

THE VALUE OF YOUR CALLING...

The background of I Kings chapter 19 was that Elijah had called for a drought, prayed it would not rain, and it didn't. Then he met with Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and they had a pray-down. God answered and Baal did not. Then Elijah had slain 450 false prophets. One woman became angry and Elijah took off running. He was more worried about one woman than 450 prophets. He got under a juniper tree with the attitude that all was lost. He just wanted to die. God sent an angel who took care of him, and then he headed on further into the desert place where he hid in a cave. God asked him what he was doing in there and told him to come out, as He wanted to talk to him. Then God began to deal with Elijah.

In chapter 19, we pick up the story after the matter of the wind, the fire, the earthquake, and then the still small voice. Verses 13-14 read, "And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a

voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, 'I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.'

Do you ever feel like you are the only one left? If so, you are having an 'Elijah' experience. Verses 15-17 continue, "And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." That was one fighting prophet! You do not usually think of Elisha going around lopping off heads, yet that was part of his commission.

Verse 18 continues, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not

bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." In essence, God was saying, "You think you are alone? I have kept seven thousand for myself that you did not even know about. They are scattered around the country."

Verses 19-21 continue, "So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: And Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

I want to draw your attention to the last part of verse 20, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" Can you imagine a preacher saying this? I imagine they would be comforting words to those whose hearts wanted to go back to what they been

in; but to a saved person they would almost be an insult.

I know a minister who became exasperated with his church people's lukewarm ways. He told them, "You should go down to the bar and get drunk. Go ahead. If you are able to do it, then it is evident you have never been saved. Just acting like it. If you cannot do it, then maybe, there is hope for your soul. Good night." He then dismissed them. Some started to think, "If we can go back to our sin comfortably, then we probably were never saved. And, if we have been saved, then why are we muddling around and doing nothing about it?" You *do not* play games with God! That is not what this passage is talking about, but it is an application for lost people to consider. This is serious business!

This passage is primarily for saved people. They are the words of Elijah to Elisha, "Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" In other words, "If my putting the mantle on you, and the call you just received were words from me as a man, go back and live your life like you have been living it. But,

if what you heard and the call you received, came from God, then how dare you turn back?"

I want you to consider the value of your calling. How highly do you value your calling? That is what Elijah said to Elisha. "You have been called – how important is that to you? Is this something you can just toss-off and go on with life? Is it something you can toss aside to spend more time with family; or is it so exceedingly valuable that priorities get rearranged and your choices changed?"

People face a crossroad; they take the easy turn, and then somehow think they can get back on the road. When you come to a fork in the road, you either go back to what you were doing, or you can head off to where you have been called. If you pass that point, you might have great difficulty ever getting back and having a second chance at the fork in the road. We need to understand; God does *not* keep calling and calling. There is a high value to the call of God.

Elijah said, "If you think it was my call and not important, then go ahead and turn back. If you

want to quit later, you might as well do it now. But, if it is important enough to change your life – your occupation – your relationship with family – and anything else that needs to be done, then you need to follow according to the call.”

Those are sober words, “Go back again: for what have I done to thee?”

Elisha responds. “It wasn’t you Elijah, God called me.”

“If God called, why did you ask about going back?” That is not said, but is implied. Elijah said, “You think I have called you? What have I done? I am just a messenger of the Almighty. What are you going to do? Go back if you think it is what I did.”

We see in verse 19 that the mantle had been cast on Elisha. Elijah did not throw his mantle around anyone and everyone. It was the first time. He said, “It is for you to take over in my place.” In verse 16, Elijah received the message that Elisha had been hand-picked by God to do a work. Elisha found out – the mantle was put around his

shoulders. According to verse 17, he had been selected for a particular ministry.

When the mantle was placed, he quivered and said, "I have a job. I have family." Elijah asked, "Is that all this means to you? You think this is of me? You think these are your choices to make? Then just go back."

People are doing that today. God calls and they say, "Well, I have a job. I have plans. I have a family. I have this or that." And they turn aside from the call of Almighty God. Then they try to justify it in their minds and hearts. The world will help you justify it. Religion will help you justify it. Family will help you justify it. Churches may help you justify it. But the issue remains, *did* God give a call to your heart, *not* whether you wanted a call or not.

My family and church know there are some verses I do not understand. One of them is I Timothy 3:1, "If any men desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." I cannot for the life of me, figure out why anyone would want to be a pastor. I understand that some people think they are getting

into easy street, i.e., they will only need to work a few hours a week and yet, get a full week's pay. But they do not understand what the pastorate includes.

