

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.”

But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

<sup>3</sup> The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” Elisha replied, “but do not speak of it.”

<sup>4</sup> Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho.

<sup>5</sup> The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?”

“Yes, I know,” he replied, “but do not speak of it.”

<sup>6</sup> Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them walked on.

<sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied.

<sup>10</sup> “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.”

<sup>11</sup> As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. <sup>12</sup> Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. (NIV 84)

Theme: A Glorious Life with a Glorious Lord Awaits

1. A glorious life in the Word
2. A glorious end of eternal life

Long before the onslaught of reality TV, there was a show called “the lifestyles of the rich and famous.” This was a show that followed along celebrities and other rich people to show us a glimpse of their glorious life. Since then, there have been many shows give us insight to the glorious life of a celebrity. And if you can’t find a show about the lifestyle of your favorite star, after a quick search on the internet you could probably find more information that you wanted to know. Today, we get a similar sort of glimpse into the life of Jesus. Today we see his glory. And this is the glory that we will have in heaven. But many people don’t see Christ’s glory. It is right there in front of them, but they ignore and deny it. At times we are so busy with our lifestyles that we don’t pay attention to the one that awaits us in heaven. So today we focus on the glorious life with our glorious Lord. We have a glorious life in the Word and we will have a glorious life in the end.

Today, on the last Sunday in Epiphany, we celebrate the Transfiguration of Christ. Jesus was reaching the end of ministry. It wouldn’t be long before his suffering and death. And he wanted his disciples to know exactly who he was. So he took his three closest disciples—Peter, James, and John, or “the inner circle,” as they are known. He led them up to the top of a mountain. And there **he transfigured before them**. His appearance changed. As Jesus displayed his divine glory **his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as lightning**. The radiance of his glory was so bright that the disciples couldn’t stand to look at him.

Two of the great men of the Old Testament—Moses and Elijah appeared on the mountain. Moses, the Great law giver and Elijah, the great preacher of repentance began to talk about Jesus. No doubt, they were talking to him about the suffering, death, and resurrection that was about to happen. Then a cloud enveloped the mountain. This meant that God was with them. Suddenly, they heard the voice of God. The voice is what made a lasting impression on Peter. Years later Peter would recall these words in his second letter. They are the same words that the Father spoke about Jesus at his baptism. **This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.**

Our text for today is about one of the prophets Jesus talked to on the mount of Transfiguration—Elijah. Most of Elijah’s ministry took place during the reign of Ahab—Israel’s most wicked and idolatrous king. He led Israel to offer their children as sacrifices to Baal. And he hired 400 women as shrine prostitutes to Ashtoreth. So Elijah relentlessly went throughout the land preaching God’s Word—leading people to repentance. He told Ahab and the other Israelites messages directly from God. At times it seemed that he was the only believer left in Israel. But God was with him and revealed to him that there were 7000 who still believed in him. God took care of Elijah through miraculous events. During a famine, God kept Elijah alive by sending birds to feed him. And a widow’s flour and oil never ran dry because she was taking care of Elijah.

Elijah was also given the power to do many miracles. He raised people from the dead. He told Naaman to wash in the Jordan River which took away his leprosy. He called upon God, who sent fire down from heaven to accept his sacrifice on the top of mount Carmel. Then he prayed to God and it began to rain to end the famine we just mentioned. And Elijah wasn’t just a prophet, but he also trained prophets. Elisha was chosen as Elijah’s successor. And for years Elisha followed Elijah around, learning from him. And Elijah—and later Elisha, also taught prophets. There were schools of prophets in different cities, and Elijah would teach them.

Somehow—in some way, God revealed to Elijah that he was going to leave this earth. Elijah knew the exact day that it was going to happen. This was also revealed to Elisha and the schools of prophets. For when our text picks up the story that is all the prophets could talk about it. The news disturbed Elisha and wanted to hear nothing of it. That day when Elisha and Elijah were walking they came to the Jordan river. And there Elijah performed his last miracle. He took his cloak, rolled it up and hit the water with it. And just like the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River when all of Israel crossed over it, the waters parted and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. Then Elijah told Elisha to ask for one thing before he was taken from him. Elisha answered, **Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.** In the Old Testament times, the first born son received a double portion of the inheritance—twice as much as the other sons. Even though Elisha was already chosen to be Elijah’s heir, he wanted

more. Elijah was a bold and zealous prophet. He defended the truth and didn’t succumb to the wicked ways of the world. The Holy Spirit was with him and strengthened him in his fight. Elisha wanted that spirit. He wanted to be as good as a servant of the Word as his master was. But it wasn’t Elijah’s to give, so he left it up to God. And after Elisha saw Elijah go up to heaven, we see that he was given his spirit. For he took Elijah’s cloak, hit the water of the Jordan and it parted for him too.

