

“Ready... or Not?”

2 Kings 2:1-3, 9-12; Mark 9:2-9

As many of you know, Barrie and I were blessed... and cursed... to have inherited a fairly large family home in Baton Rouge. (A house that might also fit with a definition of a swimming pool: ‘a hole in the ground into which one pours money!’) Regardless, one of the blessings of this house is that it afforded us a **great place** for our children and grandchildren to **gather**. And particularly for that younger generation, gave them a LOT of rooms...places to run, explore, and play.

One of their favorite pastimes was to engage their ‘Pops’ (me) in a game of **hide-and-seek**. They would take great joy in having their grandfather close his eyes and count to 10 as they scurried around the house looking for that perfect hiding place. Upon ‘loudly and proudly’ reaching that magic number of 10, I would exclaim those familiar words: *“Ready or not, here I come!”* And Pops with great **anticipation** would go around the house, looking **high** and **low** in search of those **bright, shining faces**. And when I did come **face-to-face** with those **precious ones**, we all would **celebrate** my discovery with **great exuberant joy** and laughter. Ultimately, it was much more than an exercise of ‘hiding and seeking’... but much more importantly, simply to **BE together**...

Now, what transpired in our stories with Elisha and Elijah, and with Jesus and his trio of disciples, was certainly MUCH more significant than a game of ‘hide and go seek’ between a doting grandfather and his *beautiful* grandchildren. ☺ That being said, it WAS certainly with great **anticipation** that those close protégés of Jesus and Elijah ‘followed their leaders’ **high** and **low**. While they did not understand all of what was happening, those ‘followers’ did so with great **joy** to be in the presence of one that they **cared for** so deeply. They all looked forward to that time when they would **celebrate** as one in seeing their beloved Father God **face-to-face**...to simply BE TOGETHER in that one beautiful place we call ‘heaven.’

And yet, as **powerful**, as **poignant**, were the experiences that Elisha and Peter, James, and John had, they both came with **conditions**, restrictions. As the chosen successor to the great prophet/leader Elijah, Eli-SHa asked his mentor to be given a ‘double portion’ of his ‘spirit’... to be anointed by God with twice as much spiritual strength as his predecessor To which Elijah replied, **“IF**

you see me as I am taken away, it will be granted you; if not, it will not. (2 Kings 2:10) And shortly thereafter, to be incredibly ‘whisked away’ in a whirlwind.

Similarly, after witnessing the miraculous ‘transfiguration’ of Jesus, as he stood before them along with that same Elijah, and Moses, that ‘trusted trio’ of followers of Jesus were no doubt both anxious and excited about what they had seen. But Jesus, sensing their natural tendencies to want to share with others what they had seen, did what he would do on numerous occasions to the **eyewitnesses** of His **miraculous power**: ***“He ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until AFTER the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”*** (Mark 9:9)

In both these instances, WHY were such **conditions** placed on them? Why was it necessary for both the ‘apprentice prophet’ and the ‘disciples-in-waiting’ to be **restricted** in their requests and actions? God has spoken directly to Elijah telling him that this was to be his successor... the next great prophet and leader of the Chosen People. God’s Son had hand-picked these three, along with their fellow disciples; they had learned under his teaching, witnessed his miracles, supported him in his ministry. All of these ‘student-servants’ seemed prepared to take on greater responsibility. Were they **“Ready... or Not?”**

As we read about Elisha’s experience, and in particular how it relates to his request, it’s really hard to tell just *what* the outcome was. Was he ‘ready’ to receive that ‘double portion’ of Elijah’s spirit...His drive...His power? In verse 11 it says that ***“As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.¹² Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!”*** (2 Kings 2:11)

Now, did this ‘separation’ by the ‘horses and chariot’ prevent Elisha from actually ‘seeing’ Elijah be carried up into the whirlwind? It’s not really clear. It does say that ***“Elisha kept watching...”*** Was he ‘watching’ his ‘champion and hero’... OR the ‘chariot and horsemen?’ It does go on to say ***“But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.”*** (2 Kings 2:12) This would lead us to believe that he did ‘see’ Elijah, but even so, still engaged in the typical expression of grief and mourning, the tearing of one’s clothes.

