

Keep the Fire Burning – 2 Kings 2:1-14

Introduction: A recent internet article from the Institute of Biblical Leadership, makes the statement that *“The church in America is stagnating and in decline.”* They site several resources that bear out this claim. For example, *“Leadership magazine states that 85 percent of American churches have plateaued or declining attendance. The Barna Group states that no more than 10 percent of American churches can be described as highly effective; and two-thirds of pastors strongly agree that spiritual revival is the most pressing issue facing the church today. World magazine has recently highlighted the high number of churches closing or about to close their doors. One author states that more than 3500 churches die each year in this country.”* (source: iblministry.org/usachurch)

What is happening? Why are so many churches in trouble? There are a number of reasons for the decline of the church in America, and I could spend a lot of time on each one. But there is one that I think is particularly apropos to our situation here at Sonoraville, and that is what I want to focus on today. One reason churches are closing their doors is because they have allowed the fires of ministry and evangelism go out.

How is this apropos to us? Well, we have just come through a week when the flame of revival swept through our church. It was good for you to have a different kind of preacher come here and proclaim God’s Word. Waydell is not like me. He has a different preaching style and delivery than I do. He’s loud and I’m quiet. He’s animated, and I’m more conservative. He’s funny and I’m just funny looking! I told him that I wasn’t going to invite him back anymore if he didn’t stop telling stories on me. But the thing is, you responded to His messages. They were straight from the heart but more importantly, they were straight from God’s Word. And I believe a revival fire was rekindled last week. I see a fanning of the flame for ministry and evangelism. All those “3-1-6” cards were all gone. That tells me that some of you are serious about reaching your friends for Christ, and you’ve demonstrated that by praying for them.

Not only that, but we had wonderful fellowship together, worshipful services, inspirational singing, and powerful and challenging messages from the Word of God. We’ve learned that if you have a Bible that is falling apart, it means you’re life won’t fall apart. We’ve learned what we can do in perilous times like these. We’ve learned that whatever our hearts find to do, we need to do it with all our might. We’ve learned that we

have but one story to tell, and that's the same old story of the gospel. And we've learned that the world has its eye on America and is looking to us for how a Christian nation ought to act. I hope we continue to allow God to deal with our hearts and renew our spiritual vitality. I hope we'll use this revival as not only a motivation to go and reach others for Christ, but also a motivation to grow in our relationship to the Lord.

Now I am not suggesting that we are a stagnant church. I am saying though that if we are not careful, and if we don't, as Ken Smith used to say, "*Keep the main thing the main thing,*" we could easily join the list and become one.

You see, God has called us to be engaged in ministry to others. God is looking for a people who are on fire for Him and doing whatever it takes to keep that fire burning. Followers of Christ have a fire burning within to serve God and others.

But all too often God's people have taken God's grace very lightly. Too often we have been guilty of resting in the comfort of the grace He provides and we don't allow it to touch others around us. Too often, Christians have adopted the attitude that church is all about what they can get out of it rather than what they can put into it. But listen, Church is not about me and you - It's all about Him and about us ministering to others.

God is calling His church to another level of walking with Him in our spiritual journey. He's calling for His people to be on fire for Him and to keep the fire burning.

In God's service corp., there is no place for reserve units, weekend warriors, or AWOL soldiers. God is looking for fired up people who serve Him daily.

Let's look at such a man in our text, and see what he did to keep the fire burning. **READ 2 Kings 2:1-14.** From this story, I want to point out three keys for keeping the fire for ministry burning in our lives.

1. Refuse To Be Distracted. (2 Kings 2:2.4.& 6)

Three times the phrase: "*As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.*" appears. Three times Elijah tried to send Elisha away. The prophets came out and tried to discourage him, but he would not be distracted by any of it. God had called him to a mission and he planned on fulfilling it.

It's easy to become distracted when trying to fulfill the mission that God has given us to do. Every God-follower is a missionary and every missionary has a mission. This mission gives us purpose. The person with a

mission has no time to waste.

You must ask yourself this question: *“What is God calling me to be passionate about?”* Whatever it is, it is going to involve your church, because God has chosen to work through His church. Once you’ve identified what God has called you to do in His church, then ask yourself, *“What is causing me to be distracted from the mission that God has given me?”*

Once I watched Elaine take a load of clothes from our bedroom to the laundry room, which was on the other side of the house. On the way, she saw dirty dishes in the sink, so she stopped to load the dishwasher. As she was doing that, she remembered seeing a dirty cup in Philip’s room, so she went to retrieve it. Well, she stayed in the room for a long time, so I went to check on her. I found her making up his bed. Then she saw dust on the furniture, so she stops to dust. After about 45 minutes, she came back into the living room. I asked her if she was through with the laundry. She got up to finish the laundry.

