to follow Christ, our faith will continue to grow, because we are constantly seeing God at work around us. Jesus, who promised never to leave us (**Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5**) will *always* be with us. Never forget, you are never alone. God will reveal Himself to you, just when you need Him most! Elisha lived by this simple truth, he didn't attempt to "change the world" in his own strength, he simply followed God. He was a difference-maker, because he *Never Looked Back*, He *Never Gave Up*, He *Never Listened to the Critics*, and He *Never Forgot, that He was Never Alone*. And all of God's people said...

TRUTH!!