I have never understood that verse. I did not volunteer for the pastorate. I did not even seek the pastorate. But when God called me, I was not about to turn back. I understood the 'value of the call of God' and the necessity of following His leading. My father had been a pastor, so I understood some of the heartaches but that did not have a thing to do with the call of God.

Elisha was called, chosen of God. He was doing all right. A rich farmer, he was working with 12-yoke of oxen out in the field. I do not think he ran all 12, because there were others around, but he was running the last set so that he could keep track of where the first 11 were going. A yoke of oxen does not come cheap. Twelve sets are a lot, and you do not plow a one-acre patch with that many oxen. You are into big-time farming. He had 11 or more servants. He was a strong man, who could handle his own responsibilities with his own yoke of oxen, while overseeing the others. He was in

charge. This speaks of wealth, ability, strength, and success.

Elisha was called to follow a wandering preacher who was known to hide in caves, to leave the country, and be fed by a starving widow. Elijah was always politically incorrect in the face of the King and Queen. He was somewhat on the bloody side, for he killed the prophets of Baal. He was also somewhat erratic, as he preached and then disappeared, preached and then disappeared again. Here Elisha is leaving a successful farming enterprise to follow such a man. But he did. In fact, he sacrificed a yoke of oxen, took of the instruments they had, boiled the flesh, fed the others, and said, "I am going to learn, prepare, and be used for whatever God wants." When the issue arose, as to whether it was just a man or God speaking through the man, Elisha recognized it was God. He said, "I can't push this off as though some person is talking to me. It is God talking to me through Elijah."

You know the account in II Kings 2, when Elijah was about to be carried up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha said, "I want a double portion

of thy spirit. With all that you did, I need at least twice as much to be able to continue this ministry. I need a double portion.”

In verse 10, Elijah responded, “... Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.” Suddenly, a chariot of fire comes down between them. But Elisha does not get caught by the sensational once-in-a-lifetime chance to see something that he can use for preaching illustrations the rest of his life. He keeps his eye on Elijah as he is carried up in a common whirlwind to heaven.

The mantle falls and Elisha gets the mantle, goes to the river, hits the water, and says, “Where is the God of Elijah?” The water parts and he goes across.

Elisha had asked for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, and God allowed him to see exactly two times the miracles that Elijah performed. Actually, Elisha saw two times minus one, but still accomplished twice as many. Remember, at his death they dumped his body in a pit? Later, they

dumped a dead man in the pit and when he hit Elisha's bones, he came alive. The miracle rounded the score to an even twice as many miracles as Elijah had performed. He had the double portion. He even had a ministry after death, similar to Abel who being dead yet speaketh. What he asked for he received because he recognized the value of his calling and followed it. He allowed no one to sway him. He was of a different temperament, had a little different ministry, but he was obedient to the calling that God had given to him.

Now, with this backdrop, let us go to the New Testament and look at the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 9:57, 58, "And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." That would discourage many people. Verses 59-62 read, "And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, 'Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.'" Jesus said unto him, Let the

dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

That phrase, ‘me first’ is interesting. It will not work in the ministry. You do not turn back. Elisha thought about turning back and Elijah said, “Go on back. What have I done to thee?” Here is one who said, “Let me turn back first and then I will play catch-up. I will follow your calling and get into the ministry on my schedule.” But you do not run on your schedule. You must run on God’s schedule.

Look at Romans 11. I will not argue with you regarding the interpretation. All Scripture has one single interpretation but many verses have a variety of applications. This will be at least an application, whether or not you can regard it as the interpretation. Verse 29 reads, “...the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” God does not repent of having given His gifts to man. He does not repent of giving His calling. One of the

worst things that can happen to a person is to have the gifts and the calling, and not be able to exercise them, but to have to sit on a shelf.

God does not withdraw the gifts and the calling. He just withdraws the opportunity to use them. Elijah said, "Elisha, Go back. What have I done to thee?"

"You mean I might be on a shelf? I would still have the gifts and the calling but lose the opportunity?" Elijah was going on. God is not going to wait around on people He has called. God is moving on and those with God are moving on. Those who will not be with Him are going to be left behind.

"What have I done to thee?" How important is this? God is not calling any of the angels, none of the cherubims or seraphims. He is not calling the archangel to preach and minister His Word. His calling is for mankind who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. We are to go and represent the Son, reaching the lost of the world. People treat God's calling as though it is second-rate to mowing grass – or just below a minimum wage

job. It is something to be despised and rejected. Nay! It is a marvelous thing to be called! You may be despised and rejected, but do not despise and reject the calling of God. Recognize the high value of your calling in the plans and work of God. He is not going to repent of giving that calling.

