Elisha's death brings life

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[0:00] We'll turn now to the second book of Kings, chapter 13, 2 Kings chapter 13, at verse 20.

And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men.
And they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha. And when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet.
Now we've come today to the close of our consideration over several months of the life and witness of God's servant Elisha.
In fact, it was the 22nd of July that we undertook in the congregation for the first time a study of God's servant. And so we come to the close of his life and ministry.
[1:17] And I would hope that as we've seen Elisha throughout these years in Israel, that we've been encouraged to realize that however difficult the day in which God's servants witness, it is never too difficult for God.

Elisha lived in a very hard and a desperate situation. The nation in which she lived had little care for God. And on many occasions he must have been discouraged and disheartened.
Indeed, the last 45 years of his life, as we saw last week, were spent in relative obscurity. And it may have seemed that the cause of God was growing weaker and weaker and would eventually die.
But I trust that as we have seen God at work again and again through the witness of his servant Elisha, we've been encouraged to know that confidence in God is never misplaced.
Now the last incident in the life of Elisha, and perhaps that's not accurate because he's dead. And it's an incident that takes place with regard to his body, his dead body.
[2:25] The last incident is also a strange one. In many ways it's quite unique in the whole of scripture. It's easily summarized. There were some men who had gone out to bury a companion.

And there suddenly they saw on the horizon a band of armed raiders, Moabites, armed to the teeth, seeking spoil. And no doubt very ready to put to death anyone who stood in their way.
And so frightened were they by this appearance of the armed men, that instead of burying the man with all due decorum and respect, they simply had to toss him into the nearest open grave.
And we bear in mind the type of graves that they had in those days. And it happened to be Elisha's. And then we read that when the dead man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, stood up on his feet.
Now you can imagine the situation and you can easily ask yourselves, what would have frightened these men the most? Would it be the Moabites, armed and ready to kill?
[3:36] Or would it be the appearance of this man, wrapped in his grave clothes, suddenly standing alive before them? I leave it to your own imagination as to mine, to ask which would cause the greater terror.

And so they flee back into Israel. And you can be quite sure that throughout Israel, in the homes and in the inns and in the court of the palace and so on, the news would spread.
It would be all over Israel what had happened when this dead man touched the bones of Elisha, that life had come through death. And through this means, surely God was teaching his probably discouraged and disheartened people.
He was teaching them valuable lessons. And they are lessons because God has preserved the scripture under the guidance of the Spirit until our day and generation. They are lessons just as relevant for us, the Church of Jesus Christ today.

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And I'd sum them up in this way. I'd say that God, first of all, was teaching his people that he hadn't forgotten them. He had not forgotten his own people.
[4:48] Now Israel, in these days, was a far cry from the days of David and Solomon. They were days of great wealth and prosperity and success.

Israel was feared and honored among the nations. There was not only material prosperity, there was spiritual power throughout the nation. It throbbed throughout every part of the country.
And now it's different. Israel is only part of what it used to be. This is the northern kingdom. There's been a division. The temple in Jerusalem is no longer theirs.
They are a separate estate. And not only that, but they are economically going from bad to worse.
Oh, it's true that from time to time there was a little improvement in the situation.
The son of Joash, who was reigning on the throne now, Jeroboam II, he was militarily and economically successful. But it was downhill. Downhill all the way, in spite of an occasional halt in the slide.
[5:54] And it was to lead, before very long, to the final destruction of the state. The dispersion of the ten tribes and to their disappearance from the face of the earth.

That was the situation in which the nation found itself. Unstable. Not only economically, but morally and spiritually. A prey to neighboring nations.
Here were these Moabites. They wouldn't have tried it in the days of Solomon and David. But they could try it now and could get off with it. And so the nation is suffering. And especially it is suffering the idolatry and the immorality from the king downwards that is rampant throughout the land.
And there's oppression. Oppression of the poor by the rich. You turn to the later prophets. Turn to Amos and Hosea. They are prophesying in the same situation in the same northern kingdom of Israel.
Just some decades or a bit more, century or two later. And you can tell as you read Amos and Hosea of the terrible situation. The poor are being ground into the dust.
[7:01] The needy, we're told. Sold for a pair of shoes while the rich get richer and the mass of the people suffer. Suffer in silence. So there is the situation in Israel.

