

**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon by Pastor Anthony Schultz**  
**Transfiguration February 19, 2012**  
***2 Kings 1:1-12a***  
**Holman Christian Standard Bible**



**Elijah in the Whirlwind**

<sup>1</sup> The time had come for the LORD to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal, <sup>2</sup> and Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD is sending me on to Bethel.” But Elisha replied, “As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. <sup>3</sup> Then the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said, “Do you know that the LORD will take your master away from you today?” He said, “Yes, I know. Be quiet.” <sup>4</sup> Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; the LORD is sending me to Jericho.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho. <sup>5</sup> Then the sons of the prophets who were in Jericho came up to Elisha and said, “Do you know that the LORD will take your master away from you today?”

He said, “Yes, I know. Be quiet.” <sup>6</sup> Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the LORD is sending me to the Jordan.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men from the sons of the prophets came and stood facing them from a distance while the two of them stood by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the waters, which parted to the right and left. Then the two of them crossed over on dry ground. <sup>9</sup> After they had crossed over, **Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you.”** So Elisha answered, **“Please, let me inherit two shares of your spirit.”** <sup>10</sup> Elijah replied, **“You have asked for something difficult. If you see me being taken from you, you will have it. If not, you won’t.”** <sup>11</sup> **As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire with horses of fire suddenly appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went up into heaven in the whirlwind.** <sup>12</sup> **As Elisha watched, he kept crying out, “My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!” Then he never saw Elijah again.**

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

A man named Wallis Willis, a slave who was set free in the Choctaw Native American Nation – after the Civil War – was once overheard singing, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”! They say he was inspired by the Red River – which reminded him of the Jordan River – and the Prophet Elijah’s being taken up into heaven. Some have said his song was also inspired by the Underground Railroad – the sneaking of slaves – from the deep south – to the North – to Milton, Wisconsin and all the way up to Canada. Lots of people have sung this song – Louis Armstrong, Elvis Presley, Stevie Wonder, Eric Clapton and B.B. King – but none perhaps more memorable than Joan Baez in 1969 at *Woodstock*. There is something very powerful in the whole concept of being taken by the angels – home to Heaven – to be with Jesus forever. Today God’s Word reminds us:

**Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!**

1. *Spend your life serving Jesus*

## 2. *Be ready to be picked up!*

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on today is part of the scroll of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. Pastor Arno Wolfgramm – my friend – wrote the volume on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings for the People's Bible. Originally it wasn't 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings – it was just Kings. This year – ILCW Series B – we are only reading 3 times from Kings. Just the other day we read Elisha telling Naaman the Syrian – to wash 7 times in the Jordan to be cleansed from his leprosy and he was. Today we have Elijah and his fiery chariot. And with Jesus' permission the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – August 19<sup>th</sup> we will have Elijah sitting in a cave in the wilderness – in the middle of nowhere – after defeating the Prophets of Baal – running for his life from wicked Queen Jezebel – thinking he's the only one left. The still small voice of the LORD – remember? So that's Kings Scripture readings this year! 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings begins right where 1<sup>st</sup> Kings ends. At the end of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings – Ahab dies and his son Ahaziah becomes king in the north. In the south in Judah – King Jehoshaphat becomes king. He builds a fleet of trading ships to go to Ophir for gold – but they never set sail – they were all wrecked at Ezion Geber. Jehoshaphat dies and his son Jehoram becomes king. Do we know the kings of Judah and Israel? The LORD recorded all this history for our spiritual and eternal good. We make a serious mistake – if we think – well, that's all nice for *Pastors* to know – it doesn't really apply to me. It does!

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings begins with Ahaziah falling through the lattice of his upper room and injuring himself. He wants to know if he's going to get better or not – so he sends messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god – small “g” of Ekron – *the lord of the flies*, to see if he will recover from this injury. But the LORD intervenes – sends Elijah the Tishbite – to intercept the messengers of the King. He asks them, **“Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!’”** The messengers returned and told the King what Elijah had said. What did this man look like – the king wanted to know! He wore a garment of hair with a leather belt around his waist. Who does that remind you of? John the Baptist?

<sup>9</sup> Then he (*King Azariah*) sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, “Man of God, the king says, ‘Come down!’” <sup>10</sup> Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men. <sup>11</sup> At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, “Man of God, this is what the king says, ‘Come down at once!’” <sup>12</sup> “If I am a man of God,” Elijah replied, “may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men. <sup>13</sup> So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. “Man of God,” he begged, “please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants!” <sup>14</sup> See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!” <sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king. <sup>16</sup> He told the king, “This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!” <sup>17</sup> So he died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken. 1 Kings chapter 1. Sometimes the judgment of God

can rain down like fire and brimstone! It is a fearful thing indeed to fall into the hands of the living God. We dasn't forget that!

