

Sermon Text (2 Kings 2:1–14 ESV)

¹ Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. ³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he said, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

⁴ Elijah said to him, “Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.” ¹⁰ And he said, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.” ¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw it and he cried, “My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. ¹³ And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

Jesus Is our Comfort in the Face of Death

From the moment that we are brought into this world, one thing that is certain is that we will one day also depart from this world. And, unless Jesus returns during our time here on earth, the way in which we will depart from this world is by dying. Death can be a scary thing to think about, and one of the reasons why is that we have no idea when it’s coming. Well, that’s not entirely

true. We can have some idea about when death is coming for someone. We can look at things like how old someone is, what a person's health is like, and how bad an injury is. Then, we may be able to get a rough estimate for how much longer a person has on this earth. However, that's all it is: a rough estimate. Sometimes, a person can seem like he's going to pull through, but then he suddenly takes a turn for the worse. Other times, a person can seem like he's not going last much longer, but then he lasts for several more months, if not longer. The only person who truly knows when it is time for us to depart from this earth is God, for he is the one who determined the number of days that we have. As Job says, "[Man's] days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5 ESV). However, this doesn't mean that God can't reveal when a person's time on this earth is coming to an end. In fact, that's just what he did in our reading for today.

Elijah's time on earth was coming to an end. However, he wasn't going to leave this world by dying, like all of us will unless Jesus returns while we are still alive. This time, instead of tasting death, Elijah would be taken to heaven by God in a whirlwind. But, regardless of the way that he was departing from this world, the fact remained that he was departing, and he was departing soon. God hadn't just revealed this to Elijah. He also revealed it to Elisha, as well as to the sons, or disciples, of the prophets who were in Bethel and Jericho. Before Elijah departed from this world, he and Elisha made stops at both Bethel and Jericho. And, at both places, "the sons of the prophets who were [there] came out to Elisha and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?'" (2 Kings 2:3 ESV). The sons of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho did not know if Elisha had also received this revelation from God or not. So, they asked him about it. And how did Elisha respond each time? "[H]e said, 'Yes, I know it; keep quiet'" (2 Kings 2:3 ESV). Elisha did not answer their question with a simple "yes." Both times, he also told

them to keep quiet, to not discuss the topic of his master's departure from this world any further. That topic was simply too painful for him to think about.

There are times when we can find ourselves thinking that things would be so much better, so much easier, if we knew how much time we or our loved ones had left on this earth. That way, we wouldn't have to keep wondering if this was it on each and every trip to the hospital, whether we are the ones in the hospital or the ones paying a visit. Additionally, we would be able to make the most of the time that we and our loved ones have left. However, just because it sounds like it would be better and easier doesn't mean that it actually would be. Even if we had time to prepare for a loved one's departure from this world by knowing exactly when it would happen, that wouldn't make his death any less painful. In fact, knowing about it beforehand could end up causing us even more pain, as we could find ourselves thinking about it more and more as the time approached.

Why is the death of loved one so painful? After all, even when we know that our loved one is in heaven and is currently experiencing joy without end, we can still feel pain. The reason for this pain is that we don't want to be separated from our loved ones. We want to spend all of the time that we have on this earth with them because of how much we love them. It is for this reason that we can find ourselves doing everything in our power to stay by their side for as long as possible. We see Elisha act in a similar way in our reading for today. Each time that God sent Elijah somewhere else, Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here" (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6 ESV). He said this because he did not know if God desired to let Elisha see him depart from this world or not. However, each time, Elisha said to him, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you" (2 Kings 2, 4, 6 ESV). Elisha was determined to stay with Elijah as long as he was able to, just as we are determined to stay with our loved ones as long as we are able to. However,

because of this desire, we can find ourselves going even further than simply staying by their side. We can find ourselves attempting to not preserve the lives of our loved ones but to prolong their deaths. We do this so that we can remain by their sides as long as possible; we do this to avoid the pain of losing them. But we shouldn't try to prolong their lives past the point that God has determined for them to live on this earth. Rather, we should value the time that we do have with our loved ones, pray to God and trust that he will do what is best, and turn to God for strength and help when we are in pain.

It may seem like there is no one who truly understands the pain that we are going through, but there is one person who does: our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus knows what it is like to lose a loved one, for he once lost a dear friend of his: Lazarus. Jesus knew that Lazarus would not stay dead. In fact, he would be the one to raise Lazarus from the dead, and he would raise him shortly. However, despite knowing this, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35 ESV). And the Jews responded to seeing this by saying, "See how he loved him!" (John 11:36 ESV). And so, as someone who has also experienced the pain of loss, Jesus is there to help you through your pain.

But Jesus does not just help you through your pain. He is also there to give you comfort. We may try to comfort ourselves or others by remembering the good times that we had with our loved ones or by saying that they're in a better place now. But those things do not give us true, lasting comfort. Only Jesus can provide us with that, and he has by his death and resurrection.

If Jesus had not died and risen again, then we would have no comfort, no way to ease the pain of losing our loved ones. But Jesus did die and rise again. He died so that we would not stay dead. He died to destroy the power of death. By his death, the doors to eternal life in heaven have been opened to us, and all of our loved ones who have already passed on before us, having died in Christ, are currently experiencing that joy that knows no end. But it will not just be our souls that

experience that joy. We will also experience that joy in our bodies, along with our loved ones who we will be reunited with on the Last Day, when Jesus comes again in glory and takes us home to be with him forever. And we know that this will be so, that our bodies and the bodies of our loved ones will one day rise from the dead, because Jesus rose from the dead.

Elijah is already getting to experience what that is like, for he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, body and soul, right before Elisha's eyes. Even though we do not get to see our loved ones being taken by God into heaven like Elisha did, we still know that God takes them safely there when their time on this earth is over, for they were baptized into Christ. In those baptismal waters, faith was given to them and sealed, and we have the promise of God that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. As Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25–26 ESV). Therefore, it was through those baptismal waters that our loved ones crossed from death to life, just as Elijah crossed safely through the waters of the Jordan River, after which he was taken up into heaven. And the same is true of each of us. So, while we may experience some pain when our loved ones depart from this world, that pain will not last forever, for we know that they are with our Lord and Savior even now, and that we will one day see them again and join them in the eternal joy that our Savior has won for us. Thanks be to God!