And you can be perfectly sure that the majority of God's people are discouraged and depressed. And particularly because Elisha is dead.
Even though his last 45 years had been as it were in retirement. They didn't hear much of him. They knew he was there. They knew that while Elisha lived there was a testimony for God.
And they knew that at any moment God could break forth through his great apostle Elisha. And so God's people were confident. Elisha was there. The man of God. The prophet was in the land.
And now he's dead. And there's a big difference between Elisha's death and the end of the ministry of his predecessor. Elijah was taken up into heaven.
[8:01] No doubt many in Israel said alas for Israel now. The prophet Elijah is gone. But Elisha was there. God had raised up a successor and the prophetic ministry continued.

The great apostolic succession if I may use the term was carried on from Elijah to Elisha. But it wasn't like that now. Elijah did have a servant who should have followed him.
A man of God who should have taken his place. But you remember how Gehazi failed miserably. And how Gehazi was no longer a man of God.
So Elisha dies and there's no successor. There's nobody to proclaim the word of God or so it seems. But God through this incident strange though it is God is saying to his people don't you believe it.
Don't believe that I am silent because there's no Elijah and no Elisha. Don't believe that because the cause of godliness is suffering in the land that God has forgotten his people.
[9:06] Don't believe that I've abdicated my right to reign in the nation of Israel. I am still there. I am still working even though there is no Elisha and the very bones the very dust of Elisha can bring my power to a discouraged and defeated nation.

A reminder that God is sovereign and God is always working his purposes out not as we may think but according to his sovereign and perfect will.
And so you and I in the church of Jesus Christ today we have to be careful when we look back and when we rightly thank God for better days spiritually speaking than the days we see.
Days when there were great men and women of God in the land. Days when as we read for example about men of Sutherland to quote the title of a well-known book or we read about records

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of grace in Sutherland to quote the title of another well-known book we read these things and we marvel at what God did in days gone by and we rightly give God thanks for such days but there's surely a lesson here that as we regret the passing of many who were faithful servants of God that we do not do so in such a way that we dishonor God as if to say well God in days gone by could do these things but he is no longer the God of power that once he was.
my dear friends the God of Elijah was the God of Elisha and the God of Elisha was the God of those who followed after even in the darkest days of Israel.
[10:50] From these stones our Lord Jesus said to the people in his day from these stones God can raise up children to Abraham and so it still is.

And in our day however far we have drifted from the law of God and however little the gospel of Jesus Christ may be honoured in our nation in our day God is still able to raise up those whom he will anoint for his service and be mighty instruments in his hand.
He has not forgotten his own people those who truly seek his face. Some of you may have read the first volume that's all that's come out so far of the biography of Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones who exercised such a great ministry in Wales and in England particularly in our own day died only a few short years ago.
And you may have noticed in that book that when Dr. Lloyd-Jones was ministering in what was really a very out of the way and little known town in Wales not even in one of the great cities of the country.
When he was ministering there there was a leading Christian I think he was a surgeon in Swansea or Cardiff who was very interested in the work of God in the universities longing that young men and women in our universities who would be leaders in the nation would be one for Christ.
[12:23] And he was earnestly praying that God would raise up those who would have a voice in the universities and elsewhere. And someone told him that there was this doctor who'd turned minister and who was preaching in some little town in Wales and said you should go and hear him.

