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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I have been preaching through the Big Events of the Old Testament and we have finished talking about Elijah. A couple of weeks ago I gave the message, "Murder in a Vineyard," the story of Naboth's vineyard and Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah's successor is Elisha. Don't get the two confused. One is Elijah with a "j" and one is Elisha with an "s." Of all the people in the Bible who perform miracles—of course the Lord Jesus performed more than anybody, because he was God in the flesh—but the other people who performed miracles in the Bible are numerous, including Moses and the plagues and all the miracles surrounding the exodus; then second was Elisha. Elisha performed many miracles, but the thing is, a lot of them are what we would call "minor miracles" or "obscure miracles." Once you understand the nature of a miracle, there is no such thing as a *minor* miracle. We're going to look at five of these miracles tonight. Next Sunday I'm going to talk about some more of Elisha's miracles. The point I want to make as we begin is in every miracle there is a message, and in every message in the Bible there is also a miracle. So, when you read about a miracle, try to find the message God is trying to teach you and any time you read a message in the Bible look for the miracle that is contained within.

Tonight we're looking at five miracles and five messages. I want to talk about the transition between Elijah and Elisha.

2 Kings 2:7-10. "Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?' 'Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,' Elisha replied. 'You have asked a difficult thing,' Elijah said, 'yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.'"

There's a good lesson there for anybody who has a teacher or a mentor: Keep your eyes on them at all times. You never know when you are going to learn something that's important and life-changing. So Elisha kept looking at Elijah.

2 Kings 2:11. "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind."

Of everybody in the Bible, in the Old Testament, two people who did not die physically. Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, was walking with God and suddenly he was not, for God just took him. The second character in the Old Testament who did not go through physical death was Elijah. He is with Elisha and a chariot of fire came down from heaven and picked him up and carried him away. There is a great interest about the "Rapture of the Church," when we are raptured out. In I Thessalonians 4:17, where it talks about the Rapture, it says "we who are still alive and are left will be caught up" it's the word *harpadgo* the Latin word *raptio* that's where we get the word "rapture." When they translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, which was called the Septuagint LXX [seventy, because there were seventy scholars who did it] they came to this word in the Old Testament where it says in verse 11, "Elijah went up," guess which

word they used? They used the word "rapture," *harpadgo*. What you need to know, Christian, is that what happened to Elijah is what's going to happen to Christians when Jesus comes back. We won't die we'll be caught up just like Elijah. Well, Elisha saw it and suddenly he was all by himself. Elijah was caught up into heaven in this whirlwind and his mantle comes floating down and Elisha picks it up. Elisha then assumed the role of prophet of God.

MIRACLE #1: WALKING THROUGH THE WATER

Then he begins to perform some miracles. We're going to look at five of them tonight. I call miracle number one "Walking through the Water." Now the two of them have already come to the Jordan River once, and Elijah hit the water with his cloak and it separated and they walked through.

2 Kings 2:14. "Then he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it. 'Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over."

Here is a bit of Bible trivia. Three times in the Bible the Jordan River parts for people to walk across. One was Joshua, as he led the children of Israel into Jericho. The second time was what we just read about when Elijah and Elisha walked across. The third time is right here. It's the final time in all the Bible, when Elisha is all alone, and he does the same thing. You need to understand the significance of this miracle. You may say, "Well, that's kind of a minor miracle, it's already been done." But here's Elisha. He's all alone. His teacher, Elijah, is gone and on the other side of the Jordan were some of these servants of the prophets of Jericho. They saw Elijah and Elisha walk across that dry land and now all they see is Elisha coming back by himself, so this was sort of a prophetic test for Elisha. Would he trust God the same way Elijah trusted God? Here he is with this barrier between him and what God wants him to do and he has enough faith in God that he does what Elijah had done. He rolls up the mantle and strikes the water with it and it spreads apart and he walks across. Elisha could have picked up Elijah's cloak, put it on his shoulders and turned around and walked away from the Jordan River. If he had done that, he would have missed out on God's best for his life. Instead, he trusted God and really showed faith and he performed the first miracle.

