

“When in Doubt - Take the Mantle”

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-14

Graphics: Elijah, Elisha, mantle

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are invited to be encouraged by God in times of doubt. Doubt comes in many forms - doubts of faith, self-doubts, and doubts about the future. This series will look at the lives of Elijah and Elisha as they faced doubts about their futures. They didn't doubt God, but doubted themselves. God spoke to Elijah and Elijah went where God sent him. Elijah died and passed the mantle of leadership to Elisha. Elisha followed God's plan and was used to heal Naaman. When we doubt ourselves and the future, we're called to listen, pick up the mantle, and follow God's plan.

Focus Phrase: When I am in doubt, God is with me.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

- B. Eugene Peterson wrote, “Any time we look into newspapers, or into our own hearts, and despair, we do well to remember that God's people have faced similar prospects, similar reversals, similar headlines, similar assaults on faith, and have recovered from the doubt, been rescued from the pessimism and foreboding and gone on to live in praise of God. (Living the Message: Daily Reflections, ed. Janice Stubbs Patterson [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996], 193.)
- C. In the first message of this series last week, we leaned into this truth: When I am in doubt, God will speak to direct me. This doubt we're talking about is not doubt that God exists or that He's working in the world. This doubt is about our pathway forward, our circumstances, our decisions, and any confusion or uncertainty we face.
- D. Eugene Peterson is spot on when he wrote that we all face it...and people from all times and places have faced it. But, God is with us, and will equip and call us to keep going. In fact, we're here because of the saints that have endured and persevered before us.
- E. We're spending time in 1 and 2 Kings, taking a look into the lives of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah had to seek God's counsel and listen, as he continued God's mission. This week, Elijah is coming to the end of his life. It was time to pass the mantle to Elisha. The problem was, Elisha wasn't sure he wanted it or what it all meant, until God proved to Elisha that He was with him.
- F. When he was in doubt, he knew that God was with him. In your notes, make a note of that: **When I am in doubt, God is with me.**
- G. The title for this message is **When in Doubt - Take the Mantle.**
- H. Let's open to 2 Kings 2, starting in verse 1...

2. Scripture

A. READ 2 Kings 2:1-14

- B. Today is Father's Day, so let me tell you a little about my dad.
- i. For all of my life, until he died in 2002, one of the most important things I watched my dad (and mom with him) do was lead in Christian camping ministry. If you've ever been to summer camp as a youth or adult, you know the power of camp. It's been said that you can learn more about God and yourself during a week of camp than a semester of Sunday School.
 - ii. Throughout my middle and high school, my dad led a very special camp week called Rustic Camp, which later was renamed Tent Camp. For 20+ years, my dad and mom and a small team of people planned and led Tent Camp. They loved on, corrected, challenged, and grew hundreds of young people - some who are serving as pastors and lay leaders today, and some who are sitting in this room, including Stacy and me.
 - iii. In 1995, my dad approached Stacy and me, and said, "It's time for you to take over leadership of Tent Camp." At the time, my dad was beginning to have health issues and would eventually die at age 58.
 - iv. We weren't sure we wanted to take the lead. Even though we'd been there every year, and at every step, we had doubts. We prayed about it and decided to say YES, even though we weren't sure about our ability to fill those shoes.
 - v. By God's grace, for 20 more years, Stacy and I led another 200+ youth to the love of Christ around that campfire, in those tents, cooking and cleaning, and having an incredible blast for Jesus.
 - vi. God was with us in our decision and in our leading that ministry. God equipped us to lead, even though we just youngsters.
- C. We had to **Take the Mantle** from my dad and mom.
- i. Last week, I mentioned that a **mantle** is a cloak or cape worn to protect someone from the damp and cold.
 - ii. Yet, in the time of Elijah and Elisha, a mantle was more than that. A mantle was a signifier that someone was 'wrapped in God's authority.'
 - iii. The mantle was a gift from God to represent God's calling. In this case, it was to tell everyone who saw Elijah that he was a prophet of Yahweh God.
 - iv. The mantle Stacy and I took on for Tent Camp was the tents and a set of plastic bins that held all the equipment needed to lead that group of youth.
- D. At the beginning of this scene in our text today, we learn pretty quickly that Elijah was on his way out...to be taken up to heaven by a whirlwind.
- E. It all started when Elijah and Elisha traveled from Gilgal to Bethel. It was there that Elijah said to Elisha, his protege, "Stay here...". Elijah was either testing Elisha or was confused about what Elisha's role would be in the future. God

had told Elijah pretty clearly that Elisha was going to take over for him after he was gone, so we're not quite sure why Elijah wanted Elisha to stay at Bethel.

