

Passionate Surrender – A Consuming Fire!

This is the second in a series of messages based around the beginning days of ministry for Elisha the prophet.

In the last sermon we looked at the calling of Elisha found in I Kings 19.

It should be clear to anyone who is attempting to be a Christ-follower that God has called every one of us to be engaged in His service to others.

God is looking for a people full of passion.

Christ followers are passionate people.

Christ followers are people who burn with a passion to serve God and others.

Serving God is much more than an emotional experience.

Serving God is more than great worship and good music.

Serving God is more than reading our bibles and praying everyday.

Serving God is more than keeping ourselves unspotted from the culture around us.

Serving God is always about others.

God is calling this church to another level of walking with Him.

God is calling you to another level in your spiritual journey.

Maybe you are resting.

Maybe you have taken a break for a little while.

Maybe you have put your time in and just don't feel it any more.

God has no reserves or weekend warriors.

God is looking for people who will serve Him by serving others.

Let's look at the scripture reading for today's sermon.

II Kings 2:1-13

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to Bethel."

But Elisha replied, "As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!" So they went down together to Bethel.

³ *The group of prophets from Bethel came to Elisha and asked him, "Did you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?"*

"Of course I know," Elisha answered. "But be quiet about it."

⁴ Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to Jericho.”

But Elisha replied again, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together to Jericho.

⁵ Then the group of prophets from Jericho came to Elisha and asked him, “Did you know that the LORD is going to take your master away from you today?”

“Of course I know,” Elisha answered. “But be quiet about it.”

⁶ Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has told me to go to the Jordan River.”

But again Elisha replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together.

⁷ Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River. ⁸ Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

⁹ When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away.”

And Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor.”

¹⁰ “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah replied. “If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”

¹¹ As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!” And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his clothes in distress.

¹³ Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak, which had fallen when he was taken up. Then Elisha returned to the bank of the Jordan River. ¹⁴ He struck the water with Elijah’s cloak and cried out, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” Then the river divided, and Elisha went across. 2 Kings 2:1-13
NLT

This is an incredibly moving passage of scripture. Let’s ask God to allow the message to wrap itself around our minds and hearts this morning. We are called to be a people with passion.

Today we look at some lessons to be learned from the life of Elisha.

These lessons are intended to enable us to keep the fire of passion for God burning in our lives and ministries.

1. Like Elisha we must refuse to be Distracted

“As surely as the LORD lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!”

Three times in today's bible reading this phrase appears. Three times Elijah tried to send Elisha away. The prophets came out and tried to give him a discouraging word but he would not be distracted by any of it.

God had called him to a mission and he planned on fulfilling it passionately.

It is very easy to become distracted when trying to fulfill the mission that God has given us to do.

Every God-follower is a missionary and every missionary has a mission. This mission gives us intentionality and purpose. The person with a mission has no moments to waste.

You must ask yourself the question this today, "What is it that God is calling me to be passionate about?"

What are the things in this life that are causing me to be distracted from the mission that God has given me?

What is it that causes people to get tired of ministry to others and find it easy to sit down on the sidelines?

What is it that enables Christ-followers to disengage from important ministries that are so needful for others?

Let me offer you some suggestions:

A. People can often distract us from being passionate about our calling.

The very people we are trying to help can often drain us of our spiritual passion.

Gordon McDonald in the book, *Renewing Your Spiritual Passion*, gives the following breakdown of five kinds of people that affect spiritual passion:

1. The Very Resourceful People: They Ignite our Passion.
2. The Very Important People: They Share our Passion.
3. The Very Trainable People: They Catch our Passion.
4. The Very Nice People: They Enjoy our Passion.
5. The Very Draining People: They Sap our Passion.

B. Being too busy to take time for spiritual renewal.

If we learn anything from the life of Jesus it ought to be that He understood the principle of spiritual renewal. He modeled the ability to get away from His disciples and spend time alone. If you are going to engage in ministry of any kind you must understand the importance of spending time with God for strength and renewal.

Sometimes we get too busy doing God stuff that we forget to take time to keep up our passion for the God we are serving.

2. Like Elisha we should be passionate about our dedication to our calling.

Elisha is first mentioned in I Kings 19. We have three verses that describe his calling by Elijah.

From that point on in the story of Elijah the old prophet we have no record of Elisha and his work. The only hint comes from the passage describing his calling that ends by declaring: “He set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.”

It is not until the very end of Elijah’s life that we find Elisha showing up again.

