

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE ASCENSION

The false and fashionable theology of the present day would not have occasioned the mischief it has done, had it not assumed so specious an appearance of adhering to the doctrines of the Gospel.

The bulk of the people were unable to see through such delusion, and thus the adversary, transformed into an angel of light, has, through his subtlety, corrupted their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ. Thus a Supreme Being is indeed set forth by them, but one with whom they would forbid us to hold communion. The revealed Son of God is by them refined into a personified idea, an unsubstantial image. Immortality and eternal life are spoken of also, but only so long as men are not in earnest in pressing after them. Alas, how is the apostolic warning forgotten, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Colossians 2:8).

But let us have the *realities* of the Bible, for the human heart needs realities, and the more palpable and substantial to our faith they are, the better. We want the knowledge of an intelligible God; and God is only intelligible to sinful man by the Gospel, and by that manifestation of himself in our human nature which is revealed in the Scriptures.

- We want just such a knowledge of Divine Providence as is taught by Him who said, "**The very hairs of your head are all numbered.**"
- We want a Divine Surety who, having obeyed, been judged and suffered in our stead, has made a perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.
- We need a heavenly home into which we may be received, a kingdom which cannot be moved, a world more substantial than the present, which has become subject to vanity.
- We need a reunion of the soul with the body, changed indeed and glorified, but still the body, for it is a component part of man; and, previous and preparatory to all this, we need a real change of heart, a renewal of the soul by the Spirit of God.

Such are some of those realities which our necessities require, and which alone can satisfy our capacious desires of happiness. I say we want these realities to remedy other realities which force themselves upon us in our actual experience. For too real is the wretchedness which all men naturally and morally experience in the present life; disease and death await us; a body of sin oppresses and brings us low; conscious guilt confounds us; and nothing can avail to remedy all this but what 's actually opposed to it.

A paper shield gives no protection; the bread of dreams affords no support; we want the solid and substantial realities of divine revelation. There, and there alone are such realities to be discerned; and the more they are realized by our faith, the happier for us.

In the ascent of Elijah, which we are about to contemplate, we meet with one such solid demonstration of immortality and the life of the world to come.

“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (II Kings 2:11).

This passage of Scripture invites us, as it were, to a coronation, to witness an event most marvelous and most true.

The fact itself first requires our notice; and then its meaning and signification.

I. We see Elijah and Elisha passing on together in the country beyond Jordan

It was comparatively a solitary region. God did not select the marketplace of idlers for the scene of this wonder, but this secluded spot. While the two men of God thus walked on, engaged in holy conversation, **“behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it.”**

Well may we be astonished at beholding the glory and honor with which God thus crowns a poor sinner, for such is man **“at his best estate”** in this world. Let us however remember, that not **“flesh and blood,”** as such, that **“entereth the kingdom of God; neither can corruption inherit incorruption.”** It is not Elijah as born after the flesh, it is not the son of Adam, as such; but it is Elijah as born again of the Spirit, and as united to the second Adam, the Lord from heaven that is thus exalted.

The free grace of God towards sinners is that which reigns and triumphs here. What does this wonderful scene indicate, but that the Most High regards and treats as righteous all who believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. Behold here, then, the effect of the meritorious sacrifice of Christ. Learn, therefore, more impressively, from this event, the power of his mighty sacrifice for sin.

Such honor in substance, have all God’s saints. **“What is it for Him to send from on high to fetch me,”** (may every true Christian say,) **“seeing he is willing to take me to his bosom as ‘the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.’”**

He has in infinite wisdom and grace so ordered things, that it shall glorify his own holy name thus to deal with his obedient children. Having conformed them to the image of the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, it is a small thing with him thus to ratify their union with him forever.

We need not curiously inquire how Elijah, without dying, could be fit to be conveyed away, inasmuch as flesh and blood, in its present mortal and corrupt state, cannot enter into the kingdom of God. We are told of the mighty working of the Lord Jesus, “**whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself,**” and whereby he will change this body of humiliation, that it may be like unto his own glorious body; we are told that at the last day “**we shall not all sleep, but that we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye:**” and we may be quite sure that such a change as this now passed upon the body of Elijah. This is enough for our faith at present. His mortality was swallowed up of life, and his corruptible nature had put on incorruption.

It cannot further be described what his eye afterwards began to see, his ear to hear, and his heart to conceive. God, however, has reserved the knowledge and experience of all this for them that love him.

Blessed servant of God, how unspeakably and incomprehensible is now thy everlasting felicity; made glad as thou art with the joy of God’s countenance! Here thou art gathered to thy fathers with honor, and beholdest Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and thyself numbered with them.

