

1 Kings 19:19-21

¹⁹So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. Elisha was doing the plowing with twelve teams of oxen in front of him, and he himself was driving the twelfth team. Elijah crossed over to him and threw his cloak over him. ²⁰Then Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah. He said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother good-bye! Then I will follow you.”

Then Elijah said, “Go back! For what have I done to you?”

²¹So Elisha turned back from following him. Then he took the team of oxen and slaughtered them. Using the equipment from the oxen as fuel, he cooked the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he got up, followed Elijah, and served him.

Commitment

I.

He stood at the edge of the field, gaping at the scope of the operation. If he were in modern times, what would have assaulted his senses were the roar of a diesel engine, combined with the sights of a machine with huge dually tractor tires at all four corners pulling a 12-bottom plow tilling the soil of an immense field.

Elijah wasn't in modern times, though. He stood, instead, at the edge of Shaphat's field, gaping at the scope of the operation. “Elisha was doing the plowing with twelve teams of oxen in front of him, and he himself was driving the twelfth team” (1 Kings 19:19, EHV). Rather than the noise and the sight of a huge tractor pulling a plow, Elijah's senses were assaulted with the shouts of men: “hep, hep, get up, there; keep going, keep pulling.” Mingled with their shouts were the grunts and snorts of the oxen, straining at their yokes. He could see men and beasts doing everything they could to till the fields so the next crop could be planted.

Elijah must have wondered what might happen next, as he carried out God's instructions to him.

In the past, Elijah had shown his commitment to the Lord. There had been some interesting times, to say the least, in his life. The Lord had sent him to announce a drought to wicked King Ahab and his even more wicked wife, Jezebel. After announcing God's judgment of the drought, God told Elijah to hide out in the Kerith Ravine, where ravens provided for him. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to a widow's house and miraculously provided for the widow and her son—and Elijah, as well.

At the time of God's choosing, Elijah was instructed to announce the end of the drought. Back he went to see Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah also challenged the prophets of Baal and Asherah to see who was really serving the true God. Elijah saw what James and John *wanted* to see in today's Gospel: fire came down from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice and show Ahab and Jezebel and all the assembled prophets—850 in all—that Elijah was the *true* prophet, and Jaweh was the *true* God.

But it was only a matter of moments when Jezebel threatened Elijah's life. Even a committed believer can lose his nerve. Elijah fled into the wilderness. He prayed: “I've had enough, LORD. Take my life” (1 Kings 19:4, EHV).

Eventually, he found himself at Mt. Horeb. “What had all his commitment accomplished?” Elijah wondered. He said: “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of Armies, but the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down

your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take my life” (1 Kings 19:14, EHV). Elijah was depressed. He was the last believer left—he was convinced of it.

II.

Have you ever felt like Elijah did?

This moment in history has sometimes been described as the post-Christian era of Western civilization. Society certainly works hard to prove the statement. Rather than name fertility gods like Baal and Asherah, secular godlessness reigns. Many workplaces label you a pariah if you aren’t totally accepting of every current cultural whim.

Even Christian Churches feel the pressure. People might leave and go somewhere else if the church doesn’t cater to the itching ears of some of the members. So, rather than call sin a sin, they take pride in their tolerance of any lifestyle. Just because certain things were called “sin” in the Bible couldn’t possibly mean that those things were wrong for all people of all time. Things have changed.

You look around and you see that what is called normal is exactly the opposite of what God’s Word dictates. It’s easy to join Elijah in despair and say: “I alone am left.”

III.

Well, maybe not *completely* alone. God had to tell Elijah: “I have preserved in Israel seven thousand whose knees have not bent to Baal and whose lips have not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18, EHV).

Not every member of society, Elijah’s or ours today, has caved in to the pressure to conform. Maybe the number sounds small—7,000. But 7,000 is a lot bigger than one, or “I alone am left.”

God told Elijah of his plans. *Two* nations would receive replacement kings. But there was more. “You will also anoint... Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah as prophet in your place” (1 Kings 19:16, EHV). Out of the 7,000 believers who were left, one of them was to be tapped as Elijah’s successor.

Off he went to Abel Meholah. Now Elijah found himself standing at the edge of a field belonging to Shaphat, watching Elisha and the servants plowing a field.

There is a lesson to be learned here. No matter how great your commitment to the Lord, or how important what you do in God’s kingdom—or in life in general—you are not irreplaceable. There is no doubt that Elijah was a great prophet of God. Perhaps it could be said that he was one of the two greatest, other than Jesus, himself. After all, it was Moses and Elijah who stood talking with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. But Moses and Elijah were both replaced in God’s own time.

What *you* do in your commitment as one of the 7,000 believers who are left is valuable in the kingdom of God. God *wants* you in that position. But the time will come when your successor will replace you. That’s part of God’s plan, too.

IV.

So it was that Elijah stood at the edge of Shaphat’s field, knowing that the successor God had picked was plowing the field. “Ok,” Elijah might have thought, “I’m *not* the only believer left. But this Elisha—the one set to be the heir of a wealthy landowner—is supposed to be *my* successor? How well is *this* going to go?”

His commitment as a prophet of God demanded that Elijah carry out God’s commands. “Elijah crossed over to him and threw his cloak over him” (1 Kings 19:19, EHV). On the one hand it seems a little melodramatic. On the other hand, it seems rather vague, even though the prophet’s cloak was probably quite distinctive. “Anoint” had been God’s phrase for what

Elijah was to do. Was a cloak draped over a man's shoulders supposed to give a hint at the story to come?

It did, though. "Then Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah. He said, 'Let me kiss my father and my mother good-bye! Then I will follow you'" (1 Kings 19:20, EHV).

Is Elisha hesitant? Today's Gospel showed Jesus calling three separate individuals, but each one seemed to have reservations. To the last of the three, Jesus said: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62, EHV). If you look back while plowing or mowing or doing something similar, your row is going to weave all over the place. By looking at a point up ahead, the row will be straight. Jesus was saying that, once called into service in God's kingdom, it's time to move forward with commitment, not look back.

Was Elisha looking back with regrets? Did he hesitate to give up the wealth that was already set to become his?

"Elisha turned back from following him. Then he took the team of oxen and slaughtered them. Using the equipment from the oxen as fuel, he cooked the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he got up, followed Elijah, and served him" (1 Kings 19:21, EHV). Apparently not. Elisha's break with his past showed that his commitment was complete. All the wealth in the world wasn't as important to Elisha as following the One true and only God.

Just a little while before, Elisha had been directing the servants as they prepared the fields for planting. He had been in charge. From being the leader, Elisha willingly turned aside to being an apprentice prophet; he served Elijah.

Elisha's commitment to the Lord *did* show itself to be much like Elijah's. Elisha served faithfully. Most of all, though, we see *God's* commitment to *us*. He makes sure to send faithful proclaimers of his Word, like Elijah and Elisha. Somehow, despite all the secular odds, God reserves far more than 7,000 who continue to believe in Jesus and what he has done for all people.

Remain firm in your commitment to your Lord Jesus. He gave his all for you. You might have great wealth, like Elisha. Perhaps you have very little, like the widow who dropped a few small coins into the offering box at the temple. No matter your wealth, or your abilities, use what God has given to you in your commitment to your Lord. Amen.