

## DETERMINED FOR GLORY

‡ **Doubting not** (vv.1-6)

‡ **Dividing over** (vv.7-8)

‡ **Doubling up** (vv.9-12)

In the name of Jesus, our glorious Savior, dear shining blessings of God:

A recent documentary featured American and British soldiers who survived Thai-Burma railroad death camps. Emaciated Allied troops who managed to stay alive on forced jungle marches, the Japanese captors pushed past the limit of human endurance – too sick and malnourished to stand, much less keep working. One aging warrior tearfully told how his friend fifty years earlier had simply given up. Rather than keep struggling in the heartless jungle heat, he just rolled over one night and died a few hours later.

Our situation as Christians is surprisingly similar. In this sinful world Satan's forces of unbelief either stand by and watch as Christ's followers are butchered, or join in the persecution under the names of atheistic communism or their own inventions of a prophet whose followers justify killing innocent men, women and children because they don't like a cartoon. Pile on a few personal losses of family and friends, frustrations in school or at work, and sometimes you just feel like turning your face to the wall and letting go. "But not yet," says the Holy Spirit, as He gently lays God's grace upon our hearts. Today He gives us more reasons to live, not in defeat, but **Determined for Glory**. Keep pressing on...

‡ **Doubting not** (vv.1-6)

It may be rare, and truly "*wisdom is found in those who take advice*" (Proverbs 13:10), but sometimes bad advice can come from Christians. They may mean well, but they either don't have all the information or they err by passing judgment contrary to God's Word. This week's Old Testament Lesson has five such incidents in the full Bible text. It happened at Bethel and at Jericho that "*the company of the prophets...came out to Elisha and asked, 'Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?'*" In both cases Elisha replied, "*Yes, I know,...but do not speak of it.*" (vv.3,5) So they were right, but what was Elisha supposed to do with that piece of information? He basically told them, "I don't want to hear about it." As if that weren't enough, three times Elijah himself said to Elisha, "*Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel...Jericho...the Jordan.*" (vv.2,4,6) But each time, Elisha took an oath. He swore, "*As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.*"

Before we look at what kept Elisha **Doubting not**, but **Determined for Glory**, stop and think about how easily we go the other way. We've seen young people stand before this altar and swear to be faithful to God, to never leave Him even in the face of death. But what does it take to get them doubting and giving up, if not compromising their faith? A handsome face or an attractive girlfriend is enough for some. Others may hold out until some university professor starts asking questions they've never considered. Instead of coming back to talk to their pastor or opening their Bible with fellow students at a WELS campus ministry, they yield. They turn their faces to the wall and let their souls die in silence. Doubt comes naturally; determination does not.

And doubt can spread like fire in congregation too. Sincere Christians join **Determined** to work **for God's Glory**, a determination that lasts until they feel the heat of Gospel ministry for sinners like us in a fellowship of 100% sinners. Excited about doing something for the church? Wait until someone doesn't like your idea or suggests another way. Then your well-meaning determination can melt like wax in the flame of other people's faith. Soon no one sees you at Bible class anymore. And you're always too busy for the meetings. And what's the Pastor's natural, sinful reaction? You guessed it. Just give up.

## ‡ Dividing over (vv.7-8)

Why would Elisha keep silencing the other prophets about Elijah literally being taken “from above your head”? Why keep swearing every time Elijah says, “*Stay here...*,” “*As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you*”? They had a close personal relationship, but something was about to happen that would affect the rest of Elisha’s life on earth. And he was **Determined for Glory**.

Most of us don’t like an audience especially at personal crossroads. But what can you do when fifty coworkers stand staring at you? You want to stay **Determined for Glory**, but then you reach the river. For them it was the Jordan. For you it may be some dread disease, or your worst nightmare, or an empty chair and a cold spot next to you at night. Passing from this life to the next has long been pictured by poets as crossing a river. You can’t roll over and die. You can’t run. You have to “face the music.”

That was my thought one summer when I saw my Granddad’s car coming back up the road. He had named it Blissful Acres Ranch, but it wasn’t for me that day. One my first trees to chainsaw had twisted on its stump sideways right across the old fence and the road, straight at Granddad’s house. No, I had not measured, but it was short enough to miss. Yes, I thought how the hired man with real logger’s experience had declined to cut that tree. But here comes Granddad. “I’d best go face the music.”

At the Jordan River, “*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.*” Even if you’re sure the LORD had previously divided the Red Sea and this same Jordan River for His people to cross “*on dry ground,*” trusting God is still not natural to our sinful side. Satan tortures our thirsty souls to build our own “Bridge on the River Kwai.” Instead of **Dividing over** and **Doubling up**, we start doubling over in doubt and fear. Our self-glory keeps asking, “What can I do?” instead of “God help me!”

## ‡ Doubling up (vv.9-12)

Dry on the other side, Elijah asked, “*What can I do for you before I am taken from you?*” “*Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,*” Elisha replied. “*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.*” Some commentators suggest Elisha wanted the eldest son’s “double-portion” as heir to Elijah’s prophetic office. But God had already designated Elisha as his successor. Elisha wants something far more important. It’s as if Elisha looked at the hardware store of God’s grace and fingered the one tool that could keep him **Determined for Glory**, not his own, but the **Glory** of God. Long story short, when you see “*double*” in the Bible, it’s generally in the context of God’s holy Word – Law and Gospel, sin and grace.

The older prophet would never have to die. *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. Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!”* Nearly 800 years later, Elijah and Moses would speak with our Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration about His death on the cross. (Luke 9:31) But with Elisha we too must carry on. Down from the mount of glory with Jesus, we pick up our cross and follow Him. But the key to success, the one power tool to keep us **Determined for Glory** and safe from seeking our own, is God’s Word.

This week on Ash Wednesday we begin the 40-day journey of Lent to the cross. Every midweek I pray you will be **Determined** to see God’s **Glory** in the face of Jesus Christ. We need to “face the music” of our sins as we hear the Seven Words Jesus spoke on Mount Calvary. But when we do, God gives us a pleasant surprise much like my Granddad’s after he surveyed the damage of my chainsaw accident. Come each Wednesday, and you’ll know my relief when his last word was, “Don’t let it make you afraid to cut the next one.” I pray you will still be coming Maundy Thursday as we sing to Jesus: *Thou on my head in early youth didst smile, And though rebellious and perverse meanwhile, Thou hast not left me oft as I left thee. On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.* (CW 588:4) That’s why we never give up and never give in. Live for God’s **Glory**, dear fellow forgiven sinners. And then you will really live. Amen.