

“He’s given you so, so, so much more!” 1Kings 19:19-21
4th Sunday after Epiphany 01/29/12 Pastor Thomas Kock

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God for our consideration is recorded in 1Kings 19, which we read a moment ago. In the name of Jesus, who has given us everything we really need, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

You could hardly believe the devastation. The drought had lasted for three long years. People were ruined. Fields which should have been producing abundant grain produced next to nothing. Olive groves bore little to no fruit. Wild animals fled, looking for water. The flocks and herds were gaunt. It was more and more difficult to find forage for the animals, and water was at a premium. Because the crops were so poor, families were ruined, ravaged. You had never seen such suffering.

But somehow you had survived! And, rain had returned, just a few months ago. You had heard that Elijah was involved, that there had been this huge confrontation at Mt. Carmel, that the true God had sent fire down from heaven to burn up Elijah’s sacrifice after the false prophets of Baal had spent all day praying to their so-called god. How it warmed your heart to see how God had made it clear that He was the true God! And immediately after that the rain had again returned. Jah-weh, the true God, was pouring out His blessings upon His people! Baal was supposedly the fertility god; how worthless he had proven to be! Would this be the time the nation would see that Jah-weh was the true God? Would this be the time that the nation would give their allegiance to the true God? You hoped so, you prayed so.

But you were a farmer! And it felt good to be back in the fields again, plowing. The ground was again soft, because of that rain. What a blessing to be able to again turn the earth! There would again be crops! People would be able to eat freely! People would again be able to make a living, perhaps even prosper.

As you had. It was still head-scratching. Altho’ it had been really hard, God had allowed you to keep your animals. You had 12 yoke of oxen! That was an unheard of luxury! People would be coming to you, asking to hire your oxen to plow their fields for years to come. The family business was in great, great shape! Wow!

But there’s this nagging: “Is this really what I’m here for? To simply plow the earth and raise crops? I mean, it’s been a good life so far, and God has clearly blessed it, but is this what I’m here for?”

“Yeah, I know. I’m here to share God’s word with others. I know that. And I’ll keep on doing that however I can. But, no more day-dreaming. Right now I need to concentrate. Need to make sure these oxen keep on pulling straight! Need to make sure that these fields are properly plowed, so that the seed can be properly planted, that the harvest can come and ...

“WHAT IN THE WORLD?!?!? That guy just threw his cloak over me! And ... that guy looks like Elijah! And he just kept on walking!!!! What in the world is this all about?”

And so you get a feel for what might have been going on in the head of Elisha on that day, the day which turned out to be an absolutely amazing day for Elisha. Yes, he was out there plowing with the oxen. Yes, the impression that we have is that Elijah came by, threw his cloak over Elisha, and just kept on walking. Why so? Was this some sort of test for Elisha? Was Elijah trying to see if Elisha had the toughness to deal with a very challenging ministry situation? Maybe. Was Elijah simply a different-sort of personality, and lacked some social graces? Maybe. For whatever reason, Elijah came by, threw his cloak over Elisha, and then seems to have simply kept on going.

Now, we need to understand something. To throw your cloak over someone was a symbol of succession. In our parlance, it was a “passing the torch” moment. Elijah was saying, “You will be my successor. Time to leave the family business behind. Time to come follow me, and to be a full-time worker in bringing the Word of God to people.”

Wow! Put yourself into Elisha’s shoes. Could you do this? Could you leave behind all that you had? Elisha could – and did! He ran after Elijah, asking for permission to go home and say good-bye to his parents. Elijah’s answer, “what have I done to you,” seems to be a reminder to Elisha that this call came not from Elijah, but from God. If Elisha felt comfortable going home to say good-bye, Elijah had no problem with that.

But Elisha does more than that. Not only does he tell his parents goodbye, but he also kills the oxen and burns the plowing equipment. The oxen turns into a community feed! A feast for the people! And then he’s off to follow Elijah. There can be – and will be – no turning back.

Could you and I do the same? Could, would, you and I be willing to leave everything behind to go and proclaim the Word of God full-time?

I would imagine that every one of us is at least a bit uncomfortable even thinking about it. “You mean I would need to sell my house?” “No more boat?” “No more extra car?” “No more cell phone or ipod?” “Could I really do that?!?”

Wow! How our sinful heart clings to the things of this world! How we elevate the things of this world, failing to see that the things which really matter are the things which are eternal! Are we any better than those worshipers of Baal at the time of Elijah? Are we any less deserving of hell than they were? No, we're no less deserving of hell than they were. For our misplaced priorities, for our misplaced focus, for our love of the things of this world, for placing the things of this world as at least as important as the things of God – well, we deserve God's eternal punishment.

And yet God has continued to love us! The entire point of Jesus coming to this earth was because we needed – yes, NEEDED – a Savior! And Jesus did exactly what we needed. He kept the things of this world in perfect perspective. He kept His eyes focused on the ultimate goal – saving the world, saving us. He walked to the cross in Jerusalem, winning the forgiveness of sins for us. He paid for every one of our improper priorities, our improper clinging to the things of this world. He paid for them in full!

And in so doing, He gave you everything which you really need! He gave you life which is eternal! He gave you the forgiveness of sins! He gave you His love! He gave you all that you really need!

And apparently Elisha “got” that. Apparently he understood. After all, he was willing to leave all the earthly stuff behind so that he could follow Elijah and give his life to the full-time ministry. Wow! What an example for you and for me!

Now let's be clear. God hasn't come to you and said that you have to sell your home and car and clothes and give all the money away and then become a pastor/teacher/staff minister. God only gave “some” to be pastors and teachers, not each of His people. (cf. Ephesians 4)

But, God does want you and me to recognize something; He has given you everything that you really, really need. Elisha seemed to “get” that; God wants you and me to “get it,” too.

It always seems to be more clear to me when I serve at a funeral. When you stand by the coffin of a loved one, what do you want to know? What do you care about? It strikes me that the only thing which really makes a difference is if that person believed in Jesus. If they didn't believe in Jesus, well, then their entire life had been really a waste, because they went to hell. But if they believed in Jesus? Why, then their entire life would be full of meaning! Super important! Why so? Because it ended in the glories of heaven! When you are at a funeral, is there anything more meaningful than that, than knowing that your loved one believed in Jesus? I think not!

And, can you imagine brothers and sisters? God has given that salvation, that knowledge of Jesus and His forgiving love ... to you! God has convinced you that Jesus did all that was necessary! God has convinced you that your sins are forgiven! God has convinced you that there is an eternity in heaven which is yours because of Jesus' work! In short, God has given you absolutely everything that you really, really need! Everything!

And so like Elisha we are willing to lift our eyes to the eternal! We are willing to bring generous offerings to our God, to support His work! We are willing to give our time, our talents so that the Lord's work can be furthered! We are willing to say “no” to the devil's temptations, willing to say “yes” to the way that God would have us to live. We are willing to live our lives in a way that say, “I'm but a stranger here; heaven is my home.” In other words, we're willing to follow Elisha's example. To burn the plowing equipment, to turn the oxen into a feast. Why?

Because God has given you so, so, so much more! He's given you the eternal! He's given you forgiveness! He's given you His love! He's made you an heir of heaven! He's given you so, so, so much more! Amen.