We looked earlier at the matter of the church, the body of Christ, and how God places those that are gifted ministers to outfit the people and the church. God calls and gifts all of His children to do something. He saved us to serve Him. He saved us to bring Him glory; He has a calling for each of us. It might be as a wife, mother, and to raise children to the glory of God. It might be as a prayer warrior, Sunday School teacher, to witness and reach souls in the community, and encourage the pastor ever onward. What is the calling of God for you?

Do not do what I did in the seventh grade. I tried to figure out how I could mix sports with serving God. I could have my calling, plus God's calling, and all still work out fine. The Lord gave me polio, so that I could just forget my calling to sports. So

you see adults are not the only ones who do this, children do it as well. It is the nature of the flesh.

God would ask the question. "What have I done to thee?" If you would put your hand to the plow and turn back, then you are not worthy of the kingdom of God. You are not one to be counted.

When God calls, we need to respond and to value that call. We need to pursue that call with excellence. We must stay with God's call, so that we can be used to our greatest ability at whatever He has called us to do. We need to avoid any disqualifications. How many people have been called to the ministry and then knowingly and willfully disqualified themselves by some poor choice - whether in marriage, finances, or sin in general? They are no longer blameless and of good report. They did not value their calling above the temptation to sin. They did not value their calling enough to stay right. They became disqualified.

I knew a man who was one of the most gifted preachers that I have ever known. He read Matthew Henry cover to cover - all six volumes. He was capable, when preaching, to pause for a

moment and quote paragraphs from it regarding a given verse. He had the closest thing to a photographic mind that I know, but he made a choice and God stripped him of a world-wide ministry in months. He spent the rest of his life, for all practical purposes, on a shelf – with all the knowledge, all the gifts, and the calling. He knew what it was to minister in power, and then he knew there was no power. God had disqualified him. He lived more than 25-years, disqualified after such a ministry.

I am pleading with you. Hear the calling. Value the calling. Protect yourself for the calling. Do not disqualify yourself for any calling that might come. Elisha had not disqualified himself, so he was capable of receiving the call. Learn to prepare for your calling. You may have to wait for the opportunity to follow through on the calling. Elisha was called to be a prophet, but he did not begin his preaching until Elijah died. That was all preparation and waiting time. He did not say, “I might as well be back on the farm living comfortably and making money until the opportunity comes.” No, God was getting him

ready and he needed that time of preparation before he stepped in. When the calling came that was the crisis point. It was not something to put off, take an option on, or think about.

Let us think on the practical side. What are some of the issues involved in preparing and being qualified for the call of God? Of course, a person must be saved before they would be called. Spiritually, we ought to be holy. That ought to be near the top of the list. We need to learn to have power in prayer. We need to learn to be effective in witness. We need to know what it is to be empowered by the Holy Ghost. We need to know how to be Biblically sound in belief and practice. We need to know how to operate in the spiritual warfare, and to learn as much as possible. For when the calling comes, the warfare will increase and we do not want to get blown away. We need to learn how to be wise in counsel, honest of heart, and humble of soul. These are the spiritual qualifications for the calling, as well as for being able to exercise the calling.

There are some mental qualifications: being studious; becoming knowledgeable and learning

all we can; being alert to what is going on; being curious to pursue lines of study, follow them, and obey whatever God might show us. Becoming apt to teach is important. We ought to be organized in our thinking. We ought to expand in various areas and depths, rather than just being satisfied with a little here and there.

Physically, we need to be holy. If you are going to make your body a living sacrifice, you need to be holy and acceptable unto God. The body has to be kept holy and we need to live virtuously, clean, pure. We need to be active physically.

Unbalanced servants are not very useful. Those that run to emotional extremes usually do not get much to do from God. We must learn how to control our emotions rather than be controlled by them. Learn how to be meek and gentle – for the servant of the Lord must be gentle. Learn how to be consistent emotionally so that people will not wonder what frame you are in, whether they might or might not want to approach you.

Socially, learn how to be acceptable and mannerly. Learn not to be offensive. Learn to have habits that

would be for our benefit and not our hindrance. Just a few habits can open doors. I have also seen where little habits can shut doors too. People have not been able to minister because they have been offensive. They have socially handicapped and limited the exercise of their calling.