Message: When you follow God, He will always make a way

Here's the message of that miracle: When you follow God, He will always make a way. In other words, it may seem like there are obstacles in front of you, there may seem to be barriers, may seem to be rivers you can't cross, mountains you can't climb, valleys you can't descend into, but if you are following God, there is nothing that can stand in your way! God may be leading some of you here tonight to do some things He has been calling you to do. He may be calling you to some kind of ministry and you are afraid of God's will for your life, because there is a river of unbelief, there is a river of opposition, there is a river of confusion in front of you. All I want to say to you is you need to do the same thing Elisha did: You need to trust God and follow God and when you do that, He will always make a way even if has to move mountains into the sea or split rivers.

MIRACLE #2: SALT IN THE SPRING

Here's miracle number two: I call it, "Salt in the Spring."

2 Kings 2:19-22. "The men of the city said to Elisha, 'Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.' 'Bring me a new bowl,' he said 'and put salt in it.' So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and he threw the salt into it, saying, 'This is what the Lord says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.' And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken."

Message: God can remove the curse of sin

I want to go ahead and give you the message in this, because I need to explain it as we talk about the message. Did you get the miracle? The waters were poisonous and the land would not grow any crops, so Elisha throws a bowl of salt in that spring and suddenly the water was good and the crops were producing. Here's the message: God can remove the curse of sin! So where did this miracle take place? We are talking about the city of Jericho. About seven or eight hundred years before this miracle took place, Joshua and the children of Israel came across the Jordan River and entered into battle against Jericho, but they didn't have to draw their swords or draw an arrow. They marched around Jericho seven times, once on each day for seven days. On the seventh day they shouted and "BOOM!" and the walls fell down. Jericho was the most important city in that part of the world at that time. It would have been the most logical, reasonable thing for all of the Israelites to inhabit Jericho and be content to stay right there on the edge of the Promised Land. Go back and read the book of Joshua. In chapter 6 God said, "I don't want you to do that! In fact, I'm going to declare that the city of Jericho is accursed and so is any man who tries to rebuild Jericho." So for six centuries hardly anybody lived there. Six hundred years later, Elisha comes along and there is a group of people who are trying to rebuild it, but they can't because the curse of God is still there! It's as if Elisha prays and God says, "Okay, Elisha I'm going to allow you through my power to remove the curse!" So he takes salt and he puts it into the spring.

Did you read that last verse? It said that the waters remain good to this day! I can vouch for that! About four months ago when I took a group to Israel, we stopped at Jericho, where we always do, it's one of the most beautiful places. We drank the water there. It's one of the most beautiful, fertile areas of all of the Holy Land today and the reason it is, is because God allowed Elisha to perform this miracle. What's the miracle to us? Here's the miracle! We live in a world that is cursed! We live in a world that is full of the poison of sin! It's the curse God pronounced upon Adam and Eve. He said, "Because sin is in your life, sin is going to inhabit this world." Yes it's a cursed world out there. There are many poisonous waters out there, but do you know who we are? Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth!" God has called you and I to go out and insert ourselves into the poisonous waters of the lost, cursed world and when we do that, people come to know Jesus Christ. When a person comes to know Jesus Christ, the curse of sin is removed from their life. Who have you been "salt" for?

MIRACLE #3: BEARS FOR BAD BOYS

Here's miracle number three. This is one that is one of the most obscure, strange miracles in all the Bible. Many of you tonight have never even heard of this miracle! I call it, "The Miracle of Bears for Bad Boys," not the Bad News Bears, but "Bears for Bad Boys." You may not even believe this is in the Bible but there it is in chapter 2:23:

2 Kings 2:23-25. "From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. 'Go on up, you baldhead!' they said 'Go on up, you baldhead!' He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria."

