

Survey of the Bible part 22 2Kings 2:8-10

Last week we were looking at how Elijah and Elisha were ready to separate company. They, along with a number of the prophets of the area, had been told by God that Elijah's ministry was coming to a close.

2 Kings 2:5 ⁵ The sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still."

And so, everyone knew this and they were anticipating something special, though as we'll see later they really didn't know what God was going to do or how He was going to do it.

At this point Elijah and Elisha were on the east side of the Jordan river and were now going to cross back over to the west bank of the river.

2 Kings 2:8-10 ⁸ Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." ¹⁰ He said, "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be *so*."

The first thing we see here is that a miracle precedes Elijah's departure, and what is that?

The waters of the Jordan River are divided and they cross over on dry ground.

When they get to the other side Elijah makes a statement to Elisha that has to do with both of their futures.

As to the future of Elisha what is Elijah saying to him?

Ask me to give you something that will be a blessing to you for your future ministry.

Now we know that he asks Elijah for a double portion of Elijah's spirit but **can you think of any other things that Elisha could have asked of Elijah that might have been a blessing to him?**

He could have asked for wisdom, money, influence, safety from Jezebel, a verbal blessing from Elijah, any number of things and yet what does he ask for? He asks for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah.

What essentially is he asking for?

What he's not asking for is Elijah's actual spirit. Each person is born into this world as a human being. Each human being is made up of both physical and spiritual parts. They are not meant to be separated, and they belong only to the individual who possesses them. For a human being to be separated from body or spirit makes them less than totally human.

This is why Paul makes such a big deal about the resurrection because he knows that the ultimate reality is to be with God as a human being in the body and spirit in which that person was born.

Now the only way you can have resurrection is if the body and spirit are separated. Resurrection is God's way of reuniting the original body with the spirit. Now we know that when the body and the spirit are separated that is by default called a death.

But in the case of death which part has actually ceased to be living?

The physical body.

For a Christian, which part of that human being continues to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord?

2 Corinthians 5:6-9 ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight-- ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Notice the language that Paul uses about our physical existence. What phrase does he attach to being united in both body and spirit there in verse 6?

“At home in the body.”

What does he mean by that phrase?

The original Greek word for at home is *endemeo* and it means to be in one's own country.

Well, what does it mean to be in your own country as opposed to being in someone else's country?

It means to be in your native land the land in which you were born, the land in which you live, the land in which you have family and friends and a place to work and thrive. In other words, the place you are meant to be.

Using this imagery what is Paul saying about our bodies and spirits being together as one?

This is the natural state we are meant to be in. This is the state in which Adam and Eve were created, and this is the state in which all people are meant to be in forever. This is home.

To be separated from our bodies is not to be home. The hope is always to be home. This was always the hope that Paul referred to, which by the way, was always the hope of Israel.

Acts 28:17-20 ¹⁷ After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he *began* saying to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. ¹⁸ "And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. ¹⁹ "But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation. ²⁰ "For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel."

Well, what was that hope?

^{NAU} **Acts 26:6** "And now I am ¹standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷ *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸ "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?"

But Paul talks about two homes back in 2Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:6-9 ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight-- ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

If we're at home in the body and yet we want to be home with the Lord how do we reconcile this dilemma if we have to die and be separated from our bodies to get home to the Lord?

By being home in the body and home with the Lord. Well, if we're at home with the Lord while being separated from our body the only true solution is to be home in our body and home with the Lord in the one home we were always meant to be in and that is the earth.

Again, this is what Paul and Job and Abraham all understood. And this is precisely what the writer of Hebrews tells us about Abraham's understanding of what the hope was all about.

Hebrews 11:9-10 ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Abraham was living in the land of promise and yet he was looking forward to receiving the promise of living in the land, and more particularly the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Now this raises an interesting question. Is Abraham presently living in the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God?

Yes. **But, is he living in *endemeo*, in his own country?**

No.

As to the first question, what do we know about the present heaven as far as a city with a foundation, whose architect and builder is God?

Revelation 3:12 ¹² 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the

city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

The New Jerusalem is now in the present heaven ready to come down to this earth one day. If that is the case what is the state of this city?

In other words, can a city, by definition be anything but physical?

Remember, Paul, Job, Abraham, and all the saints of old are looking forward to the resurrection of our bodies as the ultimate hope, which by definition includes a physical place for our physical resurrected body.

While it is true that the New Jerusalem is described as both a city and the bride, that is the people of God in the present heaven, both are physical manifestations of that life to come on the New Earth.