And with regards to the ‘reward’ that Elisha asked for, the “double portion of Elijah’s spirit,’ no further mention is made of it. But, as we later read that Elisha parted the waters just as Elijah had on their last journey, it would appear that the same power that the great prophet displayed

also resided in his successor. 'Double or not,' the same Spirit of God at work in Elijah's life was also present with Elisha. Apparently Elisha WAS ready to continue in the work Elijah had begun...

What this says to me is that we will have those persons in our lives... 'Elijahs'... that inspire us to be better leaders, better parents, better grandparents, better friends, better Christians. Those whom we wish we had a 'double portion' of their spirit. And that the best way to be able to 'multiply our inheritance' of good from another is to continue to 'see' them... to 'watch' their actions... that no matter what 'whirlwind' of life we may encounter, we keep 'our eyes on the prize' of our relationship with them. A relationship we will mourn when it is lost. But one in which that person knew of our constant faith and abiding love. A love that says, as Elisha did, ***"As the Lord lives... I will not leave you."*** (2 Kings 2:2) A love that is 'READY' to follow...

And speaking of 'ready to follow,' Peter James and John certainly seemed 'ready' to do anything that they could to show their allegiance and support to Jesus. Peter, always the most headstrong of the bunch, was all ready to build 'temple tents' for the 3 great church leaders. Jesus, as I said earlier, anticipated that they were ready to go tell all who would listen how they had seen such a powerful manifestation of Jesus' nature as the Son of God. For he told them NOT to do so until after He had risen from the dead. Clearly JESUS did not think that the time was right for them to start talking about His true identity. WERE they ready?

Peter had sure seemed ready earlier in this Gospel when Jesus asked him who he thought Jesus was, and he answered, ***"You are the Messiah, the son of the living God."*** (Mark 8:29, Matthew 16:16) But how did Jesus respond then? The same way as now: ***"He told them with strong words that they should tell no one about Him."*** (Mark 8:31)

"With strong words." Wouldn't you *love* to know just what constituted 'strong words' for Jesus? I'm sure just a 'little' different than what you or I would use! Clearly, HE must have felt that there was still much that they had to learn to be prepare for what lay ahead of them. Verse 10 says that ***"So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this 'rising from the dead' could mean."*** (Mark 9:10) Without doubt, the concept of the **resurrection** is one that is most central to the Christian faith. One that you'd better be SURE of what you're talking about...

But aside from the disciples not being ready to **give** the Good News, Jesus was also likely concerned about the preparedness of those who would **receive** the message of salvation from the disciples. Even devoted followers of Christ, as well as those who were open to his message, still thought of Him as the conquering King, the promised one who would lead them from oppressive

rule of the Romans to the 'promised land' of peace and freedom. The persecution and suffering... The Cross... the Tomb... these were all foreign concepts to those who thought of him only in terms of power and might, rather than humility and sacrifice.

So, it was also Jesus concern that those who did not know him as the disciples did were ALSO 'not ready.'

So what does this mean to us? Heck, we know all there is to know about Jesus, his suffering, his cross, the empty tomb, right? Hmm... only you, in the quiet of your hearts, can answer if you're ready to share with others the Good News of Jesus Christ. I think that we all, to one extent or another, must continue to, as the disciples did, 'question what this rising from the dead could mean.' We all must continue to grapple just what this risen Christ means to us individually, and how he challenges us to communicate that to others. And during this Lenten season we are about to begin, we must consider what are those barriers in our lives to a closer walk with our Lord Jesus... and to sharing that walk with others.

And as we consider our own 'readiness,' we must also pray for the preparedness of those who do not know Christ. That just as the property for the new church building out at MorganField will need to be properly graded, prepared, and made ready for building, so too does the soil of people's hearts be prepared to receive the message of hope that can only come from Christ. NOW is the time that God is making ready the fields to be ripe for the harvest. A crop that WE need to start harvesting... right here in the 'grain silo' we call a sanctuary... right here, in this very room.

Earlier I referred to our house in Baton Rouge with its 'many rooms.' The Scriptures reminds us of another reference to this familiar phrase: ***"In my Father's house there are many rooms."*** (John 14:2) NOT a 'human house' in which to pour our money. But an eternal one, in the heavens, in which to pour our *souls*. It is there that we find our *true* Father. One who doesn't try to *hide* from us. (Though too often, we think we can hide from *Him*!) But He does want us to seek *Him*. And even when we are not looking for God, our Father, through His Son, says to us: **"Ready or not... here I come!"**