

Transfiguration Sunday
Feb. 7, 2016
II Kings 2:1-12

In Christ Jesus, whose display of His glory was a foretaste of Heaven's glory for all of His believers,
Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Its only a little more than two months away. Tax day that is---April 15th. I am sure most of you know the old saying: **THE ONLY SURE THINGS IN LIFE ARE DEATH AND TAXES.** Well people try to avoid both. And there are probably some that succeed in cheating Uncle Sam out of his share of taxes, but in the history of the world, over 6,000 years, only two people have ever left this earth without dying. One of them was Enoch, the father of Methuselah. When Enoch was 365 years old, God took him directly to heaven as we are told in Genesis 5:24.

The only other person we know of who passed into eternal life without going through the door of temporal death is the man in our text this morning, the prophet Elijah.

This morning when we tie in the glorious appearance of Christ's transfiguration and Elijah's glorious departure from this world we are confronted with two wonderful truths that can be gathered under this theme:

THE GLORY OF A BELIEVER'S LIFE!

I: IT IS GLORIOUS WHEN IT IS SPENT SERVING THE LORD.

II: IT IS GLORIOUS WHEN IT ENDS IN ETERNAL LIFE IN HEAVEN.

Elijah was the greatest prophet in the Old Testament after Moses. Yet his life of service to the LORD was not an easy one. He served during the reign of the most idolatrous king in the Northern Kingdom of Israel: King Ahab. It is said of Ahab in I Kings 16:30 **NOW AHAB THE SON OF OMRI DID EVIL IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD, MORE THAN ALL WHO WERE BEFORE HIM.**

Together with his wicked wife, Jezebel, they led Israel into bloody idolatry, sacrificing their own children at the altar of Baal. They also led Israel into legalized prostitution with the 400 priestesses of the goddess of love Astoreth. In other words these two, Ahab and Jezebel, led the country into complete moral and spiritual decay.

When Elijah proclaimed God's anger and condemnation over against Israel's wickedness and idolatry, he was accused of being a troublemaker. He was hunted down as a fugitive. Jezebel swore by her gods that she would kill Elijah. Yes, his was not an easy ministry. Yet his rebuking sin and pointing to the one true LORD God, Jehovah had a saving effect upon many in Israel for the LORD told Elijah that there were yet 7,000 who were faithful to Him in Israel.

In our text this morning we read of Elijah's ministry as it draws to its close. Somehow God had revealed to both Elijah and Elisha, his assistant, that the time had come for Elijah's work on earth to be done and for his departure. It appears from our text that Elijah expected to depart this earth alone, so he directs Elisha to stay in Gilgal, and he would go on to the school of the prophets at Bethel and bid goodbye to them. But Elisha insists with a solemn oath that he would not leave Elijah's side. Elisha repeats this vow again when he is directed to stay at Bethel and again in Jericho.

Elisha's desire to be with Elijah was not just mere curiosity or a morbid wish to see how it would all end for Elijah, but it was one of loving service to his dear friend and a sincere desire to receive from the LORD the same calling as Elijah's successor.

As the two of them made their way to the Jordan River, 50 fellow prophets followed them and they saw a miraculous event take place. Elijah rolled up his mantle or cloak, which was his trademark, and struck the water. Immediately the Jordan River divided and the two of them walked across on dry ground. Just as it was good for Peter, James and John to behold the glory of God in the person of Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration, so also it was good for Elisha and these other prophets to witness God's glory upon Elijah, a faithful servant of the LORD.

As Elijah and Elisha walked on the east side of the Jordan River, Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. This did not mean that Elisha wanted to be twice as great or twice as popular or important as Elijah. He was requesting the share of the first-born son, who under Hebrew

law would inherit twice as much as any other sons thereby signifying him as the rightful heir. Although there were other prophets in Israel, Elisha had been called as Elijah's successor and by this request Elisha shows that he accepted this calling and prayed for the faith, strength, courage, and ability to fulfill it. He wanted the glory of a believer's life in service to the Lord!

This, however, was not Elijah's to give, for this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He alone can grant such spiritual gifts and He did as Elisha was eye witness to Elijah's miraculous, glorious departure. Suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire came down from heaven between the two men and Elijah was caught up in a whirlwind. The whirlwind carried Elijah away into heaven. Thus Elijah was transformed, glorified in the twinkling, the blink of an eye, instantly from a mortal body to immortal; from corruption to incorruption; from dishonor to glory; from weakness to power; from the glory of valiantly serving God in His physical kingdom to the even more glorious victory and eternal blessing in His heavenly kingdom.

What a glorious departure for the child of God. In both the transfiguration of Jesus and the bodily ascension of Elijah into heaven we have a foretaste of heaven. A glimpse of the **GLORY** of perfection and holiness in eternity.