So then we have a patriarchal instance of complete triumph over death in the case of Enoch; an Israelitish instance of the same in the case of Elijah; and, to crown the whole, the New Testament account of our Lord and Saviour’s resurrection and ascension; all serving to raise our faith to the certainty of a similar triumph. Let nothing therefore relative to death depress us. Let our faith in these truths become every day, by the grace of God, stronger and stronger; let us grow in gratitude and love, in obedience and patience, until our own faith also shall be swallowed up in vision, and our hope hope in enjoyment.

II. The wonderful event here recorded, is one of the most glorious, significant, and exhilarating facts which the world ever witnessed before the birth of Christ

It served to dispel much obscurity which might occasionally cloud the faith of dying saints under the Old Testament dispensation. It might also serve to cheer the minds of many of the faithful but oppressed or afflicted servants of God, in those days, during the course of their earthly pilgrimage. For they would recollect that Elijah too had been thus oppressed and afflicted, and yet how gloriously did he triumph at last!

Many a one, too, under deep conviction of sin, and whose faith could not always derive the comfort he needed from the typical sacrifices of the law, might have been preserved from despondency by remembering this honor visibly put upon one of the penitent sons of Adam, as an encouragement to all who were like-minded with him.

This event also served to prepare the faith of true Israelites for the wonders of the New Testament dispensation.

That prophetic invocation, "**Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive,**" It would thus be rendered more susceptible of its grandest import in the minds of those who should afterwards wait from age to age for the consolation of Israel. The ascension too of Elijah was surely intended to prefigure that of our blessed Saviour. Yet it became him, as Lord of all, to ascend, not in a fiery chariot waiting upon him, but by a visible manifestation of his own Divine power. Hence it is only said, that "**he was received up into heaven,**" that "**while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven;**" and that while the disciples "**beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.**"

Thus his ascension took place before men, in majestic simplicity and tranquility, which may doubtless be ascribed to its superior glory as compared with that of Elijah.

In all generations of mankind, the present world has been too narrow for the capacious desires of the human soul. Hence men in every nation, however barbarous, have endeavored, by one way and another, to pierce the veil that conceals from us the invisible world and a future state. This shows that the spirit of man feels, as it were, its own immortal nature, though it shows at the same time our universal need of Divine revelation.

Cyrus, though a heathen, said at the approach of death, "I cannot imagine that the soul lives only while it remains this mortal body. I am rather inclined to think, that when separated from this body, it will possess more understanding and greater purity."

Socrates, the prince of heathen philosophers, when about to die, could only say, "We part; I am going to die, and you to live. Which of us goes the best way is known to God alone!"

All that Cicero, the great and published Roman, could say upon this subject was, "I do not wish that what I am about to write of a duration of existence beyond the present life, should be regarded as certain, like a divine oracle. Upon this subject I entertain no more than conjecture."

Neither have the wise of this world, in our own day, any better staff to lean upon, while they refuse to rest their hopes on the truths of divine revelation. Their belief in a future state, if they believe in it at all, is, in most cases, so barren and comfortless, that death is viewed by them, in their reflecting moments, as a formidable foe.

But it is the privilege of the Christian to exclaim in his severest sufferings, "**O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**" "**We know,**" says the apostle, (and how many have, able since to adopt his words as their own!) "**that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**"

And if you ask the believer the source of this knowledge, he can refer you to the Son of God himself, who, when on earth, raised the dead to life by a word; yea, and in his own person rose again and ascended visibly into heaven; who said to his disciples, "**In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.**"

Here then is the veil that hides the other world from the eye of sense removed entirely to the eye of faith, and we have only to behold, rejoice, and be glad at the glorious prospect thus opened before us by the Lord from heaven. And what he has thus revealed is plain and definite; which if we believe, we know in what we have believed. He shows us a house, a home, a heavenly paternal home; a peopled residence, a real habitation, where we shall know one another, and be with one another upon terms of the most intimate fellowship and the dearest friendship. For the expression “**My Father’s house,**” indicates family community, familiar intercourse, living with and in the presence of the Father.

O how invaluable is the possession already of such sure intelligence respecting our eternal habitation in the celestial world! And how quieting to the heart thus to know of a better country, that is, an heavenly, where peace forever reigns, where all is perfect harmony and love!

Thus we see that a reflected image of the Christian’s future glory is presented to us in the triumphant exaltation of Elijah, who was originally “**a man of like passions as we are.**” They who are Christ’s, who having crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, are seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, who set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth, and whose life is hid with Christ in God—have in themselves an earnest and pledge of their future union with their Lord in glory.

But Woe unto the impenitent and unbelieving, for it shall as certainly be ill with them! and this because the great salvation has been neglected, and the riches of Divine grace, and longsuffering, and goodness, and forbearance, have been despised.

Where this is the case, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, for it is to Christ’s one sacrifice that Elijah and all the saints owe their triumph. God having “**made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**”

“Worthy” then is “**the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!**” Amen.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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