You'd better not call me "baldheaded!" On the surface some people read that miracle or that incident and say, "Oooh! I just don't like that. That just seems so mean and cruel to me!" This has caused a lot of confusion. One reason I think is that in the King James Bible it says, "Some little children came out and stalked him." Actually the Hebrew word there is *na'ar*, which has been used to indicate *young men*. For instance, when Isaac was 28 years old, the word *na'ar* was used for him; it's the same word here. When Joseph was 39 years old, the word *na'ar* was used for him. So, it is the Hebrew word that can mean anybody probably below the age of forty. So if you get the idea of some cute, little toddler coming out there and saying, "Hey, you baldhead," and a bear coming and getting them, that's wrong. These are what we would call "young toughs." This is probably just a game to them.

There is something else you need to know about this story to put it in context behind the scenes. This was at Bethel, which means *house of God* and ever since Jacob met God there, it had been a holy place, until just a generation before, because the Bible says Ahab and Jezebel in their terrible, pagan fertility worship set up a fertility bull, Baal, at Bethel. Where once God had been worshiped at Bethel, now they were carrying on some kind of promiscuous fertility worship! These were people who were not just ordinary citizens: These were people involved in the worship that was an animosity against God. They were enemies of God. They were enemies of the prophet of God. It wasn't like they were just making fun of him because he was baldheaded. When they said, "Go on up!" They were saying? They were saying, "Why don't you just do like your mentor did? Why don't you just go on up to heaven yourself, you old baldheaded guy, you? So, there is more behind the scenes than we know. These folks were expressing real animosity. So, God did something. "Justice is mine," says the Lord." Elisha pronounced a curse on them. You say, "That's so terrible to pronounce a curse!" Well, is it? That's exactly what the Lord Jesus did to the cities of Korazin and Bethsaida. "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe unto you, Bethsaida." (Luke 10:13) So, these bears came out and by the way, it does not say those bears *killed* those teenagers or those young guys; it says they tore them. I don't know what that means. It just means they got hurt pretty bad. I'll guarantee you one thing—nobody else in Bethel ever called him "a baldheaded prophet" anymore!

Message: Don't ridicule God's servants

Well here's the lesson you can learn and I think it is a good lesson: Don't ridicule God's

servants. I'm not just talking about pastors or ministers, I mean anybody who's a servant of God—don't you dare ridicule them! Anytime you insult a servant of God, you are insulting God! You had better be very, very careful about *ever* criticizing any child of God and you be very careful about criticizing any church, because the Bible says the church is the bride of Christ. "Do you want to get me really mad? You criticize my bride!" Do you want to be an insult and an affront to the Lord Jesus Christ? You criticize and ridicule his bride, the church. This is nothing new, these scoffers and people who are making fun of God's Word. In 2 Peter 3 the Bible says, "the closer we get to the second coming of Jesus Christ, that is going to be the attitude of more and more people." 2 Peter 3:3 says, "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised?' Ever since our fathers died, every thing goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." When some of you teenagers talk to your friends about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ if they are not Christians, they will usually laugh, saying, "They have been saying Jesus is going to come back for two thousand years."

MIRACLE #4: DITCHES IN THE DESERT

Let's look at the fourth miracle, I call, "The Miracle of Ditches in the Desert." Let me just tell you this story. Sometime you can read about it in chapter 3. The king of Edom and the king of Judah and the king of Israel all go into battle against the king of Moab. They go out into the desert for seven days. This single army is really three armies. They have all the soldiers they need, they have all the weapons they need, their spears were sharpened, their arrows were sharpened, they were ready to go into battle but when they were seven days out in the desert, they suddenly run out of something critically important: WATER. Here they are with no water and they are out in the desert. For seven days they were without water and were dying of thirst. They didn't know what to do. Finally, one of them said, "Let's call the prophet of God." So they called for Elisha. Elisha comes down there and says, "I want you to dig ditches out here in this desert. Dig lots and lots and lots of ditches, because tomorrow it's not going to rain, there is not going to be any wind, but if you'll dig the ditches, God will fill the ditches with water. Not only that, but you'll go over there and whip the Moabites!" Then Elisha left.