Elijah's departure into glory was because he was prepared with faith in his Lord and Savior. Few of us have the privilege of knowing as Elijah did, the precise time of our passing. Yet, our Lord reminds us continually in His Word that we are to be strangers and pilgrims on this earth. That we have no continuing city, no real home to call our own. That our real citizenship is in heaven. Continually we are encouraged to turn our eyes away from this dying, corrupt world toward the real world which is to come; away from the love of this temporary materialistic age to the eternal love of the Father in Christ Jesus. For then and only then can we be prepared at all times to meet our Lord either through death or in the clouds at His second coming.

Elijah was prepared with faith in the coming Messiah and he showed it by spending his life in service to the LORD. This should also be said of everyone of us. That does not mean we all have to become called workers like pastors and teachers; but all of us are called to work in God's kingdom as ministers, servants of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The reason the Lord has created us and given us life here on earth with our talents, time and treasures is to serve Him, to glorify His name. And even though it may not always appear so, what a glorious calling that is.

Elijah in his ministry performed wondrous miracles. We read how he used his cloak to part the Jordan River. That cloak of Elijah represented the power of God, for it was God who performed those miracles through Elijah. Elisha on his return used the same cloak and struck the Jordan and it parted again showing that the Holy Spirit had indeed imparted to him the spirit of Elijah. And what was that spirit: a faithful spirit, a God-serving spirit; a **DESIRE TO LIVE FOR THE LORD AND PROCLAIM HIS WORD**.

That same spirit is given to us through the Word. We have the power of God right here in our hands, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When the Good News of Jesus touches the human heart, a miraculous change occurs, a change from unbelief to faith, from despair to hope, from purposelessness to a meaningful life, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from serving self to serving Christ. We too can perform miracles through His Word, miracles of conversion, of healing souls, of raising the spiritually dead, of transforming hearts.

When Elijah was being taken away in the whirlwind Elisha cried out **MY FATHER! MY FATHER! THE CHARIOT OF ISRAEL AND ITS HORSEMEN!** This was not a reference to the fiery chariot and fiery horses but to Elijah. Even as the chariots and horsemen were relied upon to defend, protect and save the country from its enemies so Elisha called Elijah the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. He was called upon by God to defend, protect and save the people with the Gospel message of salvation through Jehovah and the coming Messiah. Elisha was also called the same thing---**THE CHARIOT OF ISRAEL AND ITS HORSEMEN**---when he died.

Are you a chariot and a horseman for God's kingdom? In the New Testament our Savior uses the terms **SALT and LIGHTS**. We are the **SALT** of the earth that preserves when we proclaim the message of salvation alone through Jesus Christ. We are the **LIGHTS** of the world that lead the way to salvation through the Gospel of full and free forgiveness through the crucified and risen Lord. We need to shine brightly in our daily lives. What good is a light that is burned out? What good is salt if it has lost its saltiness or preserving ability? Having been brought to faith by God's

grace, we are left in this world for a time, just like Elijah, to do what he did--proclaim to others the Word of God and the wonderful salvation through Jesus.

Our own society is very comparable to Elijah's. Many of our leaders have a form of godliness but are immoral in their words and actions. Our world is filled with idols made of chrome, steel, green paper, investments and a thousand other things. We have gross immorality that seeps right into our homes through the T.V., radio, CD's and VCR's.

Our real enemies, just like Israel's, are not those of other nations, but they are right here within our own borders and within our own bodies. Our own sinful flesh, our selfish heart that wants only what's in it for me. We are surrounded by a godless society that preaches daily, do your own thing, live only for yourself, you are really the only one that matters. Our only defense is the continuing proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the power of God unto salvation.

And soon the world will see us no more. Like Elijah, we will be taken to our heavenly home. But until then we too need to be the chariots and horsemen of Israel, the Church of God---the Salt and Light of this world, both in our homes, in our church and in our society.

The Lord through Paul says this about us, **BEING CONFIDENT OF THIS VERY THING, THAT HE WHO HAS BEGUN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL COMPLETE IT UNTIL THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST.**

The departure of Elijah was a painful loss for Elisha, but a glorious gain for Elijah. So it is with every Christian's death. It is a painful loss for the Christian brothers and sisters left behind to carry on with the work of the Lord, but what a glorious blessing it is for the one who has died in Christ. When we close our eyes in the sleep of death, after a glorious life of serving our God with a repentant heart of faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, the angels of heaven will carry our souls to our glorious heavenly home, and on that last great day of the resurrection our bodies will be raised, glorified and perfect just like Christ's.

As your pastor, my fervent prayer for everyone of you is that you too, like Elijah, are prepared for your departure with a repentant, faithful heart which shows in your life of service to your Lord. Then in death you too, will depart victorious over death and be escorted by the heavenly hosts in eternal glory. That is the ultimate goal of every child of God, attainable alone through Jesus. Praise God!

Amen.