Then there is the matter of work habits. A person needs to know what hard work entails, and how to work hard without being made to do so. If a person is going to be used of God it is hard work, but it is worthy work. We need to know how to push ourselves. We have too many lazy ones collecting on 'Christian welfare', thinking that is ministry. We need to know how to work intensively, not just on the surface, but to pour ourselves into the work. Know how to be consistent in your work, not up and down.

Know how to be diligent to get the work. Be energetic in accomplishing the work. The world can hardly find these qualities today. They are the marks of someone the world would value. The marks of one God would use.

Remember what Pharaoh said to Joseph about his brothers? If they met certain qualifications, they could not only watch their flocks, but also Pharaoh's, which turned them around financially. He asked if there be any men of activity among them. God is looking for that kind. He is not looking for those that have nothing to do, but for those who are already busy. They know how to work hard.

When it comes to separation, we need to know how to be separated from sin, compromise, the world, and worldly amusements. We need to know how to keep from being entangled with the affairs of this life. That is one of the requirements of a soldier, according to I Timothy 4. Many people are so tied-up in the affairs of life, they do not know if they can ever get free. I have a friend who was in the ministry. His goal was to have his affairs in such a condition that if God would call him to move, he could do so within two weeks. He called it, un-entanglement.

In times of crisis, when Uncle Sam sends a letter that you're needed and being called up for his service, you can't write back saying, "I am

wanting and planning to come, but it will take me three-years to get my affairs settled." You cannot run an army under those conditions and the Lord does not operate that way either. If God gives a call, you may have to butcher a few oxen, burn-up the implements, and burn the bridges behind you. You will need to move on and know how to get free of the entanglements of this world. This is what the Bible teaches.

You can be a success as a farmer, a fisherman, a tax collector, or a Pharisee, but that is not enough. You need to prepare and qualify yourself to operate according to the call of God. There is a phrase, "Many are called, but few are qualified or chosen to serve." They had a call, but they turned back. They had a call, but they did not value it. They had a call, but they did not prepare themselves.

God is looking out and seeing that the fields are white unto harvest, but the laborers are few. We do not have the workers for they never valued the call. They never responded to the call. When a qualified worker is needed, there are almost none to choose from and send out. Oh, yes, plenty were called, but

few are qualified and chosen. I added a little on that verse – you know the phrase, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” I think that would apply to this matter of the calling of God.

There are more single women on the mission fields than single men. It is hard for me to believe that God has called women and did not call men to go with them. It does not mean that women should stay home. It means there are men who did not listen to God. If I read right in the book of Acts, the early missionary teams were men. I look today, and it is mostly women. The men have heard the call in a service, or in a devotional reading, or in a Sunday School class, in a Missionary Conference, or while they were on their knees praying. They did not value it and would not prepare for it. Later on, they were never able to follow the call.

Back in the 1950's, I remember it being preached that the judgment of God had already begun. God was judging America with the curse of materialism. The people would get so 'thing-conscious' and 'money-conscious' that they would lose their God-consciousness. The curse was coming as prosperity and materialism. It would get

into the churches to where people would hear the call of the money and the call of position and would devalue the call of God. It is now nearly fifty-years later and I believe those preachers 'hit the nail on the head.'

I have since watched schools that formerly were for the training of preachers add more and more majors to survive, until the graduates who are preaching on the mission field are such a small fraction of the school that they can meet in a corner of the campus. I can name institution after institution. Their main emphasis used to be training preachers. Now, they train a whole lot of other things. I am not attacking them. What I am saying is that they do have students coming in who want to learn how to make money in business, how to be school teachers, how to be nurses, doctors, scientists, engineers, and on-and-on it goes. They hear the call of the world but they do not hear the call of God. They do not place a value on the call of God!

Let me ask you, what has God called you to be? What has he called you to do? I do not believe that everyone is called to the ministry – some of you

are ladies. Some of you men may never get called to the ministry or the mission field. Some of you may already be disqualified. But I cannot believe there are as few being called, as are answering the call. I just have trouble believing that. Between God not calling as many, and the ones who are called not following, America is in desperate trouble.

Once the British Empire went around the world and the sun never set on it, but it died off. America's empire can collapse just as quickly or more so. "To whom much is given, much is required." The secret of America has been the preachers in the pulpits and the missionaries that we sent out. Sadly, this is no longer the case. We can produce goods, but we cannot produce the goods that the nation needs.

Do *not* devalue God's call. Elisha didn't. If at that moment, he had turned back, there is no evidence here, or in all that is suggested otherwise, that he ever would have had another chance. If God calls do *not* turn back – He may only call you once. Know the value of your calling.