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Q&A#154 The Summons of Jesus and Elijah to Discipleship

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Alastair Roberts

Today's question: "Would be interested in your comments regarding Luke 9:61-62 as possibly echoing Elijah's call of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21, where Elisha is seen both plowing and bidding farewell to his parents before following Elijah."

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, I would be interested in your comments regarding Luke 9, 61-62 as possibly echoing Elijah's call of Elisha in 1 Kings 19, 19-21, where Elisha is seen both plowing and bidding farewell to his parents before following Elijah. In verse 59 following of chapter 9 of Luke we read, To another he said, follow me.

But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to those at my home. Jesus said to him, no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the

kingdom of God. And the passage in chapter 19 of 1 Kings reads, So he departed from there and found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelve.

Elijah passed him by and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you. And he said to him, Go back again, for what have I done to you? And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of oxen and gave it to the people and they ate.

Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. I think we are supposed to read these things alongside each other, not least because throughout the Gospels, not perhaps especially Luke, we see the story of Elijah and Elisha playing very consistently in the background. Even a few verses previously in Luke chapter 9, we have James and John saying to Christ, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them? But he turned and rebuked them and they went on to another village.

That is calling back to chapter 1 of 2 Kings. Previously, you have the encounter with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration in that chapter again. And in other Gospels account, you have the discussion immediately following concerning John the Baptist, who is the Elijah that was to come.

Previously, even going back further, you have John the Baptist, others say Elijah and others that one of the prophets of old has risen. So Jesus being compared to Elijah there. The feeding of the 5,000, that's compared to the ministry of Elisha.

And again, you have Herod hearing about the work of Christ, wondering whether John has been raised from the dead. Some think that Elijah has appeared. So Elijah's name is coming up again and again within these verses.

And I don't think that's an accident. Elsewhere, we'll see Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days. Elijah goes into the wilderness for 40 days.

Elijah is someone who is a paradigm for Jesus' ministry, as is Elisha. At the beginning in his sermon in Nazareth, Jesus talks about the ministries of two people. Elijah, who went to the widow of Zarephath, and Elisha, who ministered to Naaman the Syrian.

Later on in the story of Luke, you have two figures that compare to that. The centurion, and then you also have the widow of Nain, who has her son raised. And in these cases, I think we're having a juxtaposition between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of Elijah and Elisha.

Jesus does similar sorts of things from them. And he does similar things when he calls disciples to follow after him. He instructs his disciples to put their hands to the plow, not to go back to say farewell to the dead, as it were, to spend their time waiting for their

parents to die and then go on.

There's an urgency to the kingdom mission, an urgency that contrasts perhaps in part with the ministry of Elijah, which is important, but does not have that degree of urgency that Elisha can't go back and celebrate a feast with his parents. So these two things have to be read alongside each other, I think. As we read later on, we'll see, for instance, the breaking of the rocks in the death of Christ, the earthquake in the book of Matthew.

I think that's playing off the background of the mountain in Mount Horeb when Elijah goes there. He thinks that he alone is left. He's suffering at that point.

And these other points of parallel between the story of Elijah and Elisha give us a paradigm within which to understand what Jesus is doing. Likewise, the ascension of Elijah is the Pentecost of Elisha. The ascension of Elijah is then led by the descent of the spirit upon the firstborn, the double portion upon Elisha.

And then that continuation of that ministry in the work of Elisha. That's exactly what I think we see in the ministry of Christ and the church, the movement between the two in Acts 1 and 2. So as we go through these verses, I think there's considerable warrant to think about parallels between these narratives. It's not accidental, I think, that we do have a callback or an echo of the events concerning the calling of Elisha here.

If you look at the surrounding context, there are many reasons to believe that Elijah and Elisha are very much to the forefront of Luke's attention. If we look at the ministry of Christ and when we look in the Old Testament, we'll see that the Gospels bring forward key figures as paradigms for understanding what Christ is doing. Moses, Elijah and Elisha, David, and at certain points maybe Joseph or maybe very much a secondary figure, people like Samson and Ezekiel, I've mentioned, and Jeremiah.

All of these people are paradigms for understanding what Christ is doing. And Elijah and Elisha maybe are not given as much attention as they deserve. So good work on picking up that connection.

There's a lot more to be found if you dig and pull that thread a bit more, mixing metaphors there. Thank you very much for listening. If you have any questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account.

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