

“Burn the Plows: The Call of Elisha” // *Something Greater*, #5

// 1 Kings 19:19–21; 2 Kings 2:1–14

Announcement:

- Of all the reasons to be a part of our church, I think our student ministry may be one of the greatest of those...
- **Let me reintroduce myself...**
 - I met a **new person at our church** last week. I asked him how long he'd been here. "6 months," he said. "And apparently I come to this church more often than you do."
 - **Whenever I am gone** I really enjoy it for a week or two... but then I start itching to be back.
 - **I haven't preached** here in four weeks... so you might brace yourself for an 1.5 hour sermon.
 - All the guests laugh and the Summit regulars say, "Oh my."
- You've got to hand it to me, though... I left you in good hands for those 4 weeks.
 - Week 1: Matt Carter, (interest meeting week of the 4th) over 300 showed up... *105 said they wanted to explore going on a long term assignment*
 - Week 2; Week 3...
 - Last week, Tony Merida, glorious truth of adoption: Just under 200 in attendance. *66 new families signed up to say they were interested in taking the next step to foster or adopt.*
 - You just saw the video about **Elevate summer camp**. There, 43 high school and middle school students made

the decision to trust Christ with their whole lives, and 25 of those are being baptized at all of our campuses this morning.

- *At all campuses, let's put our hands together...*

Introduction:

(Before I left I had finished **part 1 of our summer series**, *Something Better, Something Greater*, based on the lives of two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha. We're going to **pick up right where we left off**, as Elijah passes the baton to Elisha.)

We're going to look this weekend at the **call of Elisha**. It's pretty **extreme**—what God asked of him—but if Elisha could have seen what he was being offered he'd have taken it **1000 times** over.

Elisha had a **"good life,"** but God was calling him to **"something greater."**

You're offered the same thing. God has a plan for your life; a plan beyond anything you have ever asked or imagined, but it **costs everything**.

- (If you're **not a Christian**, or never fully committed, this is a great week to be here because you can see just what's being offered and what is being asked...)
- And if you **are a Christian**, it's good to think through these things again, because the decision to follow Jesus is something you keep renewing day by day.

What you are going to see today is that following God means an abandonment of our entire lives to God.

- **A lot of us got interested** in God because it seemed like he could something to our lives that we were missing.
 - He could **give us peace**; help when we are in **trouble**; comfort when we were **worried**; a stable **foundation** for our families; **assurance** that when we die we'd go to heaven. And that's great. Those are all valid reasons to come to God.

- But you don't come to God to **get services** from him. Those things make you realize that **God needs to be the center** of your life.
- Think of it like this: **In the year 1532**, astronomer **Nicholas Copernicus** challenged the long-held belief that the earth was the center of the universe. People saw how the **sun came up** and moved seemingly through the sky and assumed... Copernicus said...
 - We each need to have a Copernican Revolution of the soul. Most of us view the world **me-centrally**, and for many us, **when we do decide to follow Jesus**, it's mainly because we think he can add something to *our* lives. And so in our **list of priorities he comes 2nd or 3rd or 10th.**
 - You think you are following Jesus; in actuality, you've invited him to follow you.

Watch how God calls Elisha.

1 Kings 19:19–21

God had told Elijah he would raise up another prophet after him.

[19] So he (Elijah) departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth.

Elisha passed by him and cast his cloak upon him.

First thing to notice here was that Elisha was rich. How do I know that?

- Well, he's got at least **24 oxen** (12 pair). Think of **oxen like cars**. A middle-class family in that day had one... Elisha had 24.
 - And all the latest models—the new **sport models**, pimped out with spinners. **Collector's edition** oxen. **Sport utility** oxen.
- And notice that it says he was **in line behind the 12th** set, but they were all his. What does that mean? He had **servants** pulling the others.

- He lived in a place called the "**Abel Meholah**," (which in English would be translated "the **dancing meadow**.".) This area was known as the **breadbasket** of Israel; a little fertile area right along the Jordan River.
- **So see, he was rich.** He had the best land; servants; and lots of oxen.

But maybe he was **restless; unfulfilled**... Did he sometimes watch his servants plowing the land and say, "*Is this it? Do this for a few years, and then **die and pass it on to my son and be forgotten? Is this all there is? Is there something greater?***"

Have you ever felt that way?

Well then, Elijah walks up to him, without a word, and **throws his cloak** around him, which, admittedly, is a little weird. I tried that at the **mall the other day** and got arrested.

