

## Family Worship – Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Hello everyone and thanks for joining us for another week of Family Worship.

If you have access to Facebook, please go to our Facebook page where you'll find today's Family Worship on video: [www.facebook.com/muckamorepc](http://www.facebook.com/muckamorepc)

If you don't have access to Facebook, here's some of the contents for you to read.

We reach an important moment in Elijah's life this morning – it's time for him to hand over his role as the Lord's prophet in Israel to Elisha. Moments like these can be confusing and uncertain for people who are open to God and are trying to live the way he would want them to live – change often brings confusion and uncertainty. Yet, the Lord provides us with anchors that hold us steady in the changing circumstances of life.

Please pray together, giving thanks to God that his perfect love never changes, and his mercies never cease. Ask him to forgive us for trying to find our own way through life from day to day without allowing him to help us to do what's right or letting him guide our thinking so that we make decisions and choices that honour him and are good for us and the people around us.

Then read the Bible passage we'll be looking at together for yourselves – it's 2nd Kings 2:1-22 – if there's more than one of you, perhaps you could take it in turn to read.

Sermon: "Elijah: swing low, sweet chariot"

From the day he walked away from the family farm to become Elijah's attendant, Elisha knew that sooner or later it was bound happen - Elijah would be taken away by the Lord. Elijah had all but had his day when he and Elisha had begun their partnership – he appears only twice between that day and the day the Lord handed over his role to Elisha. Both of those occasions involved Elijah delivering rather grim messages from the Lord - first to Ahab and Jezebel, and then, later, to their son, Ahaziah – messages that described how they were going to die, and it wouldn't be pretty, for any of them because they'd done so much "evil in the eyes of the Lord", and each of them came to a rather grisly end, just as Elijah said.

And so it was time for Elijah to take his leave and hand over to Elisha. His farewell marks the end of an era. To Elisha, he was a hero; yet even Elisha is gobsmacked at what he sees – "*The chariots and horsemen of Israel*" – Elijah receives an escort usually reserved for royalty; the chariots and horsemen protecting their charge; keeping back anyone or anything that might seek to hold Elijah back from his divine appointment. And then he was gone; in the blink of an eye, caught up in a whirlwind. Any wonder Elisha felt nervous and anxious? Any wonder the company of the prophets were at a bit of a loss to know what to do next? It was a moment of transition in the Kingdom of God and it felt like a disaster.

Such times are never the easiest for God's people – but the Lord understands that, which is why he includes passages like this in the Bible in the first place – to help **us** understand that such moments in life aren't the *disasters* we might think they are, but moments we can find reassurance and hope in the Lord. While the circumstances of life constantly change, there are anchors that remain sure and steadfast for us in the Lord. In some ways, the last six months have felt like a disaster since Coronavirus bounced onto the scene and closed down so much of daily life through lockdown and restrictions that have affected most areas of life, including Sunday worship and other church activities. It has left many people confused and uncertain – feelings that have carried across into organisations and businesses and churches alike. What's next? What do we do now? Well, 2 Kings 2 reveals several things that provide hope and assurance for God's people in the shifting circumstances of life, both in terms of the everyday situations we face as individuals and families as well as God's work within the church. What sort of things do we find here? There's God's power. Picture the scene – Elijah and Elisha walking side by side with the prophets of Jericho in tow. They reach the River Jordan and stop – what'll happen now? The other prophets stand back a bit to watch and see – Elijah takes off his cloak, rolls it into a sort of

stick and strikes the water with it – dry ground appears and the two men walk over to the other side of the river. Once the two of them reach the other side Elijah asks Elisha *“What can I do for you before I’m taken?”* Elisha replies *“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit”*. Good ask – mind you, given the enormity of Elisha’s respect and regard for Elijah, a double portion of his spirit would be a hard thing to obtain – as Elijah himself admits. However, if Elisha sees him when he’s being taken, his prayer will be granted – we can only assume it is because the text doesn’t explicitly say; it merely tells us that Elisha does indeed see his master being caught up in the whirlwind. But any doubt we might have is completely removed as the Lord’s power reaches down to Elisha in the same way it had to Elijah - *“When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over”* 2 Kgs 2:14. To the waiting prophets the message was loud and clear: *“The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha”* – but remember this: the power wasn’t Elisha’s any more than it had been Elijah’s; it was God’s power flowing through each of them. Elisha recognised that as he hit the water with the cloak – *“where now is the Lord; the God of Elijah?”* Without the Lord he’d have ended up with a soaking wet cloak instead of a dry path! And the same is true today. Jesus says in Jn 15:5 *“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”*. Achievement and success in the work of the Kingdom isn’t down to human beings; it’s down to the Lord as his power flows through those who have a heart for him and whose hearts are open to him. The God we worship today is the same God as Elijah and Elisha worshipped. Yes, the world of our day is very different from theirs; we face different cultural problems from them; different aspirations from the people of their day; very different technology from the chariots and horses they used. But the God of 850BC is just as powerful today as he was then; and his power is every bit as much an anchor for us in the shifting circumstances of life as it was then.

