

“GOD AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF ELISHA”

(Before scripture)

DO YOU EVER HAVE THE EXPERIENCE OF STUMBLING UPON SOMETHING UNEXPECTEDLY THAT TURNS OUT TO BE AN ENTHRALLING DISCOVERY?

I HAVE AN OLD FRIEND NAMED CAZZIE THAT SOME OF YOU HAVE HEARD ME MAKE MENTION OF, WHO WAS MASTERFUL AT STUMBLING UPON THINGS THAT NONE OF THE REST OF US HAD EVER HEARD OF.

IT MIGHT BE A NEW MUSICAL GROUP OR A NEW SPORT OR A NEW SAYING.

CAZZIE KNEW ABOUT CROSBY, STILLS & NASH LONG BEFORE WE COULD EVEN KEEP THE NAMES STRAIGHT.

HE KNEW ABOUT FRISBEES WHEN IT SOUNDED, TO THE REST OF US, LIKE A NEW FAST-FOOD CHAIN.

WHEN CAZZIE FIRST STARTED CALLING PEOPLE DORKS, WE THOUGHT IT WAS A COMPLIMENT. WE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS THAT IF CAZZIE TALKED ABOUT SOMETHING, IT WAS BOUND TO EVENTUALLY BECOME FASHIONABLE.

UNLIKE CAZZIE, I RARELY HAVE STUMBLED UPON SOMETHING THAT I WOULD CLASSIFY AS AN ENTHRALLING DISCOVERY.

ONE TIME COMES TO MIND, THOUGH.

I PICKED UP A BOOK IN A BOOKSTORE THAT WAS ON A CLEARANCE SHELF.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE THAT OBVIOUSLY HADN'T SOLD WELL BECAUSE IT WAS HARDBOUND & A RECENT PUBLICATION & IT HAD A TWO DOLLAR PRICE TAG ON IT.

IT WAS ENTITLED BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY AND IT WAS AN ENTHRALLING DISCOVERY.

THE BASIC PREMISE OF THE BOOK IS THAT ONE CAN DISCOVER MORE ABOUT A PERSON'S BELIEFS THROUGH THEIR ACTIONS THAN THROUGH THEIR WORDS.

TO MAKE HIS CASE, THE AUTHOR INCLUDES CHAPTERS ON MARTIN LUTHER KING, DAG HAMMARSKJOLD & CLARENCE JORDAN.

HE SUGGESTS THAT EVERYONE HAS A STORY & THEIR BELIEF SYSTEM IS INCORPORATED INTO THEIR STORY.

BASICALLY, THAT'S THE PREMISE OF OUR ADULT SUMMER SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM THAT WE'RE IN THE MIDST OF RIGHT NOW – “THE LIVES OF GREAT CHRISTIANS.”

WE DON'T CALL IT “THE *THEOLOGY* OF GREAT CHRISTIANS.”

WE'RE LEARNING WHAT PEOPLE BELIEVED BY THE LIFE THEY LIVED.

YOU, TOO, HAVE A STORY TO TELL.

YOUR STORY CONSISTS OF THE MANY WAYS IN WHICH GOD IS WORKING IN YOUR LIFE.

AS WE MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR THE “UNBINDING YOUR HEART” PROJECT THAT WE’LL ALL BE A PART OF IN THE FALL, I WANT TO CONSIDER THIS IDEA OF “BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY.”

THIS SUMMER, WE’LL BE FOCUSING ON A VARIETY OF INDIVIDUALS & SEE GOD AT WORK IN THEIR LIVES.

WE’LL LOOK AT TWO INDIVIDUALS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, TWO FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT, TWO FROM CHURCH HISTORY & THEN TWO FROM THE PRESENT.

YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL & WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS CLOSELY INTERTWINED WITH THAT STORY.

I WANT TO BEGIN BY TAKING A LOOK AT A MAN ABOUT WHOM YOU MAY KNOW VERY LITTLE & THAT, WE’LL DISCOVER, IS A SIGNIFICANT PART OF HIS STORY.

OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING PROVIDES THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION THAT PROBABLY VERY FEW OF YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER – “*WHERE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT DO WE FIND THE MIRACLE OF THE FEEDING OF A MULTITUDE THROUGH THE HANDS OF A MAN?*”

LET’S READ ABOUT IT IN II KINGS 4:42-44.

(After scripture)

CONTRARY TO WHAT SOME MAY HAVE THOUGHT, ELISHA WAS NOT THE WIFE OF ELIJAH ANY MORE THAN THE EPISTLES WERE THE WIVES OF THE APOSTLES!

ELISHA WAS A PROPHET IN HIS OWN RIGHT JUST AS ELIJAH WAS.

AND YET, WHEN WE THINK OF ISRAEL’S PROPHETS, PRIOR TO THE ONES WHOSE NAMES ARE ATTACHED TO A BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, ELISHA ALWAYS PLAYS SECOND FIDDLE TO ELIJAH IF, IN FACT, HE IS MENTIONED AT ALL.

TO SOME EXTENT, OF COURSE, THIS MAKES SENSE.

AFTER ALL, ELIJAH CAME FIRST.

ELISHA WAS A PROTÉGÉ OF ELIJAH.

TO A LARGE DEGREE, ELISHA LEARNED HIS CRAFT FROM ELIJAH.

ELISHA LIVED MUCH OF HIS LIFE IN THE SHADOW OF ELIJAH.

THROUGHOUT MOST OF HIS LIFE, ELISHA’S MINISTRY WAS ECLIPSED BY THE AWESOME REPUTATION OF HIS PREDECESSOR.

EVEN AFTER ELIJAH WAS GONE FROM THE SCENE & ELISHA WAS WELL-ESTABLISHED IN HIS WORK, HE WAS STILL KNOWN AS THE MAN WHO – AS IT SAYS IN II KINGS – “*USED TO POUR WATER ON THE HANDS OF ELIJAH.*”

EVEN TODAY, ELISHA REMAINS IN THE SHADOWS – THE RELATIVELY OBSCURE UNDERSTUDY OF A GREAT PROPHET.

EVEN THOUGH GOD PERFORMED TWICE AS MANY MIRACLES THROUGH ELISHA AS HE DID THROUGH ELIJAH, IT IS ELIJAH WHOSE NAME IS REMEMBERED.

BUT HERE'S THE FIRST LESSON IN ELISHA'S "BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY."

HERE'S THE FIRST EXAMPLE OF THE WAY IN WHICH GOD WAS WORKING IN THE LIFE OF ELISHA  
– THE PROPHET DIDN'T CARE.

ELISHA WAS COMPLETELY CONTENT IN BEING KNOWN AS THE MAN WHO FOLLOWED ELIJAH.

ELIJAH HAD ENDURED ONE TRIAL AFTER ANOTHER & WHAT HE NEEDED – WHAT GOD DIRECTED  
HIM TO FIND – WAS SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO SUCCEED HIM IN HIS MINISTRY.

EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, THOUGH, HE NEEDED SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE HIS COMPANION,  
HIS ENCOURAGER, HIS SUPPORTER & HIS FRIEND.

HE NEEDED SOMEONE TO SHARE THE TRIUMPHS & DEFEATS, THE MOMENTS OF GREAT JOY &  
THE MOMENTS OF DEEP DESPAIR.

THAT ROLE FELL TO ELISHA.

BEFORE ELISHA EVER PERFORMED HIS FIRST MIRACLE, BEFORE HE HAD EVER BEEN LOOKED  
UPON AS A GREAT MAN OF GOD, HIS CALLING WAS SIMPLY TO BE ELIJAH'S FRIEND & SUPPORTER.

HE PROVIDED A LISTENING EAR & HE OFFERED WORDS OF WISE COUNSEL.

IT WAS TRUE THAT ELISHA Poured WATER OVER ELIJAH'S HANDS AS A SERVANT.

BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY THAN THAT, HE Poured THE REFRESHING WATER OF  
ENCOURAGEMENT OVER ELIJAH'S HEART.