- In those days, the cloak was a **symbol of your vocation**, your authority.
- The calling of Elijah is being offered to Elisha.

That's exciting, right?

- Well, Elijah, if you recall, was a **wanted man**. He lived on the run. God feeds him through handouts from widows and by ravens beside creek beds.

Elisha is being called from a life of luxury to one of poverty and danger.

Watch how he responds...

[20] And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" (*That's a Hebrew figure of speech meaning, "Why not?" or "Who's stopping you?"*)

[21] So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. (NIV)

- So he **kills the oxen** and uses them to feed the poor in his community. **One ox would typically feed** a family of 5 for a year and a half. 24 oxen. This would have been an epic feast!
 - And this is, incidentally, where the vision for **the Golden Corral** was born. (Someone gave my family a gift card for Golden Corral and so we ate there for breakfast a couple of Saturdays ago. I don't think we've been there in like 4 years. As we were walking out, Allie, my 8 year old, said, "Well, I think we can all agree, *that* is the greatest restaurant ever." wHer birthday is this week, and she got to choose where we went to eat—guess where?)
- And then he **burns his plow**. No turning back.
- And (look at vs. 21), 21 "Then he arose and went after Elijah and became his servant."
 - **He was the CEO**. Now he becomes **Elijah's "assistant"**. He made coffee for him. He went from calling the shots to making coffee and copies.¹

Three things characterize his response, and, believe it or not, this is where the invitation to something greater begins.

1. The PATH to "something greater" goes through the valley of surrender, sacrifice and service.

Let's look at those 3 words one at a time:

Surrender.

- Burning his plow meant irrevocably handing in his resignation as CEO of Elisha farms.²
- He literally cooked his old way of life and had it for dinner!

¹ Mark Batterson, *All-In*

² Batterson, 61.

- Elijah was his master now; there was no plan B, nothing to fall back on.

Sacrifice.

- What had been his foundation; his delight; his treasure source, was now the means by which he blessed others.

Service.

- Think about how much his life changed in a day. He went from being the top guy to an unpaid intern; from calling the shots to making coffee and copies.
 - Imagine what this was like for **Elisha's parents**. "And what does your son do? Well, he makes Elijah's breakfast. Cleans up after him. Keeps his calendar."
- *BTW... this was the case for 18 years.* (If you look in 2 Kings 2:8, which we'll get to in a minute, which when Elijah dies and Elisha ceases being the servant and officially becomes the prophet, you'll see the gap between this moment and that one is 18 years. **For 18 years Elisha is a servant, doing menial tasks for Elijah.**)
 - **As I have explained to you before...** whenever God calls people in the Bible, they almost always go through a **time of humbling.**
 - Moses.
 - David.
- **I know you hate it... I do too.** But that time is crucial... **If you don't excel** in those areas God has assigned you to be a servant—if you're not a good employee; a good student; a good son or daughter; a good door-holder, you'll never make a great prophet!
- **The way up is the way down.**
- You complain about your career:
 - "God, why don't other people recognize these talents of mine?"
 - "And why haven't I been given these opportunities?"
- The **better question is, "Are you faithful?"** If you can't be faithful as a servant, you'll never make a great prophet. **Quit**

worrying about where God has placed you, and worry instead about being faithful in that place.

- Honor God with all your heart, in the little things, and in due time, he will lift you up.

When God calls people, these 3 words begin to characterize their lives: Surrender, Sacrifice, Service. Is that what you signed up for? Is that what you thought you were getting into?

Believe it or not, Jesus would take this up a level: "And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34 ESV)"

- **"Deny yourself"** means total abandonment of your life to God.
 - Note that Jesus did not say, **"Deny money"** or **"Deny illicit sex"** or even **"Deny sin"** but **"Deny yourself"**: Denying yourself means saying "no" to all you want from life so you can say, **"Yes" to all that God wants from it.** It means putting your **"yes"** on the table.
 - **That's a phrase that gets thrown around here a lot... "Take up your cross..."** think about that one, for a moment.
 - **Crosses in those days** were instruments of torture. In our day, crosses are sentimental—symbols of our faith; pieces of jewelry we wear around our necks.
 - But for that first century audience, "crosses" were symbols of **Roman racism** and oppression. They evoked **horror** in the hearts of all who beheld them.
 - **Condemned men** hung upon them, in shame, totally dominated by the will of another.
 - Sometimes in our **use of the symbol** we lose its **horror**.
 - Imagine you went to someone's house and **above their dining room table** was a picture of a **man being electrocuted**. In their family room they have a **life-size lethal injection** table. Above their **baby's crib** they have **mobile** with little dangling hangman's nooses...

