



The speech of Elisha's grave

***"Elisha died and was buried.
Once while some Israelites were burying a man,
suddenly they saw a band of raiders;
so they threw the man's body in Elisha's tomb.
When the body touched Elisha's bones
the man came to life and stood up on his feet."***

(2 Kings 13:21)

The season in which we are presently living is often called Lent, and traditionally recalls the suffering of Christ. Year after year we are reminded of His suffering, resurrection, and subsequent ascension. Following this season preachers usually return to their normal subjects of preaching and people consider Lent past. Easter, too, has come and gone. And we find ourselves living the same kind of life as before. People still get sick, are hospitalized and some die. Our lives haven't changed.

Is this true? Is it true that although we recalled that Jesus did His work on earth, things haven't changed? If this is true, we are not or are very defective Christians. When the body of the dead man, as recorded in the above-mentioned chapter, was thrown into the grave of Elisha and touched his bones the dead man immediately became alive again. Something happened, something phenomenal, a miracle. In the New Testament much greater things happen when sinners touch the Christ who died and arose.

Elijah and Elisha were prophets of the Lord, sent to apostate Israel. The first, Elijah was the prophet of judgment, the "John the Baptist" of the Old Testament, calling the people to repentance. The ministry of Elisha was primarily one of mercy, rather than judgment. Special emphasis is placed upon his miracles. He made bitter water sweet at Jericho; he provided oil for the poor widow whose children were about to be sold; and he raised the son of the Shunamite woman. At Gilgal he made poisoned food edible for seminary students (the "school of the prophets"). On another occasion one of the students who was too poor to even own an ax, lost the iron of a borrowed ax and Elisha made it float on the water. (As Elijah was a type of John the Baptist, Elisha was a type of Christ.)

Apparently Elisha was prophet for a long time. In the setting of the above-quoted passage he was an old man, sick and nearing his death. People came to visit him. One of them was Joash, the king of Israel. Even though he did not serve the Lord, he did recognize Elisha to be a prophet of the Lord. Realizing that Elisha might soon die, he exclaimed in sorrow: *"My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof."* Elisha had said the same thing some time before this when he saw Elijah taken up into heaven. Joash now used the same expression in view of the departure of Elisha. To his sorrow, he saw himself and Israel deprived of their spiritual father and leader.

Although Elisha died, the people of Israel must know that they have had a prophet of God among them and his spirit was still with them. That would be shown in later history. Someone had died and was going to be buried. As the funeral procession was on the way to the grave they saw a predatory Moabite band and took flight. Seeing a nearby structure, they threw the man's body into the tomb on the bones of Elisha who had been buried there. As soon as the body of the dead man touched the bones of Elisha it came to life and the dead man stood up. What a startling experience this must have been for the burial party.

The people must know that there was something special about this prophet Elisha. He did not himself have resurrection power for he remained dead; he had been a bearer and speaker of the life-giving Word which came from God. Although Elisha was dead, the Word which he spoke during his life, the Word of Life, was still with them.

This incident foreshadowed greater things to come, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We who live in the twentieth century know that Jesus Christ has been here. He died, was buried, and rose again. As prophet He revealed the Father to us; as priest He suffered and died on the cross to make payment for our sins; as king He conquered the devil, death, and the grave. He ascended into heaven, but with His spirit and power He is still with us. The church of the New Testament has much more than the Israelites had in Elisha's day. Although Elisha remained in the grave, Christ arose, as the living and victorious Lord. He gives eternal power and life to us now and will even raise our bodies unto everlasting life.

What we must not fail to see, is that the body of this dead man did not come to life until it touched the bones of Elisha. We receive the Spirit and life of the risen Lord only when we "touch" Him, or when He "touches" us. Almost two thousand years ago Christ was on earth, but this lapse of time makes no difference. The world has not changed, since He was here, people are not different, sin and death still prevail with all of their devastating results. But when we have "contact" with this Jesus, the Living Lord, He gives life. Christ saves and gathers His church, and ultimately will raise their bodies from the grave and give them eternal life in the new heaven and earth.

All this takes place only when we have "contact" with Him, as this dead man when his body touched the bones of Elisha.

This "contact" we can have only by the Holy Spirit who works faith through God's Word. The Scriptures emphasize from cover to cover, the need of faith in Christ through the Word. We must hear the Word and believe it. Called the Word of life, it makes us alive, it keeps us alive and increases spiritual life. Wonderful things happen when we who are still in this world, have "contact" with the living Christ through faith in the Word. Streams of living water will flow from within us (John 7:38). We will be able to move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Christ is able to work in us immeasurably more than we can even ask or begin to imagine (Ephesians 3:20). We will be able to do even greater works than what Jesus did when He was on earth (John 14:12).

We must receive the Word as the inerrant and infallible Bible, and use it in faith. May we realize how important it is that that Word is preached to us, that we read and study it, in Bible classes, as families and personally. It must be our daily companion and the guide for the education of our children.

The bones of Elisha's body are still with us. But Jesus Christ, physically in heaven, in the Spirit is with His people on earth. How rich the New Testament church is, compared with God's people in the Old Testament. May we faithfully use God's Word and daily pray for faith in the Christ of the Word.

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