1<sup>st</sup> Kings chapter 2, then, is the account of Elijah being taken into heaven! **1 The time had come for the LORD to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind.** Time to go up to Heaven! When are you going to Heaven? Do you know? Whitney Houston went to Heaven the other day at age 48. Did you see that coming? The pilot on a Czech air plane collapsed and died in the middle of the flight. The co-pilot safely landed the plane in Prague – and all 46 passengers were fine. They say a prisoner in the overcrowded prison in Honduras set his mattress on fire and the next thing you know some 356+ prisoners have died. Most – they usually say – from smoke inhalation! How terrible would that be – locked in your cell – unable to escape as the thick black choking smoke was everywhere? Day after day the ambulances – the pudgy red flashing trucks go through our subdivision – up the hill to the Emergency Room. Again and again we hear the helicopter flying over the Immanuel Cemetery – on the way to the helipad – Flight for Life – to take patients to UW or St. Mary's or Meriter in Madison or St. Luke's or Froedert in Milwaukee. Back in the day we used to pray, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the LORD my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake I pray the LORD my soul to take. And this I ask for Jesus' sake. God bless...all the people I love – my family, my relatives and friends – and then I like to add all the people I know that have terrible troubles! If I should die before I wake... How would you like to die? Do you think about that? Almost everyone I know – wants to die in their sleep. To be like my Grandma – Wilhelmina Schultz. She worked in a nursing home – until she lived there – still helping people when they were in distress – finding workers when someone needed one. Holding people's hands – when they were afraid while they waited for workers to come and help. They checked on my grandma at midnight and she was fine. They checked on grandma at 2 in the morning – and she was perfect! How wonderful is that? To literally fall asleep in this world and wake up in Heaven! I wonder if at first you think – this must be a dream! And then you realize it's not a dream – it's forever reality!

**9 After they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you." So Elisha answered, "Please, let me inherit two shares of your spirit."** **10** Elijah replied, "You have asked for something difficult. If you see me being taken from you, you will have it. If not, you won't." Spirit and attitude! Elisha understood this would be the most precious inheritance he could receive from Elijah. You have asked for something difficult – Elijah says. In what way? Difficult for the Lord to give? – I don't think so. But difficult in this respect. God's Word says – to whom much is given – of him shall much be required! Ask for a double portion of the Holy Spirit – to be filled with the Holy Spirit to the point of overflowing – and you are asking for a powerful blessing. When the Holy Spirit sets your heart on fire – you just have to share the Gospel. The Apostle Paul understood this. **Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel!** You just have to tell people about Jesus – you just have to! Jesus will send prospects your way! Jesus will give you lots and lots of seeds of the Gospel to scatter and water and cultivate. He will put you in a position to share Jesus all the time! It's not going to be easy. It may be painfully difficult to **be joyful always, to pray continually, to give thanks under all circumstances. And the peace of God – which is far past anything human minds can comprehend will give you comfort and hope!** Only when your heart is filled with a double portion of the

Spirit can you say, “Don’t be anxious about anything – but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving – present your requests to God!”

<sup>11</sup> As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire with horses of fire suddenly appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went up into heaven in the whirlwind. <sup>12</sup> As Elisha watched, he kept crying out, “My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!” Then he never saw Elijah again. He took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. *The chariots and horsemen of Israel!* At first read – it would make sense to say that’s the fiery horses and chariot – the angels that carried Elijah body and soul up into Heaven. Pastor Wolfgramm writes, “Elisha’s exclamation, ‘The chariots and horsemen of Israel,’ refers to Elijah, his father in the faith. Just as mighty horses and chariots are emblems of a king’s strength, so Elijah had been the spiritual bulwark of God’s people. King Joash later addressed Elisha with that same title of respect. (2 Kings 13:14) For our country to be truly safe and strong God’s people need to use the means of grace – the Gospel in God’s Word and baptism and Lord’s Supper! The more we read and study and ponder God’s Word – the more we come to worship – to thank and praise – then to serve and obey Jesus – the stronger our marriages. The more powerful our families will be – strong against the powerful pressure this world applies to try and lead us to sin. We are safe in Jesus’ nail marked hands until we are carried by the angels to our forever home. Amen!

~~Be God alone all glory!~~