Are these the kinds of people you want to be friends with? You want your **kids playing with their kids?**

- Yet this is the image Jesus used... and his **disciples told him he was crazy**. They were like, *"Jesus. You can't start a movement going around telling people they need to strap on their electric chairs and come after you. People like self-empowerment. They like upward mobility. Give them that stuff."*
 - **But Jesus didn't hold back.** He said, "Finding me is finding everything you've been searching for. But you have to be willing to abandon everything to follow me."
 - And btw, this was **not just for an elite few**, like a Varsity subset of Christians. Did you see the detail at the beginning of vs. **34**, "he called the crowd to him with his disciples." Not just the 12 Apostles he is speaking to here, but everyone.
 - *Are you ready for that?*
 - I think of when Jesus called the **RJR**. Why not start by asking for a tithe?... It's all or nothing. You can't come to God with any conditions or hedging your bet in any way.
- Now, the point is not that God has called all of you to resign your job like Elisha, or even to give away all your money.** The point is that there's nothing off-limits to God. No area in which you say, "No, God I won't obey you there. No, God, you can't have that."
- ...And that your life takes on the flavor of **sacrifice and service of the cross.**
- You see, I do know that.... I **can't tell you exactly** what God will have you do specifically with your life—he leads some to be missionaries and others to be bankers; some to take care of **foster kids**; some to serve in the **prison ministry** (others to serve in student ministry—which can feel sometimes like prison ministry); some to reach their **co-workers** and lead a small group—I can't tell you specifically what it will be—but I can *assure* you that following Jesus means your life takes on the air of sacrifice and service.

- Yet I hear people talk about **Jesus and how he helps them** achieve their potential and their best life now ...
- **Think of the Apostles...** According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*:
 - Every single one was martyred.
 - Doubting Thomas was pierced with a pine spear, tortured with red-hot plates, and burned alive in India.
 - In AD 54, the proconsul of Hierapolis had Philip tortured and crucified because his wife converted to Christianity while listening to Philip preach.
 - Matthew was stabbed in the back in Ethiopia.
 - James was thrown off the southeast pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. Miraculously, he survived the 100-foot fall and he was then clubbed to death by a mob.
 - Simon the Zealot was crucified in Syria in AD 74.
 - Peter was, of course, crucified upside down, at his own request.
 - The only disciple who didn't die a martyr's death was John, but that's only because he survived his execution. When a cauldron of boiling oil could not kill him, Emperor Diocletian exiled him to the island of Patmos.³
- Now, admittedly, they were a special class of people, Paul said so, but **do you really think that** following Jesus for them meant **that**—pain and the cross, and **for us it means simply flowers and roses and 'God bless you' and self-fulfillment?**
- Vs. 34, “and he called *the whole crowd* to himself and said these things...”
 - Listen, if you're into power... and earthly reward and personal fulfillment, become a Muslim. The **head of Islam rode** on a horse and conquered cities.
 - Our Savior rode on a **donkey and washed feet**. He called himself a servant and died on a cross for criminals and those who had betrayed him...
 - Which one do you want to follow?

³ Primary source is *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. This version is adapted from Mark Batterson, *All-In*, 19.

- **I often think about this...** in heaven, seeing Jesus, who hung on a cross; meeting the Apostles... “I tithed.”
 - You're not supposed to seek martyrdom, or persecution, but I have to constantly ask myself the question, “**Am I really following Jesus**, or am I simply using him to help complete a self-centered life, to give me my best life now?”
 - **James 1:27**. True religion is giving yourself away for those who can't pay you back.
 - **Where am I doing that?**
 - **Where are you doing that?**
 - Are you following Jesus? Is your live characterized by surrender, sacrifice and service, or are you using Jesus to complete a life focused completely on yourself?
 - **Occasionally tip him.**
 - I think of the words of **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”
- So: 1. The path to “something greater” begins in the valley of surrender, sacrifice and service.*
- 2. The POSSIBILITIES of “something greater” are realized only through bold acts of faith.**
- Vs. 21 tells us that he burned the plow and here's a detail... **21** “**Then he arose and went after Elijah...** Elijah left! He had to chase him.
 - There was an abandonment, an all or nothing to Elisha's response...
 - *Listen to this.* (From Mark Batterson):

“On February 19, 1519, the Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés set sail for Mexico with an entourage of 11 ships, 13 horses, 110 sailors, and 553 soldiers. The indigenous population upon his arrival was approximately five million. From a purely mathematical standpoint, the odds were stacked against him by a ratio of 7,541 to 1. Two previous expeditions had failed to even establish a settlement in the New World, yet Cortes conquered much of the South American continent.”

