

ROAD TO REVIVAL

By

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"WHERE IS THE LORD GOD OF ELIJAH?"

THE prophet Elijah towers like a spiritual Colossus in his day and generation. Although he was a man of like passions as we are, he moved among the time-serving sycophants of his day like a giant among pygmies. He could pray down fire or water, whichever was needed at the time, flames of judgment on Carmel or showers of rain on parched land. From the day that he burst on the scene to prophesy three years of dry weather until he went to Heaven in a blaze of glory, he lived a colorful and picturesque drama stranger than any fiction.

Elijah rose like a tower of strength in a weary land. There never was anything indefinite about him. No dictionary was needed when he preached. There were no half-tones and vague uncertainties about him. He never lived in the No Man's Land of clever religious half-truths. He did not belong to spiritual fogs and moral twilights; his was the solitary grandeur of those few souls in any age who get their orders from Headquarters, who speak with authority because they hide themselves at Cherith before showing themselves at Carmel.

But there came the day with Elijah as there must with each and all of his kind when his fight had been fought, his course finished, with his faith kept. There came the morning when he, like Enoch long before him, should be translated and not see death. That amazing scene when the second man in history to go to Heaven without dying left earth for glory is described sublimely in the second chapter of Second Kings. It opens with GOD's rugged prophet walking from Gilgal beside the man he called from the plow handles to be his successor. Strangely enough, it seems that three times Elijah tries to shake off his companion Elisha by saying, "**The LORD hath sent me to Bethel,**" "**The LORD hath sent me to Jericho,**" "**The LORD hath sent me to Jordan.**"

But like Ruth cleaving to Naomi, Elisha would not be shaken off. The reasons are clear: he did not want to leave his spiritual father, he wanted to see him translated to Heaven; but, above all, he wanted a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. He was out that day on serious business and was resolved to see it through.

Along the road that day stood a number of theological students, sons of the prophets. They knew that great things were to happen that day. They mentioned it to Elisha: "**Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?**" But you will observe that they only "**stood to view afar off**"; it was Elijah and Elisha who went on.

In every age and generation there has been at least one Elijah who has walked with GOD in power. And on his heels there has always come at least one Elisha who wants GOD's very best, the double portion of His SPIRIT. There have always been plenty of prophets' sons, good fellows and well-meaning, who have stood by the road while Elijah and Elisha went by. They have been interested onlookers, have enquired into the matter, but it is only Elisha who will not be denied, who follows on in dead earnest, until he sees the glory of GOD - it is only Elisha who comes back with the mantle of Elijah.

I am not speaking of some weird and vague experience of "second blessing." But it is a known fact, whether we like to admit it or not, that most of us are like the sons of the prophets: we stand by the roadside and know that great things are possible, we enquire about them, we stand to view afar off, but ours is not the mantle that divides Jordan.

There are a few in every age who take seriously our Lord's parables about importunity in prayer, the woman and the judge, the man who had a friend call at midnight. The sons of the prophets had much that was good, but Elisha pressed through to the best. There is a power with GOD and men that comes to those who will stop short of nothing less, who wait long before GOD, not because He is reluctant but because we are rebellious, who go far with GOD and walk close to Him, who will not be put off at Bethel or Jericho.

When Elijah asked his faithful companion what it was that he desired, Elisha knew what he wanted. He could have asked for many things, but there was one consuming desire for a double portion of the SPIRIT. Would that we today knew what we need most! Not a better pastorate, or more learning, or more machinery, or more publicity, or a more engaging personality, but a double portion of the old-time Power. We sing about it, but we are willing to do without it. We can take it or leave it, and so long as we feel that way about it we usually leave it.

Then came the whirlwind, the horses and chariots of fire, and Elijah went up while Elisha cried, "**My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!**" He spoke the truth for Elijah was worth more to Israel than a standing army. Better part with all her horsemen and chariots than with him! Little did Ahab realize when he called Elijah the troubler of Israel that he was indeed her bulwark. And little does America know today that godly people and not armies and navies are her best protection.

Then follows the climax of Elisha's quest for the double portion of the SPIRIT. We read that he rent his own clothes and took up the mantle of Elijah. That holds for us today a blessed lesson. We must tear up the wrappings of our own self-righteousnesses if we are to be clothed from above. Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and only when we see them so and rend our garments can we be clad in His righteousness alone to stand faultless before the Throne. And not only that, but the believer who would live and work in the power of GOD must rend the garments of self-sufficiency and tear up the vestments of the flesh if he is to go clothed in the Lord. GOD will not drop the mantle of His SPIRIT around the dirty raiment of our own goodness. We must rend our own clothes if we wear the garment of GOD.

Elisha stood by Jordan, smote the waters with the mantle and said, "**Where is the LORD GOD of Elijah?**" and the waters parted for him to go over. We have come today to times so dark and drear that millions are asking, "Where is God?" Some are asking it in irony and unbelief, like

those of Jeremiah's time who sneered, "**Where is the Word of the LORD? Let it come now.**" Some are asking it in the spirit of Isaiah when he cried, "**Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down**" (Isaiah 64:1). We live in an hour when the foundations of civilization are crumbling, the night of apostasy is deepening, lawlessness runs wild to its awful climax, the powers of anti-Christ increase and abound, and wars and rumors of wars belt the globe.

