Palavras-chave:

**Text: 2 Kings 2**

**Reading: 2 Kings 2, 19-24**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Recently I had a conversation with someone about the history of Elisha, when he healed the water source of Jericho. He told me that this text wasn’t meant to be preached. I soon reacted, because I didn’t agree. God’s word was gave for us to strengthen our faith and I believe that all God’s word is meant to preach. I know that there are hard texts or even well-know texts that are not easy to preach, but all texts serve to preach the gospel. I mean, Christ gospel.

I believe that the bible is Christocentric. Not only gospels and the Apostles letters, but also the prophecies and the histories of the Old Testament. All of them, in one way or another, point to Christ. Our problem is to discover the right relation with Christ.

So, let’s observe once again the history of Elisha in Jericho. [Read 2 Kings 2, 19-22]. Reading the history, I asked myself: what is the message for us? The miracle was only for the Jericho’s population OR it also has a meaning for us, in the 21th century? I know that there are preachers who would soon focus in the new plate and the salt. They want to use those elements to make miracles in their services. But is this the message? I was in doubt and then started to read the context. The whole chapter.

The chapter tells us about **the end** of Elijah’s prophetic work and **the beginning** of Elisha’s prophetic work. What happened in Jericho is his first act, and soon, later follows what happened with the teenagers in Bethel.

Observing this, I noticed a contrast that we find some other times in the Bible. The contrast between a BLESSING and a CURSE. God’s word always brings a blessing or a curse; a blessing to the believers, and a curse to the unbelievers. Elisha was called to be a prophet. He was the preacher of God’s word. So, what calls our attention is that him, as a prophet, brought the blessings to Jericho and preached the curse to Bethel.

This calls our attention and even more if we observe those places. Jericho was a cursed place. It was the first city that the Israelites faced when they wanted to conquer Canaan. They conquered Jericho and razed the city completely. And in that occasion, Joshua said (Joshua 6, 26): “Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates.” Jericho was turned into a cursed place, and Bethel was a sacred place. Bethel mean: God’s home. The patriarch Jacob was there and saw the angels rising to the sky. The place was a heavenly portal. A special place. The ark was there for a while, and after the division between the south and the north of Israel, the built an altar for Baal, in the city of Bethel. So, Bethel, the blessed city, receives the curse from God and Jericho, the cursed, received God’s blessing.

**Elisha, the truly prophet of God, preaches the bless and the curse.**

1. He preached God’s blessing to Jericho.
2. He preached God’s curse to Bethel.

**Elisha preached God’s blessing to Jericho.**

The first acts of Elisha were characteristic in all of his prophetic work. This chapter shows us that he was the substitute of the great prophet Elijah. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets of Israel. He was a man of God and he done great things with God’s help. Elijah chose Elisha to be his substitute. Elisha accompanied him until the moment when Elijah was taken to heaven. Elisha asked for a folded portion of Elijah’s spirit as heritage; he saw what happened and he took Elijah’s robe that felt in the ground. He got dressed with that robe and he discovered that he got Elijah’s heritage. The spirit of Elijah’s was over him. Elijah went up and Elisha went back to Jericho.

The disciples of the prophets of Jericho observed that Elisha crossed the Jordan in the same way that Elijah crossed, and then concluded that Elijah’s spirit was over him. Then they came to meet him and prostrated themselves before him. They showed respect to the servant of God. They knew that he represented God in earth. The servant of the Lord.

Because of that the men from the city got close to him desiring that he would help them. They knew that they lived in a cursed land. They explained the situation: “Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.” It means that the land didn’t wanted to give fruit because it was infected by the bad water; and the expression gives the impression that the water was so bad that it caused spontaneous abortions, in both animals and women.

So, the city was well situated. A good place to trade; Jericho was Canaan’s door. Close to it was a passage to the Jordan river, so the caravans passed by the city; a trade point that attracted people to live there. But who moved discovered that the city was well situated, but the water wasn’t good; even bad. So, the men looked for Elisha to ask for help. They had hope that Elisha, as a God’s men, could help them and heal the water.