So, too is God’s wisdom. The Bible constantly points out how wisdom is so vital for human beings, especially Christians. Wisdom matters; and Elisha has it. His fellow prophets, however, didn’t quite manage to exercise it on this occasion. Having just witnessed what he’d been able to do, they recognised Elisha’s authority; *“the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha”* – yet they didn’t pay a blind bit of notice to what he had to say. *“Shall we send men to look for Elijah?”* they asked – *“No, you’d only be wasting your time”* answered Elisha. *“But they persisted until he was too ashamed to refuse. So he said, “Send them”*. And off they go, searching for three days, and surprise, surprise, Elisha was right; it was the wrong thing to do. How often that happens in life. People turn for help to someone they regard as wise and sensitive only to ignore the advice they’re given and persist in having their own way and end up no further forward. It happens in the church, too. People often persist with things that others in wisdom advise them against but they refuse to listen. Power is everything, we think; wisdom, nothing. True, wisdom isn’t one of God’s spectacular gifts but what a spectacular difference it makes when it’s exercised! And it’s freely available, as Jam 1:5 makes abundantly clear: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him”*. Trouble is we’d rather have our own foolish way instead of listening to God. Yet God’s wisdom will help us keep our heads when all around are losing theirs.

The third anchor for us in the shifting circumstances of life is God’s grace. Jericho is evidence of that grace and its effects. We’ve all heard of how Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down but what of the curse he inflicted on that city? *“Cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates”*. Surprise, surprise, in the days when Ahab ruled – the Ahab against whom Elijah had been pitted so often and under whose reign the vast majority of people in Israel didn’t give a toss about God or his Word – a builder from Bethel called Hiel took on the challenge of rebuilding the city, presumably in the hope of making his fortune. But at what cost? His eldest son died while the foundations were being laid and his youngest as the city gates were being hung. Jericho was a place under curse and it continued to

be to Elisha's day – the problem? Its water supply was contaminated and everyone believed it was causing death and miscarriages in both animals and people in the surrounding area. Elisha responds using a new bowl filled with salt and empties it into the spring – but be careful; this was only a visible sign of something that the Lord was doing for these people: *“This is what the Lord says: “I have healed this water...”* Other people might've thought to themselves, *“I could've done that ages ago if I'd known it only needed a bit of salt”* - but they'd have been wrong. It wasn't the salt healed the water; it was the Lord. He chose to overturn the curse and give a blessing of grace; and he still does it today – even for people like us. Which is why his grace is an anchor for us in the shifting circumstances of life – particularly when we make a mess of things. There's hope for us here: no one is beyond God's grace. The curse we brought upon ourselves through disobedience, wrong behaviour, foolish talk, rebellious attitudes, reckless living – the Lord can heal it! So we should never think we're beyond grace; never think we're a hopeless case; no matter how sinful we may think we've been, look at Jericho; see the curse; experience the grace. God's presence is with us wherever we go, whatever we do – he is with us by his Spirit in a way he wasn't with people in Elisha's day when the Spirit was only with a particular person for a particular purpose at a particular time. And, of course, Jesus himself gave us this promise: *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”*. And so his presence, the presence of God, makes his power, wisdom and grace available to us in our everyday lives. So don't try to get through life on your own; don't rely on your own abilities no matter how good those abilities might be. Draw on God's power, wisdom and grace. Let them become anchors for us in the shifting circumstances of life; anchors that keep us true to the Lord and walking in his ways; anchors that help us find reassurance and hope in the Lord.

Please pray for others as you finish:

1. Give thanks that despite the restrictions within which we gather for worship – either in the church building or in our own homes – we can still know God's presence as his people, reassuring us of his grace and prompting us to live well for him.
2. Give thanks for a return to school despite the many obstacles and uncertainties it has involved. Pray for all those involved in delivering education in our schools, asking God that he would give patience, creativity, resilience and safety as they continue to grapple with necessary restrictions and unusual patterns of teaching and supporting pupils.
3. Pray for the friends living and working in other parts of the world that we support through our Missions Fund – M & A (Poland); Nathanael & Elizabet (Croatia) – together with PCI's global mission workers and partners across the globe supported through United Appeal. Ask that God would bless their work and encourage them in life and witness as they continue to minister for him in a multitude of settings and circumstances.

Thanks for joining with us today. And may the blessing of the Lord God be upon you and all whom you love. Amen