And the book tells us how he went and it quotes from a letter that he wrote to the leader of the Christian student work in London and said I have found the modern Apostle Paul.
Well the language was exaggerated no doubt. but what he was saying was this that he had discovered that God is able at any time in any place in any way to raise up great servants to raise up his cause not to forget his people to do mighty things as he has done in days gone by.
And so when you and I are discouraged as sometimes we are let us remember this from the very bones of Elijah of Elisha dead in the grave power the power of God can come.
Some of you may have noticed I was in a home on Friday evening and they were watching a television program and you may have seen it. It was about religious sects in the Pacific and it was in one way very demoralizing because you saw millions of people following all kinds of sects and cults different varieties of Buddhism and of various supposedly Christian sects aberrations you saw the Mormons making tremendous strides there in the South Pacific you saw Hindu sects that were capturing the imagination of hundreds of thousands of people in California it showed you all of that and you were tempted to say well where is the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and God brings you to his word and he says whatever the appearances God is still on the throne and God is still at work in sovereign power and if you and I know a little of history we will never forget that if we remember the Roman Empire if we remember its persecution of Christians if we remember men like Nero on the throne throwing Christians in their thousands to their death and then we remember that according in keeping with prophecy and the promises of God the Roman Empire was overthrown and the church of Jesus Christ was established and we look to the reformation and we see how the truth lay buried in centuries of debris of falsehood and of lies and God worked through his chosen servants and so there is this first message
[15:09] God has not forgotten his own people and as that man came to life there in that distant grave in Israel that truth was brought home to them and to us and then secondly there was surely this being taught to the people of Israel firstly that God hadn't forgotten them and secondly that their labor was not in vain their labor for the Lord was not in vain we read that verse in 1 Corinthians 15 earlier in the service now Elisha was dead and the last years of Elisha didn't seem to accomplish very much 45 years as we saw when Elisha didn't seem to be heard he was in retirement and his voice was scarcely listened to within the nation and so it didn't seem as if much was being done for God the king King Jewish in the previous incident we have it he came to Elisha now you would say doesn't that show that Elisha was accomplishing much in Israel well it seems a king nearly came to

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pay some formal respects he called him my father my father the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof he showed him respect because he was after all the prophet of God but I tend to think that Jewish's respect for Elisha was rather along the lines of the respect given in our nation sometimes nominally to God at our state ceremonies well it's right to have the Archbishop of Canterbury there that shows that well

God is some place in our national life but where where is the true acknowledgement of God in the hearts of the people and in the case of Jewish he came with words in his lips my father my father but it didn't change his life it didn't change the way he lived or the way he thought it didn't abolish the idolatry or the immorality of the court of the king they didn't make him a man of God oh he had the words in his lips to honor Elisha but nothing more and so we ask was Elisha a failure he didn't influence the king very much there weren't many people became believers in the true God because of Elisha so it seemed was he a failure well God uses this incident not only to teach us the first lesson that he hasn't forgotten his own people but to teach us this lesson that we must never measure the spiritual effectiveness of a man or a woman of God by their lives in this world that God does not limit the blessing he can bring through this life or that life through this preacher or that ordinary believer in an ordinary sphere of life
God doesn't limit the effect of their testimony to their days on earth but the seed that is sown goes on germinating and when we least expect it the blessing of God can appear some of you will remember perhaps from school days reading Shakespeare's Julius Caesar you remember perhaps that incident for Mark Antony before the corpse of Julius Caesar speaks these words the evil that men do lives after them the good is often terrored in their bones well Shakespeare was only partly right and in the things of God that's not true and it wasn't true with regard to Elisha Elisha was dead but the good that was in Elisha that God had given him that lived on and the power of God lived on though Elisha was dead and Elisha's dust in the grave was the source of blessing not only to the man who came to life but to many others no doubt through his witness we're told of
Abel that being dead and he lived at the dawn of human history but being dead he's still speaking still speaking of God and of the power of God to the nations of the world I have among my books one entitled Trekking Among Moroccan Tribes the tells of a man James Haldane he was a Scotsman who spent a lifetime in Morocco he went there as a missionary and in all his years I think it was some 40 years in Morocco in North Africa he did not see one single Arab Muslim coming to faith in Christ not one he did in God's favor see some others of other nationalities who were brought to faith but not one of the Arab Muslims to whom he had gone to witness and went back to Scotland and he died so was it a failure of course it wasn't a failure their labor is not in vain in the Lord Elisha's bones still speak and today in Morocco we certainly don't see a flourishing Christian church but we see what James Haldane who labored for 40 years there we see what he never saw we see a little group here and a little group there we see those who have come to faith in Christ we see that radio is beaming the message of God from the south of France into Morocco and people are being built up in their faith and if you have any knowledge as I do have of Christians in Morocco and they tell of how God is silently and mightily working oh yes God does work and he works when his servants are dead and brings forth fruit from their labors and we could give many many other examples of this great truth the writer of Ecclesiastes the preacher he puts it this way cast your bread upon the waters and it will return to you after many days and this is
[21:17] God's way of working now I know that this is true in the secular sphere in a certain sense a poet a musician an architect they may feel that their own generation despises them doesn't read their poetry doesn't think much of their architecture and they console themselves by saying well future generations will appreciate it and that does happen oh but that's a poor consolation at best if one is merely thinking of the memory of future generations that one will never see but where the believer in Jesus Christ is concerned oh it's very different because you're caught up in the glorious almighty purposes of God you and I may not live to see this church packed to the doors again we may not live to see it but if that comes we are part of it if we are the people of God and if God sweeps through our land again as in days gone by as we many believe and pray that he will though we may not be literally physically part of it remember