What surprised me is that Elisha accepted the request. He didn’t serve only as the guide of the soul to the eternal life, but also to the welfare of the people. He does that here with Jericho’s water; and later he also did this in Gilgal, when he neutralized the poison in a pan full of food, and he multiplied twenty breads to one hundred people. And he healed the General Naaman of leprosy. In a certain way we can say that Jesus light was already shining in Elisha! Christ also healed the people that looked for him and he set them free of the bad spirits. Elisha had already presented himself as a representative of God’s Kingdom.

Then, he said: “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” Of sure this worked as symbolic material, that should visualize what he was going to do. The plate and the salt symbolized the powers of God’s word! A new bowl symbolizes the renewing power of God’s word and the salt symbolizes the purifying power of God’s word. Over it, the new bowl and the salt, in no way, would be enough to heal the entire region of the city of Jericho. What happened serves to strengthen people’s faith in God’s word.

We can compare that with the use of the sacraments, the baptism and the holy supper. The baptism water doesn’t purify our soul, but Christ’s blood does it. The purification of the body is visible, the soul purification is not. The visible water of the baptism helps us to believe in the invisible purification of the soul. In that way the new bowl and the purifying salt, that are visible, help to believe that the water will be purified by the invisible power of God’s word.

For that reason, the prophet says: “This is what the Lord says: ‘I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.”. The LORD declares that the water will become healthy and by the LORD’S power the water became healthy. The LORD declares that the water won’t cause infertility or spontaneous abortions anymore and by the LORD’s power the water became good. The Lord healed the water, not the salt.

It’s good to record this, brothers and sisters. It’s good to remember this when we observe the mistake of certain churches that use ‘blessed water’, ‘Jordan River’s water’, salt, flour and more of that kind of stuff to “cure” people of their diseases OR to “heal” their houses from the demons. It’s all a mistake, brothers and sisters. Because if it doesn’t work, they will say that’s your fault. It doesn’t work because you don’t have faith enough! In the Old Testament they would be condemned as false prophets and stoned.

The true prophets came to speak God’s word. Elisha did it and the Lord blessed his speaking so people would learn that he was the true God’s prophet. The same thing happened in the New Testament with Jesus and his apostles. They performed great miracles and healed many people, but those miracles served to get people’s attention to hear the preaching about God’s Kingdom and to obey Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Elisha’s miracles served the same target. The people lived in darkness; idolatry was huge; the people turned away from the Lord and followed Baal’s religion, the god of fertility. By the act of Elisha, he called the people back to adore the Lord, who healed the waters.

**He preached the curse do Bethel.**

After that, Elisha continued his journey and he went back by the same way of the verses 3 and 4. He will go up to the city of Bethel, which was situated in a higher place. The slant was about more and less 1000 meters. So, he went up to Bethel and he was going to pass by the city; while he was close to it, some boys observed the prophet passing by and they started to mock him. Its hard to say how old those boys were. Maybe they were 10 years old children. It may also be 15 years old boys. Or maybe a mix of 7 to 20 years old. Anyway: the group was big. Of sure more than 42. Who knows? Maybe a group of more than one hundred children, because the bears already shattered 42 of them. Of sure the group was much bigger. Let’s say: a hundred or two hundred boys.

Imagine! The city above, the prophet passing by the lower way, the kids getting out the city and following the prophet, and suddenly the bears appear behind and block the way back and start to attack the kids, who were trapped between the bears and the prophet and could only climb upward, what made them an easy target to the bears.

So, imagine that you’re walking in a street here [in Village] and in a certain moment some boys start to yell and to mock you. In the beginning there are some boys, but in some minutes the group grows, until there are a hundred boys, yelling: “Get out of here, baldy! Get out, baldy!”

It isn’t very clear why they called Elisha “baldy”. We don’t know if he was baldy. There are religions where the monks are completely bald, or they have tonsures. But according to God’s word (Lv. 19. 27-28) men couldn’t cut their hair at the sides! So, of course the prophet, who was a guard of God’s word, didn’t done this. So, probably, the boys were using a bad language, that despised the prophet. For example, referring to a vulture head, or the head of a fierce dog as the Chacal, that eats dead bodies. So, they yelled something offensive, as? “Get out of here, dog! Get out, vulture! Get out, baldy!”