Revelation 21:9-11 ⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, *I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.*" ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, *and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,* ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.

The bride is the Holy City, the living stones.

1 Peter 2:4-5 ⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But living stones does not preclude that there will not be a physical city on a physical earth in a physical universe that God calls the New Heavens and New Earth in which righteousness dwells.

Revelation 21:1 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.

By the way, it is not uncommon to refer to a city as both its people and the place where they actually live.

I grew up in Ft. Lauderdale and it would be quite natural for a sign to be posted on one or more of its borders, "The City of Ft. Lauderdale Welcomes You."

In the context of that sign no one would mistake that buildings and other structures are welcoming visitors. Everyone would understand that the people who inhabit that city are welcoming them.

In a similar way, if the sign said, "Welcome to our City," it would also be understood that the people of that city are welcoming them to the place which would include buildings, residences, businesses and every other physical thing in that city, like parks and museums.

In the same way the "City," we know as the New Jerusalem that comes down from the present heaven, must include both the people and the buildings that will inhabit the New Earth.

But all of this presupposes physical people will inhabit a future physical world, which raises the question.

If we are absent from the body and present with the Lord, does that satisfy Paul's hope that he longed for?

No. So, the hope can only be satisfied when we are resurrected in our physical bodies to live in a physical city on a physical earth where God our Savior will dwell physically for eternity in our midst.

Revelation 21:2-5 ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

As I've said before, the present heaven must be defined by the things that are in the present heaven, including a physical city, the New Jerusalem, with a physical throne and a physical resurrected

Jesus who sits on that throne, and physical smoke that rises from a physical altar, along with a physical tree of life. In fact, it is the same tree of life that was in the Garden of Eden.

^{NAU} **Genesis 2:9** Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Jesus tells us Himself where this tree is planted.

Revelation 2:7 ⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'

Notice. Where is this tree of life at this moment?

In the paradise of God.

Well, what is the paradise of God and where is it?

^{NAU} **Luke 23:43** And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

The Garden of Eden was paradise on the earth, but it was a mere reflection of the garden or paradise in the present heaven. We know that the garden that God planted in Eden was obviously physical and since the tree of life was in that garden, and since that tree is now residing in the present heaven, we know that it has not ceased to be physical, because one day it is going to simply be transported from the present heaven to the eternal heaven, which is the new earth.

So, where was I? I was noting how Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of his spirit. And since he was not asking for Elijah's actual spirit, because it couldn't be separated from Elijah, he must be asking for something different.

And what would that be?

He's asking for a double blessing from God that would reside on his ministry that up to this point was residing on Elijah's ministry.

In other words, he knew that he couldn't take the mantle of Elijah without having at least the same power and authority that was given to Elijah from God.

And what is Elijah's response?

2 Kings 2:10 ¹⁰ He said, "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be *so*."

Why is Elisha asking a hard thing?

Because what Elijah possessed was not something that came from Elijah, it came from God.

It would be the same if someone in the body of Christ today had the gift of hospitality for example. Someone might come to them and say, when you go home to be with the Lord do you mind if you give me your gift?

Your response would probably be similar to Elijah's. Well you're asking for something hard because I'm not in a position to give you something that was given as a gift to me.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't seek the gifts of the Spirit but as in the case of Elijah he simply puts it back into the hands of God who is the only One who can give such gifts.

And so, essentially he says, if God decides to give you such a blessing you'll know that, if He does a certain thing.

And what is that certain thing?

2 Kings 2:10 ¹⁰ He said, "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be *so*."

What does he mean by this?

If there is a physical manifestation that God employs to take me to be with him, then you will know that God will grant you such a blessing. But if God simply has me vanish before your eyes then you will not be granted such a blessing.

And so, even Elijah, at this point, didn't know how God was going to take him to the present heaven. He only knew that He would.

And so, the Lord must have impressed upon Elijah that He may take him home one way or the other and if it was one way, that is physically taken up to heaven, then Elisha would have his answer.

When we come back next time I want to raise the issue of how Elijah could be taken physically to heaven when in fact we are specifically told in **1 Corinthians 15:50** that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

I also want to raise the issue of Elijah's present condition. Was his physical body transformed into something else, or does he in fact possess the same physical body in the present heaven that once resided on this earth?

And, since both he and Enoch were granted the privilege not to experience death as we know it, do they have a special ministry in the future where they may in fact still experience physical death?

We'll look at these and other issues next time. One such issue being those horses and chariots that came to get Elijah.