FOR 10 YEARS, UNTIL THE OLDER PROPHET WAS FINALLY CALLED INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD,  
ELISHA SERVED ELIJAH.

HE WALKED THE DUSTY ROADS OF SAMARIA WITH HIM.

HE STOOD BY HIS SIDE UNTIL THE VERY END.

THAT IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF ELISHA'S STORY.

PERHAPS IT'S AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOURS AS WELL.

WHEN WE LOOK IN THE BIBLE, WE FIND A NUMBER OF ELISHAS.

THERE WAS JONATHAN, WHO STOOD BY DAVID'S SIDE IN THE CRITICAL TIMES OF HIS LIFE.

THERE WAS BARNABAS IN THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

MAYBE THAT'S A ROLE TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED AS WELL.

MAYBE THAT'S PART OF *YOUR* STORY THAT TELLS A GREAT DEAL ABOUT WHAT YOU BELIEVE –  
BEING A SUPPORTER, AN ENCOURAGER, A FRIEND – BEING SOMEONE WHO WILL STAND BY ANOTHER'S  
SIDE, SHARING THE TRIUMPHS & DEFEATS, THE MOMENTS OF GREAT JOY AS WELL AS THOSE OF DEEP  
DESPAIR.

THERE IS PERHAPS NO HIGHER CALLING THAT GOD CAN PLACE UPON A PERSON.

THERE IS PERHAPS NO BETTER WITNESS THAT CAN BE OFFERED THAN TO BE A PERSON  
SOMEONE ELSE CAN RELY UPON, SOMEONE WHO WILL ALWAYS BE THERE, SOMEONE WHO WILL BE AN  
ENCOURAGER, A SUPPORTER, A FRIEND.

THE GREAT PREACHER LESLIE WEATHERHEAD TELLS A STORY THAT HE HEARD IN WORLD WAR II.

WHEN A SOLDIER WAS INJURED AND COULDN'T GET BACK TO SAFETY, HIS BUDDY WENT OUT TO GET HIM AGAINST HIS OFFICER'S ORDERS.

HE RETURNED, MORTALLY WOUNDED, AND HIS FRIEND, WHOM HE HAD CARRIED BACK, WAS DEAD.

THE OFFICER WAS INCENSED.

*"I TOLD YOU NOT TO GO," HE SAID. "NOW I'VE LOST BOTH OF YOU. IT WASN'T WORTH IT."*

THE DYING MAN REPLIED, *"OH, BUT IT WAS, SIR, BECAUSE WHEN I GOT TO HIM, HE SAID, 'JIM, I KNEW YOU'D COME.'"*

RARELY WILL ANY OF US BE CALLED TO GO TO SUCH EXTREME LENGTHS & YET WHAT A WONDERFUL THING IT IS TO BE THOUGHT OF AS JIM'S FRIEND THOUGHT OF HIM.

TO BE THE KIND OF PERSON OF WHOM ANOTHER WOULD SAY, *"I KNEW YOU'D COME"* IS THE EPITOME OF A LIFE STORY FOCUSED ON THE CALL OF GOD TO SERVE OTHERS.

ELISHA – IN HIS SERVICE TO ELIJAH – WAS SUCH A MAN.

HIS "BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY" IS FIRST OF ALL, THAT OF A MAN WHO CARED MORE ABOUT BEING A SUPPORTIVE FRIEND THAN RECEIVING ACCOLADES & ADULATION.

OUR SCRIPTURE LESSON FOR THIS MORNING PROVIDES US WITH ANOTHER CHARACTERISTIC OF ELISHA THAT DISPLAYS THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD WAS WORKING IN HIS LIFE.

IN A TIME OF WIDESPREAD FAMINE & ECONOMIC INSECURITY, ELISHA WAS GIVEN A WONDERFUL GIFT BY A DEVOUT MAN FROM THE PAGAN CITY OF BAAL-SHALISHA.

IT WAS CLEARLY A GIFT FOR *HIM*.

ELISHA CHOSE, INSTEAD, TO LOOK AT THE WAY HIS GIFT MIGHT BENEFIT OTHERS.