The thing that I find most fascinating about Elisha’s ministry is that he just did it with no fanfare.

He served an old crotchety prophet who at best had a nasty disposition. Do a personality profile on Elijah and you will be fascinated by what you learn. He wasn’t easy to get along with. He wasn’t easy to work with.

Look at II Kings 1 and read about his last little bit of work that he carried out. Read and then tell me he would be easy to attend to.

He never included Elisha in any of his remaining exploits. At least he didn’t include him to the point that he received any mention in any of the stories at the ending of Elijah’s life.

He served as Elijah’s attendant.

God expects every one of us to serve by serving others. He calls us to serve without recognition. He calls us to serve Him because it is right to serve Him not because we get Christ-follower of the month awards.

To be dedicated to our calling and the ministry we are engaged in means that we put time and effort into whatever it is that God has called us to do.

Lack of dedication is often the curse of today’s church.

Too often we offer God what is left of our time and our talents and hope He accepts them as a noble sacrifice.

I believe that God is calling this church to do some very special and unique things in this community.

While there will always be some staff leaders, the ministry and effectiveness of this church will not be built around paid servants it will be built around men and women who are sold out to God and serving others. The unpaid servants who daily live out their calling and dedication to God through serving others.

There are an incredible amount of ministries that need to be done but I want to be honest with you, I would rather them not be attempted at all than to be done in a sloppy, undisciplined and careless manner.

I have been praying that God will help us identify the people who really want to be committed to the journey. The people who sense a calling to minister to others and who will be dedicated to their calling.

If you teach a class or a bible study be dedicated to the class and prepare to give your best to the work.

If you lead a life group, do it with every ounce of energy and preparation you can possibly give to it.

If you are going to work with children or young people you will have to realize that you are not doing it for me or for some staff member of this church you are doing it for God and you ought to give him your best.

The bottom line is simply this, if we are Christ followers we will serve him passionately and be dedicated to the calling he has given us.

Gone will be the idea of last minute preparation and shoddy work.

Gone will be the idea that it's just for the church so I'll just do enough to get by.

As we move to what God is calling us to be as a church there will be those who won't make the journey. It will be too hard. Take too much time and require too much work.

Healthy churches are filled with people who have a mind to work.

Healthy churches defy the 80-20 principle which says that 20% percent of the people do 80% of the work and that 80% of the people watch the 20% do the work!

3. Like Elisha we will experience a sense of Destiny.

Elisha had a sense of destiny that kept him faithful to his work.

He saw the big picture. He got it. He knew that God was calling him to something that was far beyond what he could imagine. God wanted him to do something that was bigger than what he was currently doing.

To be passionate about your mission and ministry you must have a sense of the destiny that God is calling you to be a part of.

All that time that Elisha was ministering in the shadow of Elisha he was doing it because of the sense of destiny that God had placed within him.

Talk to the minor league baseball players who take the long bus rides to play in small cities across America. They sense a calling to a bigger destiny. Talk to the guys who are riding the benches on professional sports teams across this country and they will tell you that they are working just as hard as the guys who get all the press.

Talk to a Kurt Warner who stocked grocery shelves and play Arena football. A man of faith who got the call and became one of the most successful quarterbacks in NFL history. When there were no cameras and lights and publicity he kept on honing his skills and playing his hardest. He kept the consuming fire burning. When the call came he was ready.

Look again at the scripture that we read today.

⁹ *When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away."*

And Elisha replied, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor."

¹⁰ *"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah replied. "If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won't."*

He knew God had called him and he knew he needed more of God than ever to fulfill that calling.

Serving God is not a picnic or a walk in the park. It is hard work and takes a sense of destiny and a commitment to be passionate about our calling.

What God is calling us to it to keep the fire of our passion burning for Him.

Illustration 1

"A seminary professor was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. One morning they were eating breakfast in a little restaurant, hoping to enjoy a quiet, family meal. While waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white haired man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. The professor leaned over and whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here."

But sure enough, the man came over to their table. "Where are you folks from?" he asked in a friendly voice. "Oklahoma," they answered.

"Great to have you here in Tennessee," the stranger said. "What do you do for a living?"

"I teach at a seminary," he replied.

"Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a really good story for you." And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down. The professor groaned and thought to himself, "Great. Just what I need -- another preacher story!"

"The man started, "See that mountain over there?" He pointed out the restaurant window. "Not far from the base of that mountain, there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up because every place he went, he was always asked the same question: 'Hey, boy, who's your daddy?' Whether he was at school, in the grocery store or drug store, people would ask the same question: 'Who's your daddy?' He would hide at recess and lunch time from other students. He would avoid going into stores because that question hurt him so bad.