Elisha was not dead his body was there but Elisha lived on and so the people of God in the body of Christ live on and know that they are part of that great work not limited by time but has its fulfillment in God's eternal purposes God hadn't forgotten his people God showed them through this that their labor was not in vain and I'd like to suggest one final thing that God taught through this incident not

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so much perhaps to the Israelites then knowing in shadow in prophecy yes but to us fully and clearly it is taught and it's this God taught them that life comes through death it certainly happened that way here here's a dead man a dead body touches him and life courses through the veins of the one who was to be buried and when you and I read this if we are
Christian men and women we cannot but think of another who was as it says here dead and they buried him and he continued under the power of death for a time Jesus Christ nailed to the cross of Calvary he too was buried laid in a tomb but we know that he rose again now Elisha as I've just said he wasn't really dead his body was dead his bones were crumbling into dust but the real Elisha lived on in the presence of God and so through his bones God conveyed that real life that eternal life that Elisha was experiencing there in the very presence of God oh this man he's anonymous to us he died so did Lazarus die when he was raised by the power of Jesus Christ but when Jesus Christ died there and was laid in the tomb when he rose again he became and becomes the giver of life to the dead whosoever says Jesus
Christ believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live and if you and I touch him by faith he's not merely there in the tomb he died it is through his death that the virtue of saving power comes through the death allied to the resurrection and if you and I touch him by faith come into contact with him with Jesus Christ who's here today as this man came into contact with the bones of Elisha then we shall live eternal life shall be ours as the gift of God and there's something more I'd suggest that this incident here the miracle in Elisha's grave is a pledge to the Christian of what we were reading in 1st Corinthians 15 of the resurrection of the body we receive through faith in Christ eternal life you can have it now it can be the gift of God in your experience and in mine but that's not all there is a day coming we shall be laid in the grave our body shall crumble into dust there's a day coming when Jesus
Christ returns and the teaching of scripture is that the bodies of his believing people will be raised all of them out of the grave and glorified will be united once again to their spirits that immediately pass into glory new life for soul and body through Jesus Christ because I live says the Savior you shall live also and so we take our leave of Elisha the culmination of his ministry his life through death so too the Lord Jesus Christ the culmination of his life on earth was death there on Calvary's cross and life through death to those who trust in him let me just read one sentence as Dr.
[26:36] Alexander Stewart whom I've mentioned already minister of St. Columbus Pre-Church some 50 years ago as he concluded a series of sermons on Elisha he said this at the end of the very last one we take our farewell of Elisha in the light that streams through the open door of a vanquished grave the grave from Calvary to the empty tomb to the risen Lord for whom you and I can have life well do we do you can you say not just what this man would have said that through Elisha's bones he came to life he died again but can you say with the apostle Paul I live yet not I but Christ lives in me and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me may God add his blessing to his own word

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