- F. Elisha would have none of it...pledging his life to follow Elijah. "As the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will not leave you." Elisha was faithful and true to Elijah.
- G. At Bethel, though, there was a group of prophets who said to Elisha - "Do you know that the Lord will take your master away from you?" The Hebrew there is more accurately, "Do you that the Lord will take your master from over your head?" Essentially, they were telling Elisha that Elijah's authority over him was about to be done...removed. What that meant was that Elisha would take that authority to lead.
- H. I love Elisha's answer, "Yes, I know; keep silent." I don't want to read too much into that answer, but has anyone ever told a teenager something that they should do? I remember my dad telling me I should study or how to do some chore, and I would reply, indignantly "I know!" (even though I knew and he knew that I DIDN'T know, or I would already be doing it!)
- I. Elisha replied, "I know...shut up, you!" (That was my paraphrase).
- J. In our story, this happens two more times...same thing. "Stay here, Elisha." "No, Elijah." "Did you know the Lord will take Elijah from you, Elisha?" "Yes. Zip it." Same thing happened one more time.
- K. They eventually ended up at the Jordan River...the same river the Israelites crossed after the Exodus. This was no coincident. Now, Elijah and Elisha stood at that same river.
- L. This time, instead of a staff to part the water, Elijah rolled up his cape and struck the water...which parted it from river bank to river bank...and they walked across on dry ground.
- M. This miracle is so overlooked in our bible studies. We think of Moses. We think of Abraham. We think of Joshua. But, God parted the waters of the Jordan River when Elijah touched them with his mantle.
- N. SO, they went across the river and then Elijah asked, "What do you want me to do for you before I go?"
- O. Elisha asked for a double share (a double portion) of your spirit. Now, Elisha wasn't asking to be 2 times as spiritual...he was asking to be at least 2/3 as spiritual, since a single portion would be 1/3 of an inheritance.
- P. Elijah replied that it was really up to God...but if Elisha saw Elijah go up to heaven, then it would be done. Which is exactly what happened!
- Q. Elisha watched as this whirlwind, and chariots of fire and horses, accompanied Elijah to heaven...gone.

- R. And there on the ground, was the **mantle of Elijah**.
- S. I suspect that Elisha took a second to consider whether he wanted to pick up that mantle from the ground, or if he wanted to run away from that river. Whether he wanted to leave the prophets on the other side, and forsake the calling of God...and from all the responsibility that comes with it.
- T. In verse 13, we get the answer. “He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.”
- U. It was at that moment that I think Elisha began to have serious doubts about what God was asking him to do and be. He was confused about what he just saw, and uncertain about the future.
- V. Yet, there was one thing he could do to have God prove the mantle - the authority and calling - was now his. “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?”
- W. Elisha lowered the mantle and struck the water...and it was in that moment - as the water PARTED - that Elisha KNEW that God was with him.

3. Application

- A. Stacy and I had no idea what to do to get ready for that first year of Tent Camp when we were in charge. Yet, we weren’t alone! We had some great people working with us, which helped. But we were nervous. I remember having a migraine headache that first day...what were we thinking?
- B. By the end of the week, though, as camper after camper knelt at the make-shift altar we had to set up in a horse barn (because it rained several inches that week) I KNEW (I KNEW!) that **God was with us**. God desired the hearts of those young people with such intensity that He wasn’t going to let them leave that camp without a fresh encounter with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.
- C. There are times in each of our lives when the mantle must get passed. Within your family, that may be a recipe or some small tradition that continues. Maybe it’s a leadership role in the church.
- D. In some ways, it doesn’t matter what the task is. What matters is what you do to prepare to give or take the mantle that God places in your life.
- E. One of the things that concerns me about our current world is that less and less people are willing to take the mantle of leadership to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Less people are willing to stand in the gap with their sisters and brothers in order to defend the faith and proclaim God’s salvation in Jesus.
- F. We all have doubts about our own abilities and the pathway God lays out. Yet, you and I have a mission to go into all the world to baptize and teach others everything Jesus said and did. Even IN your doubt...God is with you.
- G. Let’s get some practical equipping for today. Here are three steps that lead to taking the mantle and boldly leading to serve God on mission into the future.

