



Thought for the Week – 27th June 2021

READING 2 Kings 13:14–19

¹⁴ Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash king of Israel went down to him and wept before him, crying, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” ¹⁵ And Elisha said to him, “Take a bow and arrows.” So he took a bow and arrows. ¹⁶ Then he said to the king of Israel, “Draw the bow,” and he drew it. And Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. ¹⁷ And he said, “Open the window eastwards,” and he opened it. Then Elisha said, “Shoot”, and he shot. And he said, “The LORD's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria! For you shall fight the Syrians in Aphek until you have made an end of them.” ¹⁸ And he said, “Take the arrows”, and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, “Strike the ground with them.” And he struck three times and stopped.

¹⁹ Then the man of God was angry with him and said, “You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times.”

SERMON

Then (Elisha) said to the king of Israel, “Put your hand on the bow.” And he put his hand on it, then Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands.

Introduction

Although it's now almost 105 years since that fateful day - 1st July 1916 when the men of the Ulster Division climbed out of their trenches to engage in the Battle of the Somme, we still marvel at their courage and commitment. It is just one of many examples of brave soldiers who went into battle unafraid, dedicated to their country and their task? If they hadn't shown courage and dedication they would have lost the war. Our military is taught complete commitment and courage; without it they could never succeed. In the same way, Christians must learn the lesson the prophet Elisha gave from his deathbed to a lethargic young king.

The Task (vv. 14–17).

This scene can easily confuse us; but in Eastern lands instruction by means of symbolic actions was common (see 1 Sam. 15:27–28; Acts 21:10–11). King Joash seemed uninspired as a leader, and Elisha was symbolically urging him and his nation to victory. The prophet was dying, but the fight would still go on. Through the symbolic actions we see in this story, Elisha aimed to spur King Joash on to execute a specific task. In effect this was a call to:

- A. **Public Warfare.** The cities which Syria had taken by force from Israel (see 13:25) needed to be recovered. The king needed to act decisively. Elisha was trying to stir up the sluggish, compromised young king with enthusiasm to fight the enemy. He was saying, “Get up and get on with it - engage the enemies of your country!” That's the Lord's call to every Christian, because, make no mistake about it, we are in a war situation – a spiritual war, that is. The church has been on the defensive far too long. God calls us to the offensive, to attack the fortified places of error and sin in our society and to be proactive witnesses for God. Is there any way in which your example is seen as God's offensive weapon against sin and evil in our society? Does your light dispel the darkness?

- B. **Personal Warfare.** The apostle Paul frequently likened the Christian life to a personal battle (Rom. 7:23; Eph.6:10; and 2 Cor. 10:3). How are you doing personally as you wage war with that powerful inward foe, your own flesh? Gossip? Sexual sin? Unforgiveness? We are given the Spirit to overcome these things (Gal. 5:16).

2. The Touch (v. 16).

In verse 16, the trembling hands of the monarch are touched by the gnarled old hands of the prophet. Just as the touch of Elisha was on King Joash, the Lord's touch is on us as we go forth to fight battles for him. Joash experienced the alliance of the supernatural. There's a Gospel song that goes, "He touched me! Oh, he touched me!" Jesus often touched people during His ministry, and His touch on our lives conveys His power as we go onward as Christian soldiers. Is the touch of Christ on your life? Offer yourself to Him as Lord, and visualize His hands clasping around your own, just as Elisha's old, rugged hands fell in blessing over those of the young king, signifying:

- A. **God's Presence with Him.** What an encouragement for Joash to know that the Lord of Hosts would accompany him to the field of battle. Imagine how the disciples felt when the Saviour placed before them the responsibility of world evangelization. Not only did Christ instruct them, but He encouraged them, "*I am with you always . . .*" (Matt. 28:20). Isn't that what he said? Perhaps we all need to be reminded of that? God is with you in days of blessing and barrenness, of storm and sunshine, of progress and opposition. He will never leave or forsake you (Heb. 13:5)
- B. **God's Power upon Him.** As the prophet's hand closed over the king's hand, so the might of the Lord of Hosts would, through him, defeat the forces of Syria. When His hand is upon us, is anything impossible (Phil. 4:13)?
- C. **God's Purpose through Him.** God's purpose for Israel was victory over Syria (v. 17). Likewise, if we are engaged in the Lord's work, we're on the winning side (Matt. 16:18). Why is it that we fail so often, when the power available is so unlimited?

3. The Test (vv. 18–19).

Elisha commanded Joash to shoot his arrows into the ground, but all Joash did was to meekly fire three arrows into the dusty earth around the prophet's bed. Why didn't he get excited and shoot his whole quiver full of arrows? This was a mock battle that predicted the outcome of the real thing. Did he feel silly? Did he misunderstand what Elisha meant? Or perhaps Joash simply didn't believe there could be any connection between firing arrows in private and later seeing total victory in public. Are we not guilty of the same thing? We often limp along in our prayer lives; struggling to believe that a few words launched from our bedside could ever achieve anything in the real world. So, after two or three attempts, we give up.

We live in challenging times for the church. The battle with the forces of this world is intensifying and so we need to be brave, wholehearted, boldly believing that through us, God will ultimately win the battle against sin in our lives and our world. Are you willing to follow the Lord faithfully, wholeheartedly, and courageously? Remember that because His Hand is on the bow, victory is sure in the end!

During the American Civil War, a deputation came to see Abraham Lincoln. In their conversation, they expressed the hope that the Lord was on their side. The President replied, "That is not the thing that I am most concerned about." His hearers were astonished; what could be of greater importance than the question of whether or not God was on their side? They waited for an explanation, "What I am most anxious about," said Lincoln, "is whether we are on the Lord's side."