Those soldiers had two choices. The army could have said, "Dig ditches in the desert? There's no water here. Why would we want to dig holes in the desert?" If they had done that, there would not have been any water. But those kings did a very wise thing. They decided to *trust* the word of God and the prophet of God and so they said, "Okay, guys. Get out your shovels." I can just picture thousands of soldiers going out there into the dry, parched desert land digging trenches. The Bible says the next morning when they woke up, those ditches were full of water. That's a miracle!

Message: We need to work to receive God's blessings

Here's the message. You and I need to work to receive God's blessings. God wants to bless everybody in this room in a certain way. Sometimes God says, "Listen. I'm ready to bless you but I can't bless you until there is a place for you to contain the blessing." So, sometimes He says, "I need you to dig a ditch; I need you to get a place ready where you can receive what I have for you." But what do we say? "Oh, no. I'm not going to do that until I see what you have

for me." He says, "No. It doesn't work that way. You do what I tell you to do and when you get ready to receive it; then you will receive it." If most of us had been there that day, we would not have dug the ditches. We would have said, "That's stupid! There's no water! There's not a cloud in the sky. Why should I dig a ditch?" I'll tell you why you ought to dig a ditch—because God *said* to do it! This book contains a lot of commands and principles that don't make any sense whatsoever to us, but the truth is you and I don't have enough sense for God's word to make sense to us. Sometimes all we have to do is just obey what God says do things the way God says to do it and when we do it, he'll fill our ditches!

MIRACLE #5: ONGOING OIL

Here's the final miracle. I call it, "The Miracle of the Ongoing Oil."

2 Kings 4:1. "The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.'"

She was distraught because her dead husband owed some money and because she couldn't pay his debts, his creditors were going to demand that her sons become slaves. This is what Elisha told this widow to do. "I want you to borrow as many pots and jars and containers as you can from your neighbors. So, she did that. She went next door and got an empty pot and an empty barrel and an empty jar. They filled up her house with all of these empty pots and jars. Then Elisha said, "Take your little container of oil and start pouring into those empty pots." So the widow did. What usually happens when you pour it out? It empties! But the widow found that when she poured the oil out and filled up one pot, there was still more to pour so she kept pouring and pouring and pouring until every single jar and pot they borrowed was filled to the brim with oil. Back then oil was a very valuable commodity. The Bible says when she filled up the very last pot that was borrowed, that was it! I don't know about you but if I had been that widow, I would have wished I had borrowed some more pots and jars. Wouldn't you? That is the miracle.

Message: Honor and obey God and you will always have enough

Here's the message: Honor and obey God and you will always have enough! That is the promise of the word of God. The Bible does not say you will have *more* than enough. The Bible may not say you'll have *all* you want, but the Bible says you will have all you *need*. I have found? I have found that if you honor God with the first ten percent of your income every month it's amazing that the ninety percent that's left over can do more than the one hundred percent before you tithe on it! That's does not make sense mathematically, does it? That's just drives accountants crazy! But when you honor God first with his tithe and then you start pouring out your income that month, it just seems to keep on until there is all that you need. Oil is a beautiful symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

CONCLUSION

There's a lesson here I didn't bring out: You and I are the empty vessels God wants to fill with

the oil of his Holy Spirit. God cannot fill a vessel that's already full. Some people are so full of their own selves, their own ideas, their own hobbies, their own jobs, their own whatever, you want to say they can't be full of God's Holy Spirit. The other thing is God won't fill a dirty vessel. Sometimes you want to come to God and say, "God, fill me with your power. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. but God says, "I won't fill a dirty vessel." Tonight maybe you just need to empty yourself of those things that are keeping you from being filled with Jesus. You need to get rid of some of that dirty filth that's keeping him from filling you with the oil of his Holy Spirit. When you do that, you'll find that the provision of the Spirit He gives to you will never run out.

OUTLINE

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