Elisha wanted a double portion of Elijah’s spirit so he could be a better servant of the Word. If only we were more like Elisha. However, we often don’t pray for a stronger faith, or a spirit that strongly defends the Word. At times, it seems as if we don’t care about the Word at much at all. We have access to the Word of God at all times and in all places. But we often fail to read the Word on our own. We fail to study God’s Word with others at Bible Class. And instead of being in the Word at worship, at times we find other things to do. We may let our busy lifestyles, or not so busy lifestyles get the way of God’s word. And it is through the Word that we get a glimpse of God’s glory. It is through the Word that we have a glorious life. For through the word we are brought to faith. And through faith we receive all the blessings Christ has won for us. For he lived a perfect life for us. He took all our sins upon himself when he died on the cross. He became guilty of all our sins. And when he was forsaken by God he suffered through the pain and agony of hell. Three days after he died he rose from the dead and promises that we too will rise from the dead and join him in heaven forever. It is through the Word that we know this. And we have this Word. It is through the Word that we gain a spirit like Elijah. For as we are in the Word the Spirit makes our faith stronger and we become more bold and zealous for the gospel.

Through the Word we have a glorious life here on earth. But we will have a much more glorious life in heaven.

That day, as Elijah and Elisha were walking and talking, suddenly they were separated. We read in verse 11, **chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.** I’m sure it was an amazing sight to see. Here Elisha and the 50 prophets who were standing on the other side of the river got a

glimpse of the glory of heaven. Here we see the hosts of heaven coming to lead a believer to his God. What happened is not really out of the ordinary. It happens all the time—angels take believers to heaven. The difference is that God allowed the prophets to see it. That day Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah didn't die. Just like Enoch before him, God took Elijah to heaven before he experienced death. These are the only two people ever in the history of the world, not to experience death. All others, including God himself, have died. So why, would God allow Elijah not to die? The only answer is God's grace. Out of his love and mercy God took Elijah to heaven. He was a sinner just like all of us, but God had mercy and compassion on him.

Here, in the story of Elijah we see a glimpse of the glory of heaven. Fiery chariots and horses. A whirlwind. They came to take a believer to heaven. What an incredible sight. It gives us a glimpse of the glories of heaven. Over 850 years later we get another glimpse of the glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration we see a glimpse of Christ's divine glory. We see our Savior still in his state of humiliation—so bright and radiant that sinful human beings couldn't even look at him. But we just don't see Christ's glory on the mount of transfiguration; we also see a glimpse of the glory of heaven. And that is the glory that awaits us. For in heaven we will have the glory of Christ. We will be perfect and without sin. Paul tells us that on the last day our bodies will be raised and be like Christ's glorious body. What Elisha saw happened to Elijah, will also happen to us. When we saw Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus, that will be like us. For we will live in heaven with Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and countless others. We will sit next to Jesus in his heavenly kingdom. And his radiance will shine so bright, that there will be no need for the sun, for he will light the way for us.

We know that we will be in heaven. For we have the Word. And it is through the Word that we are brought to faith and kept in the one true faith. It is through the Word that we are assured the glorious that await us in heaven. Peter, James, and John were the only three people to see a glimpse of his divine glory. It was a blessing that God would give them that glimpse to assure them who Jesus was. Elisha was the only one who saw up close what God did for Elijah. And he allowed 50 others to see it from a distance. But we see both. Through his

Word God has allowed us to see both glimpses of glory. It is through the Word that we see the glory of his grace. That he has paid for our sins and will take us to heaven.

And we have seen much more through the rest of his Word. God has given us a greater blessing than Elisha, the prophets, or the inner circle. He has given us his Word. It is powerful and effective. And so we spread his word. We share it with others so that they too may catch the glimpses of glory. So that they too may see what awaits them in heaven.

All those reality shows give us a glimpse of the glorious life of celebrities. And they are sometimes interesting to watch—but they also remind us that we will never have a life like that. But in his Word God has given us a glimpse of Christ's glory and the glory that awaits us in heaven as we will live with him. And that glory is far greater than any life we can have on earth. And this life is ours. For through the Word we have been brought to faith and will enjoy a glorious perfect life in heaven forever with our glorious Lord. Amen.