Yet the Church of GOD, with the only hope and cure for mankind's sin and misery, rests, for the most part, at ease in Zion, and we who claim that Name above every name make mud pies and daisy chains and twiddle our thumbs while a world sweeps over the brink of disaster. We preach a Gospel that is GOD's dynamite and we live firecracker lives.

We sing of showers of blessing and the old-time power and faith, the victory and higher ground, and then we leave it all in the hymn books and go home. We read that when our Lord held a service the congregation went home amazed and glorifying GOD and filled with fear and saying, "**We have seen strange things today**" (Luke 5:26).

How many, do you think, go from our meetings today in such a frame of mind? The early church lived in such power that men durst not join themselves unto them; they stood in awe of Pentecostal fire. To day the world slaps the church on the back and indulges in coarse familiarity with the things of GOD, for they see little to stun them into silence before the presence of the Lord. Did we care as we should, we would at least be embarrassed to sing so loudly about a power which even the world knows we do not have. "**Where is the LORD God of Elijah?**"

I am afraid that too many of us are like these theological students who saw Elijah and Elisha go by. They believed theoretically that Elijah was to be taken, but so weak was their actual faith that they wanted later to send out a scouting party to look for him lest the Spirit of GOD had cast him upon a mountain or into a valley! Here was knowledge without faith, the same sort that talks and sings today about the great realities of the Gospel but never actually believes them. We study Sunday-school lessons about Elijah, but who seeks his mantle? We read and sing about Pentecost, but who is willing to live as those Christians lived?

So we go on at this poor, dying rate, trying to swim across Jordans that GOD would part before us if we smote them with His mantle. How we do reason among ourselves today, devising ways and means to get across Jordan! We build bridges, we launch boats, we rush in like fools to ford it instead of standing still in faith to see GOD part the waters. We labor in our might and power, for we are too hurried and too busy to wait upon the Lord. We read that when Elisha went over Jordan the sons of the prophets said, "**The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha,**" and they met him and bowed themselves to the ground before him. Men know real power when they see it work, but they are not bowing in awe today because they see little that they cannot explain. Most of our religious activity today is only the work of the world moved over into the church on Sunday. It is the same power that men see all week in the regular routine; it merely wears a different garb and holds a hymn book. The strange fire of Nadab and Abihu can be accounted for. Men need to see GOD at work.

Let it be observed that, after he crossed Jordan, Elisha used his power first in healing the city's water supply. It was a constructive touch and we need to learn that lesson today. There are many

who, if they had the mantle of Elijah, would immediately summon all the reporters in order to crash the front page. GOD's power is healing, and certainly the waters are poisoned today. They do not need sugar but salt, not the sugar of social gospels and ethical programs but the salt of which our Lord spoke when He called us the salt of the earth.

We are the salt of the earth, mind you, not the sugar, and our ministry is truly to cleanse and not just to change the taste.

But on the heels of this incident comes another which has troubled many, the episode of the children mocking Elisha and their being torn by the bears. Here, although they were torn and not slain, there certainly was a destructive touch, and many have wondered what good there could be in such procedure. Well, it teaches one thing we do well to remember: you cannot fool with GOD's man. Even little children could not do it and get away with it. More than one poor mortal has undertaken to ridicule the minister of GOD and put his hand on GOD's anointed only to reap a bitter vengeance.

We have read of John McNeill saying once in a church where he was encountering criticism: "John McNeill and GOD have come to an understanding. Keep your hands off John McNeill!" Poking fun at GOD's prophets is dangerous business.

"Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" We stand before Jordan today and wave our wands, but the waters do not divide. The reason is not hard to find. Few there be of Elisha's sort who will not be stopped at Gilgal or Jericho but who press on for the double portion. We are not speaking here of tarrying for a Pentecost that has already come. But we do know that the men whom GOD has blessed with His SPIRIT in unusual power through the ages have been men in such dead earnest that they would not let the good keep them from the best.

They craved a deeper fellowship with GOD and found it through prevailing prayer, while the rest stood by the wayside and curiously watched them go by. Call it what you will, there is a waiting before GOD that we hurried modern mortals do not know, that sends a man back to his task with the hand of GOD upon him in such a fashion that waters part before him which are not moved at our command.

It is not that GOD puts a premium upon fastings and night-long prayers and tears and austerities of the flesh. But He does reward a burning desire for His very best that leaves no stone unturned and follows Elijah to Jordan while others merely watch him go by.

Our Lord Himself certainly lived perfectly in the will of GOD, yet He found it necessary to spend nights in prayer. And shall we poor failing mortals casually snatch from Heaven the power that others gained only by fervent and importunate intercession? It is true that our Father giveth liberally and upbraideth not; but He keeps His choicest blessings for those who really mean business and will not stop at the Gilgal of a mild average experience.

It is interesting to note that when Elijah seemed to be trying to get rid of Elisha, his faithful follower said, **"As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."** Later in Elisha's ministry, when the Shunammite woman comes to him in behalf of her son, he tries to dispose of the matter by sending Gehazi with his staff, but the woman says exactly what he said

to Elijah: "**As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.**" It is the man who holds on for GOD's blessing to whom people will come for a blessing. If you would have needy souls drawn to you for help, you must first have clung to One Who is greater.

Men in general and the church in particular are asking, "Where is GOD?" Our CHRIST is the same yesterday, today and forever. But the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him. Who will be a candidate for the mantle of Elijah, the double portion of His SPIRIT?

~ end of chapter 8 ~