- i. First, **be faithful and loyal to the godly leaders in your life.**
 - a. Being a leader must start by being a servant. In fact, the more you have the calling to lead, the more it looks like servanthood. Think of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.
 - b. There are people, right now, in leadership authority over you...here at church. Maybe at your workplace or in your family. It could be your parents and teachers, younger people and young adults. For better or for worse, those people are "over your head" as it said in 2 Kings.
 - c. When you are in doubt about the future, or your circumstances, seek the guidance and wisdom of the leaders over you. Be faithful and loyal to learn from, serve, and stay loyal to those leaders. Many times, your doubt will begin to dissipate as you trust your leaders.
 - d. This is true, EVEN WHEN those leaders make mistakes or are unclear about the mission. Even the godliest and skilled leaders will fail from time to time. Pray for our leaders. Pray for me. Pray that we have hearts of servant leadership...that we are following Jesus first and most.
 - e. Be faithful and loyal to the leaders God has appointed over you.
- ii. Second, **Allow God to silence the other voices that try to distract you.**
 - a. Elisha had lots of voices in his ear...trying to tell him what to do, how to lead, what the future held.
 - b. He commanded them to be silent so he would be able to think and hear the voices that mattered (God's and Elijah's).
 - c. There are many people telling you what you should think and do. If you add social media feeds into that mix, the sound is **deafening** - all trying to entice you and convince you what's important. Those voices can shift your priorities in the wrong direction if you listen to them.
 - d. We learned last week that God speaks to us in, "...the sound of a thin whisper..." sometimes. God won't shout over the crowd, so your job is to give yourself times of silence in order to hear the Holy Spirit's voice.
 - e. I give you permission to not listen to or believe everything you see on social media or that you read in the newspaper. What you CAN trust is what's in YOUR BIBLE and the Spirit-inspired words of the writers.
 - f. Let God turn the volume down on all the confusing voices when you are in doubt. Let that still small voice speak to you in that silence.
- iii. Finally, even in your doubt, **give or take the mantle and continue the mission**, depending on the season.
 - a. The mission for followers of Jesus hasn't changed. The ways you communicate that to the world has changed, for sure. But the mission

remains the same - make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the church...the community...the world!

- b. And even though that mission will not fail, Jesus gave that mission to you and me. WE are the ones who are to pick of the mantle that Jesus left and strike the water.
- c. Your mission is not to be rich or well-fed. Your mission is not to keep your lawn nice or get to retirement with a big pension. Your mission is not even to be happy or make the world a better place.
- d. Your mission is to be part of the team that's making disciples for Jesus Christ with the time you have left. There will come a time to pass the mantle to someone else...pray about that. Raise up the next generation of leaders and servants.
- e. If you're like Elisha, ready and called, then take the mantle, without fear and with the assurance that God is with you. And THEN, begin teaching the next generation about this Jesus who has saved you!
- f. This is something that grows over time. Jesus' words in Luke 16:10 remind us, "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much."
- g. Pass the mantle if it's time. Take the mantle if it's time...and then be on mission...God is with you!

4. Conclusion

- A. Fathers and Mothers, leaders and servants, take this seriously, no matter old your kids are, and no matter where you lead or serve. Pass the mantle - the mission and the humility it takes to love and lead others as God directs - and go out into the world for Him, as you take the next mantle into the future.
- B. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, died on March 2, 1791. His final words from his deathbed, as he passed the mantle onto others who would lead the movement, were, "The best of all is, God is with us."
- C. He had times of significant doubt about the movement he started, about God's call on his life, and how to turn people's hearts to God. Yet, he knew that he was called to lead and show others. He KNEW that what he was trying to do for God was going to impact many...not because he was skilled, but because God was with us. We're here today as Methodists because of John Wesley and the Holy Spirit.
- D. When in doubt, don't be afraid to pass the mantle. When in doubt, take up the mantle of God's mission, and trust Him with the next steps.
- E. Let's pray...