HE LOOKED OUTSIDE HIMSELF TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE AROUND HIM & TRUSTED THE POWER OF GOD TO TAKE WHAT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN TO MIRACULOUSLY BE USED ON THEIR BEHALF.

WHAT A GREAT STORY THIS IS.

YOU CAN'T READ IT WITHOUT THINKING OF ANOTHER STORY, CAN YOU?

IT IS SO STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO THE ONLY MIRACLE STORY THAT IS TOLD BY ALL 4 GOSPEL WRITERS – THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000.

IN BOTH STORIES, FOOD IS TAKEN & MULTIPLIED TO SERVE A GREAT CROWD OF PEOPLE WHILE THOSE WHO STAND BY, SCOFF AT SUCH A SUGGESTION BECAUSE IT SIMPLY ISN'T POSSIBLE.

ELISHA TRUSTED IN THE POWER OF GOD TO USE HIS GIFT IN A MIRACULOUS WAY.

ARE YOU A "TRUSTER" OR A "SCOFFER?"

ARE YOU WILLING TO TRUST THAT GOD WILL USE THE GIFTS HE HAS GIVEN YOU TO POWERFULLY TOUCH THE LIVES OF OTHERS?

OR ARE YOU MORE INCLINED TO SCOFF AT THE THOUGHT THAT YOUR LIFE CONTAINS A MIRACLE JUST WAITING TO BE PERFORMED?

ELISHA'S "BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY" OFFERS US A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF A MAN WHO TRUSTED THAT GOD COULD USE HIM & USE WHAT HE HAD TO OFFER TO HELP OTHERS.

GOD WAS POWERFULLY AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET ELISHA.

ELISHA ALLOWED GOD TO WORK THROUGH HIM.

FIRST OF ALL, HE WAS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT BEING A SUPPORTER, A COLLEAGUE, A SERVANT, AN ENCOURAGER & A FRIEND THAN HE WAS ABOUT ACCOLADES & ADULATION.

SECONDLY, WITH THE GIFTS HE WAS GIVEN, HE USED THEM FOR OTHERS TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

I MENTIONED AT THE OUTSET THE BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY BOOK THAT I STUMBLED UPON THAT I FOUND TO BE AN ENTHRALLING DISCOVERY.

IRONICALLY, ANOTHER BOOK THAT I STUMBLED UPON IN MUCH THE SAME MANNER CARRIES A SIMILAR THEME.

IT'S BY THE GREAT BIBLICAL SCHOLAR WALTER RUSSELL BOWIE & IT'S ENTITLED SEE YOURSELF IN THE BIBLE.

BOWIE'S APPROACH IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF BIOGRAPHY AS THEOLOGY.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION, HE SAYS, "WE RECOGNIZE THAT UNLESS WE ARE TAKEN HOLD OF BY SOMETHING BIGGER THAN OURSELVES, LIFE CAN BE FLAT & SHALLOW.

*BUT HOW DOES IT COME ABOUT – THIS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A LIFE THAT HAS MEANING AND A LIFE THAT HAS NONE?*

*SOMEBODY MAY TELL US IN GENERAL TERMS WHAT THE ANSWER IS, BUT WE MAY FAIL TO GRASP IT UNLESS WE SEE IT.*

*TO LOOK AT MEN & WOMEN OF THE BIBLE, IN THEIR VIVIDNESS AND THEIR VARIETY, MAY HELP US SEE IT.*

*IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT THE GRACE OF GOD WROUGHT IN SOME OF THEM – AND EVEN IN ORDINARY ONES – WE MAY SAY, 'I BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THE POWER IS THAT CAN MAKE ME WHAT I OUGHT TO BE.'"*

LIKE ELISHA, YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL.

MAY YOU BE INSPIRED BY *HIS* STORY TO SERVE AS A TRUSTWORTHY FRIEND & MAY YOU ALLOW GOD TO WORK MIRACLES THROUGH THE GIFTS YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO SHARE. AMEN.

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