Anyway, the group is threatening and despises the man of God. This is a manifestation of the incredulity of the city and of the aggressiveness against the worship of God. This isn’t an isolated act of ignorant boys; this is an aggressive act of boys that learned at home that they should despise the men of God. And probably it wasn’t one or two families, but the whole city was against the worship of God. Note well: we are talking about Bethel, the competitor of the temple of Jerusalem; the north’s center of idolatry; the spiritual center of enmity against the south. The fact that a group of children, this size, got out the city to tease God’s prophet tells us something about the parent’s spirituality and teaching.

Pay attention in that, brothers and sisters. How do you talk about the church officers in the presence of your children! Sometimes you can notice how parents talk about the officers for the behavior of their kids! The children easily take their parents pain. I have already experienced that in my pastoral life.

In my first congregation there were two officers, who had the same character and were always arguing. They didn’t like each other, and one of them talked about those things with his wife, in the presence of their children; and one day one of the children pushed slightly the other office when he was getting out the church, showing some contempt for the man. It was very slight, but it was also clear that he wanted to say: hey, be careful; don’t fight with our family, or with my father!

In the other side, you can also see when the parents talk positively about the officers. The children notice that and they show respect for the pastor or the elders. Do you understand, brothers and sisters? It can happen that you disagree with the elders or the pastor, but don’t show that in the presence of your children, speaking with contempt about the officers, because for sure the kids take their parents pain and they show it (perhaps without wanting or knowing it).

Here the manifestation is clear and strong. A group of boys get out the city to mock the Lord’s prophet, the man of God! They didn’t do this when Elijah passed by the city: because they knew that Elijah, once, sent fire from the sky to end up with the life of two battalions of soldiers. Elijah was fire. It was dangerous to mock him! So, in the way nothing happened, but on the way back Elijah wasn’t there anymore.

Perhaps they thought “Now we can! Elijah doesn’t exist anymore, so let’s show that we are not afraid of Elijah’s substitute. Of sure he doesn’t have what Elijah had.” So, as a group of dogs, barking behind someone who’s passing by, the boys started following Elisha, yelling: “Get out of here, baldy! Get out of here, dog! Vulture!”

Elisha’s reaction is strong. On one side, that surprises us. He could have denied these boys and continued his journey. Wouldn’t that be wiser, more peaceful? But that didn’t happen. Once more his act serves to call our attention to the Lord’s word. God’s word is powerful in its blessing, but also in its curse. The people had to know to respect Lord’s word, and consequently the prophet of God’s word.

The act is strong, as it is in the case of Ananias and Sapphire in the New Testament. The lied against the Holy Spirit! They showed a lack of faith; in a certain way they tempted God and tested his presence in the congregation. God’s reaction was strong to make it clear that he didn’t like their act. God’s wrath flared, and Ananias and Sapphire died at the same time.

A parallel thing happened here. Elisha turned back, saw the boys and cursed them IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! Pay attention in that! This wasn’t a personal act of Elisha, but an official act of him. He acted as a prophet, as a representative of the Lord. He cursed IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, and the Lord heard his words. God’s wrath flared against those boys, for that people would fear the word of the Lord.

This was the effect in Ananias and Sapphire’s case. Acts 5, 11 says: “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.”. What happened here is shocking! Very shocking! Those who hear the history are shocked and learn that you can not play with the Holy God. Who plays with the holiness of God plays with his own life.

Not always things like that happens or will happen. But this curse was fulfilled to call the attention to the work and the teaching of the prophet Elisha. He is a man of God. He is a prophet, who brings the word of God. Listen and obey!

As I already said, Elisha’s prophetic work has many aspects that look like Jesus prophetic works. In a certain way, Elisha es a shadow of Jesus. He is a shadow of Christ. He’s not Christ, but he points to him. He’s a servant of the Lord. When Jesus Christ shows up, the Lord shows up. So, Elisha is a servant of the Lord and he taught us to respect the Lord’s word. This word is powerful in the blessings and in the curses!

Remember of the word in Hebrews 12, 25-29: See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. ”The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”

Amem!