What Cortes is reported to have done after landing is an epic tale of mythic proportions. He issued an order to... **burn the ships**. As his crew watched their fleet of ships burn and sink, they came to terms with the fact that retreat was not an option.

(Now, I realize that what the murdering and pillaging that Cortes would do is **morally repugnant**, but if you could compartmentalize that for a minute...) *there is a **lesson to be learned** from what Cortes did here.*

*Nine times out of ten, failure is resorting to Plan B when Plan A gets too risky, too costly, or too difficult. That's why most people are living their Plan B. They didn't burn the ships. Plan A people don't have a Plan B. It's Plan A or bust. They would rather crash and burn going after (what God has told them) than succeed at anything else.*⁴

- **Some of you need to act boldly in faith.**
 - You know God has called you to **go overseas**.
 - Go ahead and tell **your parents**. Today. Tonight.
 - Resign the job and **enroll in seminary**.
 - He's calling you to **move your residence** into one of these neighborhoods as part of our *Dwell* initiatives.
 - To **start the adoption** process, or the application process for fostering.
 - To **walk across the room** to share your faith with a neighbor...
- *Quit messing around with it and act boldly...*
- Parable of the **golden minas**:
 - Jesus called the servant who buried the mina, "wicked."
 - Not unwise or "squandering" but "wicked."
 - Meaning: there's always risk involved in obeying God, and to not take those risks Jesus' considers to be wicked.

⁴ Mark Batterson, *All-In*, 50.

- So take the risk!
- Obey the impulse.
- College student: go overseas for 2 years.

*Let me show you something. Let's **fast-forward** Elisha's life 18 years. He's been Elijah's **servant for 18 years**.*

2 Kings 2:8-14

[8] Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

[9] When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you?" And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me."

[10] And (so Elijah) he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so."

[11] And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. [12] And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" (as if Elijah hadn't seen them). And he saw him no more.

- OK, so "coolest death ever..."

But there is more...

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. [13] And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

[14] Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

- **children**, if you accept it. Then your **neighbors**. Then your **community**. Then the **nations**.
- Jesus said, “**Greater works** than I have done, you will do!” (Greater does not mean **greater in their power**, for what greater work is there than raising the dead? Greater means **greater in number**.)
- Double the number! Elijah did **14**; Elisha did **28**. We have the **cloak of authority to multiply** Jesus’ works in people groups all over our planet!
- Here’s a thought I don’t often hear talked about: **The RYR became the ROR...**
 - On his deathbed, what was the **last thought** went through his mind? Maybe, the words of Jesus: “**Follow me.**” What **could have been** true of his life?
- **Don’t let that be you.** Now is the time to **act boldly!**

3. The **POWER to pursue “something greater” is found in the heavenly vision**

- Elisha saw a vision of Elijah being taken up into heaven. It was a terrifying vision.
 - In my opinion, **all the paintings** I’ve seen get this moment of Elijah’s ascension wrong.
 - When I was about **8 years old** my church did the greatest thing... They replaced the all-text Bibles in our pew racks with these big, KJV Bibles with pictures of oil paintings depicting Bible scenes. **I remember this picture** depicted Elijah ascending to heaven in this sparkling chariot with fire trailing off behind it, like some **scene out of Hunger Games**, on top of these **white, fluffy** clouds. It looked so pleasant.
 - **Wrong.** This was a tornado. Even Elijah’s **chariot is on fire**. And the horses are on fire, too.
- This picture **represents judgment**, which is why **Elisha tore his clothes** when he saw it.
- **You see, when people** see this kind of thing, they usually **die**.

- So, here’s Elisha with Elijah’s cloak in his hand, and he’s like, “Well, here goes...” and he slaps the water with Elijah’s cloak the way Elijah did... and when he does, the waters draw up into walls on either side like secret passageway opening up, and he walks through.

So, in other words, Elisha got what he asked for.