We can get so distracted with other things, we can forget the main thing. And the main thing we do is serve God by ministering to others. That is why we teach Sunday School, go on mission trips, sing in the Choir, have youth groups, and children’s church. It’s all about reaching people. We can get so busy doing other stuff that we can forget to do the main thing. That’s when we start to let the fire go out. That’s when we burn out. So many things can distract us from becoming passionate about God. So we must refuse to get distracted.

The second key to keeping the fire burning on our church is:

2. Resolve to be Dedicated. (1 Kings 19:21)

Elisha is first mentioned in I Kings 19. Three verses in that chapter describe his calling. From that point on, there is no record of Elisha and his work. The only thing we know comes from vs. 21 which says: *“Then He arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him.”* It’s not until the very end of Elijah’s life that Elisha is mentioned again.

Now something you need to know about Elijah is the fact that he was an old crotchety prophet who had a nasty disposition. He wasn’t easy to get along with. He wasn’t easy to work with. We don’t have any record of him including Elisha in any of his work. Elisha just served as Elijah’s attendant. You see, I think this is an interesting thing about Elisha’s ministry to Elijah: He served God’s prophet, and He did it with little fanfare.

God is calling us to serve Him by serving others. And He calls us to serve whether we are recognized or not. He calls us to serve Him because it's the right thing to do - not because we're up for the *Christian-of-the-Month Award*, or to get a string of Sunday School pins, or to get our name in the record books.

Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't ever recognize outstanding service. Certainly, we do appreciate all the time and effort and energy that go into the ministry of the church. But let's not let that be our only goal. No, our goal is to please God and reach others with the gospel. Let's not ever lose sight of that!

And while we're at it, may we resolve to put our best time and effort and energy into what we do for the Lord as well. May we never be guilty of giving God our leftovers, and expect Him to accept it as a sacrifice. The people we minister to deserve better, and certainly our Lord deserves better.

I am praying that God gives us people who are called and committed to the journey; dedicated and prepared teachers; worship leaders who sing to make a joyful noise to the Lord; Children and youth workers who love kids and want to help influence their impressionable lives in a positive direction; and excited and enthused committee members.

If we say we are followers of Christ, then let's serve Him passionately and be dedicated to the calling He has given us.

The third key to keeping the fire burning in our church is:

3. Recognize Your Sense of Destiny (2 Kings 2:9)

Elisha had a sense of destiny which kept him faithful to his work. He understood that God was calling him to something that was beyond what he could imagine. All that time that Elisha was ministering in the shadow of Elisha he was doing it because of the sense of destiny that God had placed within him.

To be passionate about your mission and ministry you must recognize the sense of destiny God is calling you to be a part of.

The Rome Braves realize that. That is what keeps them going, taking those long bus rides to play in small cities across the Southeast. They sense a calling to a bigger destiny. They'll tell you that they are working just as hard as the guys who get all the press. They keep the fire burning, and when that call to the big leagues comes they'll be ready. **Look again at vs 9b - READ:**

Elisha knew God had called him and he knew he needed more of God than ever before to fulfill that calling.

Serving God is not a picnic or a walk in the park. It is hard work and takes a sense of destiny and a commitment to be passionate about our calling. God is calling us to keep the fire of our passion burning for Him.

Conclusion: John Maxwell, in his book Be All You Can Be, writes, “*During the latter part of the fifteenth century, all of Europe was filled with despair. At one of the most discouraging times in European history, the Nuremburg Chronicle was published in 1492 claiming that the end of the world had come. Several blank pages were left at the close of the book for readers to add their own personal discouraging words. The following year in 1493, a courageous sailor returned to His Portuguese port with exciting news. Christopher Columbus told his comrades to rip those pages from the book because there was a wonderful opportunity to seize.*” John Maxwell, Be All You Can Be, (Wheaton : Victor Books, 1987), p. 122.

There is a new church year before us. Yes, we have a challenge of a budget crunch to deal with. And yes, there may be some ministry positions to fill before us. And you might be thinking that you’ve done your time, or there’s someone else more qualified, or we’ll just have to cut back. You might be thinking that revival was nice, but that was just pie in the sky and now it’s back to reality. But the way I see it, we have a wonderful opportunity to seize. Now is not the time for negative thinking. God’s church is not about gloom and doom. We don’t have time for worry and wringing of hands. God has given us a purpose and the power to fulfill it. He’s calling for His church to keep the fire burning. Don’t be distracted! Be dedicated! Be committed! Be surrendered to Him and watch what God can do!