"When he was about 12 years old, a new preacher came to his church. He would always go in late and slip out early to avoid hearing the question, 'Who's your daddy?' But one day, the new preacher said the benediction so fast, he got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. Just about the time he got to the back door, the new preacher, not knowing anything about him, put his hand on his shoulder and asked him, 'Son, who's your daddy?' The whole church got deathly quiet. He could feel every eye in the church looking at him. Now everyone would finally know the answer to the question, 'Who's your daddy?' The new preacher, though, sensed the situation around him and using discernment that only the Holy Spirit could give, said the following to the scared little boy: 'Wait a minute! I know who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God.' With that, he patted the boy on his shoulder and said, 'Boy, you've got a great inheritance -- go and claim it. 'With that, the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever anybody asked him, 'Who's your daddy?' he'd just tell them, 'I'm a child of God. 'The distinguished gentleman got up from the table and said, "Isn't that a great story?"

The professor responded that it really was a great story. As the man turned to leave, he said, "You know, if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children, I probably would never have amounted to anything!" And he walked away.

The seminary professor and his wife were stunned. He called the waitress over and asked, "Do you know that man who was just sitting at our table?"

The waitress grinned and said, "Of course. Everybody here knows him. That's Ben Hooper. He's the former governor of Tennessee!"

Illustration 2

Erwin McManus in his book, *Seizing Your Divine Moment*, relates the following story:

"It was a combination family vacation and a speaking engagement. The location was the beautiful beaches of Florida's northern peninsula. My wife, Kim and our kids, Aaron and Mariah, were looking forward to enjoying the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. My assignment was to call several thousand singles to a life of sacrifice as we basked in soothing tranquility. A tropical storm had just hit the area and left the waters basically unswimmable, but

my little boy, Aaron, insisted on going down to the beach. So we walked from our beachside hotel down four or five steps right onto the beach. To my right there were perhaps a hundred or so singles enjoying the Florida sun.

And then I saw him. He had somehow managed to find his way to the water, and now he had begun to find his way back. I had not seen him before, and he did not appear to be a part of the retreat. In fact, it seemed as if no one was even aware of him. He appeared alone in the middle of the crowd. He was a double amputee who had worked his way, with the use of specialized crutches, through the sandy beach. Just as I had noticed him, one crutch slipped, and he fell hard to the sand. Undaunted, he pulled himself back up and began again, only to fall a second time. It all happened in what seemed an instant, long enough for me to see him to my right and choose to turn to my left.

I wish I could say I simply wasn't thinking, but the problem was that I was. I knew if I turned to my right, I would have to do something. So I turned to my left. I gently placed my arm on my son's shoulder, turned him away, and began talking to him to distract him from the scene below. We went a few feet, and I felt sure we were free from any responsibility—until my son stopped me. To my surprise, he said, "I have to go help that man."

No explanation was needed. I knew exactly what he meant. His words pierced through me, and I stood there paralyzed in my hypocrisy. I could only look at him and say, "Then go help him." Several thoughts were racing through my mind. I had been caught, was one of them. Yet at that point, it wasn't that I was unwilling to go; it was just clear that this was Aaron's moment. I had missed mine. His compassion had moved him to heroism. While Aaron seized his divine moment, I was stuck in a moment I couldn't get out of.

I watched my ten-year-old son run across the beach and, without explanation, begin to pick the man up. I had to wonder what the man was thinking when this little boy grabbed him and his crutch and tried to pull him up. I watched as the crowd turned and saw Aaron's futile effort to help the man back to the hotel deck. Almost immediately I watched the crowd move toward Aaron and the man. Someone picked up the crutches, while others reached down and picked up the man. The group moved as if they were one unit, committed to helping the man complete his journey.

After the group helped him return to the hotel deck, Aaron came running back to me, and there were tears in his eyes. He looked at me with his innocent conclusion: "I couldn't help him I wasn't strong enough." He couldn't see that no one would have helped the man if he had not taken the initiative. My sense of shame was overwhelmed by my deep sense of pride in who my son was becoming. I explained to Aaron that his strength carried the man. It was because of him that others came to his aid."

He wants us to turn that passion into ministry that will give us a sense of destiny as we serve Him.

He wants our dedication. He wants us to not be distracted but to be filled with passion for the mission He calls us to do.