- In fact, if you **count up the number** of miracles Elijah did, it was 14. If you count up Elisha’s, it’s 28. Elisha got the double-anointing... **because he didn’t hold anything back.**

Write this down: Elisha got what he asked for because he didn’t hold anything back.

The great blessings of faith come only from bold moves of faith.

For many of you, **I see that your lives could be so much more.** You are living a **good life**; you’re a **decent person**; **making money**, but **not making an eternal difference** for anyone. You **could have an eternally significant life.**

- But you have to **act boldly. Burn** the ships. **Invest** the mina.
- ~~(Jesus said, For whoever would keep his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will keep it. (Mark 8:35))~~
 - You find your greater life by giving your old, good life away.
 - Remember the little rhyme you used to say as a kid, “Finders, keepers; losers, weepers?” According to Jesus, it’s actually “losers, keepers; finders, weepers.”)
- You want to **keep plowing the fields** with your **24 oxen**? You might be forfeiting **28 miracles**.
- *Oh, what your life could be!* It’s not Elijah’s cloak offered to you, but **Jesus’ cloak!**
 - He said, “**All authority** is given to me in heaven and earth! Go in **my name!**” You have the authority in Jesus’ name to **set captives free**, starting with your **own**

- When **God descended upon Mount Sinai** at the giving of the 10 commandments, it had been with fire and tornadoes, and God had them put up a perimeter around the base of the mountain and he said, “*Don’t even come near this line. If you do, you’ll be immediately killed.*”
- But here, **Elisha sees Elijah lifted up** on top of judgment rather than destroyed!
 - And in that moment he saw a **prefiguring of Christ**. When Jesus died, there was **lightning and thunder**, as the **fire of God’s justice** tore through Jesus’ body. (**Why the cross?** God’s **justice against our sin** was being executed. His **righteous wrath** for our sin was being poured out.)
 - But **like Elisha**, we saw **someone ascend** into heaven alive, on top of the judgment.
 - And what we see is **greater than what Elisha saw**. We see Jesus, risen from the dead, **ascended** to God’s right hand, **ever-living** to make intercession for us.

- Elisha saw the judgment of God, and realized he was safe. And **this vision became his sustaining vision** to leave it all behind, to endure sacrifice and persecution, and to faithfully do all that God called him to do.

And we see Jesus.

- One of my favorite parables, I tell it all the time... **Matthew 13:44** (Justin Bieber’s t-shirts he’d actually sweat in)
- **Joy!** Jesus is the reward for the Christian life.
- **And so he offers all of him for all of you.** It’s a good trade.

Conclusion:

My goal: To get you to **act boldly**.

- God has **something greater** for you, any many of you will **never obtain it**, because you won’t follow the path of **surrender, sacrifice, and service**, and you won’t **act boldly**.
 - *Oh, you could be so much more!*

- *24 oxen or 28 miracles?*
- **Eric Liddell**
 - The 100m was on Sunday, and he wouldn’t run on Sunday. Could only do the 400, a much different race. But he would not budge.
 - If he had run in his own heat, no one would ever have heard of him. I can prove it... can you name the Gold Medalist for the 100m in the 1928 Olympics? **GREATER**.
 - This wasn’t his only act of faithfulness. God called him to be a missionary to China. When the Japanese took over, he had a chance to flee, but didn’t. He went to the prison to be with the Chinese. Those who knew him said, the most selfless life they’d ever seen. He was selected to be released from prison as a part of a prisoner exchange and he gave up his spot to a pregnant woman.
 - This is the path of the cross, and it leads to an enduring legacy.
- What does faithfulness look like for you?
- (*And I don’t want to make it sound like if you do this you’ll resign your job and become a missionary. The point is faithfulness.*)
 - God leaves many people right where they are.

- **My dad and his faithfulness.** But he faithfully served his church; radically generous with his money. He’s where I learned to **give 20%**. He **served every week** at our church. He led **small groups**. He went on **mission trips**. He told his **co-workers about Jesus** and had them in our house all the time; he **sacrificed his preferences** to keep me around the church. On **Saturdays** he wasn’t out playing golf all the time, he was with me on student activities. And God gave him the **greater things**.
 - **Whatever** God is telling you to do; I want you to **obey** him fully.)

GREATER.

If you've never become a Christian... are you ready to surrender your all?

Or maybe you've **assumed** you are a **Christian** but you have **never really laid** it all down for him. Are you ready to do that **today?**

