

ELIJAH, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER

By

F. B. Meyer

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A DOUBLE PORTION OF ELIJAH'S SPIRIT

(II Kings 2)

THERE is one incident forever associated with the translation of Elijah, which, though it largely concerns his friend and successor, is so characteristic of the great prophet himself that we must not pass it over without some notice. It is deeply significant.

We are told that, after they had passed the Jordan, the two friends went on and talked. What sublime themes must have engaged them, standing as they did on the very confines of Heaven, and in the vestibule of eternity!

The apostasy of Israel and its approaching doom; the ministry just closing, with its solemn warnings; the outlook toward the work upon which Elisha was preparing to enter - these and cognate subjects must have occupied them.

It was in the course of this conversation that **“Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.”**

It was a very wide door flung open by the elder to his younger friend. And at first we are surprised to think that Elijah could offer to supply anything for which Elisha asked. Is not this rather the prerogative of God? Surely God alone can do whatsoever we desire when we pray; and even He is limited by the fulfillment, on our part, of certain essential conditions. But we must remember that Elijah was intimately familiar with the mind and heart of his brother. It was not in vain that they had spent those years of ministry together. It was with the object of testing the spirit of his friend that the departing seer had urged him again and again to leave him. And it was only when Elisha had stood the test with such unwavering resolution that Elijah was able to give him this *carte blanche*.

He knew that that faithful soul would ask nothing for which he could not exercise his mighty faith, or which God could not and would not bestow. He was only **“a man subject to like passions as we are,”** cast in the ordinary mold of human nature; but, by close and intimate communion with God, he had reached such a pitch of holy boldness that the very keys of spiritual blessing seemed put into his hand, so that he might dispense to kindred spirits the priceless gifts of God. Why should not we strive after and attain **“like precious faith”**?

I. ELISHA'S LARGE REQUEST

Elijah's confidence was not misplaced. Elisha's reply wrought along those lines which he had anticipated. He sought neither wealth, nor position, nor worldly power; nor a share in those advantages on which he had turned his back forever when he said farewell to home, and friends, and worldly prospects.

“And Elisha Said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.”

What did Elisha mean by this request? I do not interpret his request to mean that he should have twice as much of the faith and spiritual force as characterized his master. What he intended was to ask that he might be considered as Elijah's eldest son, the heir to his spirit, the successor to his work.

There is a passage in the law of Moses which clearly proves that **“the double portion”** was the right of the first-born and heir (Deuteronomy 21:17).

This the prophet sought, and this he certainly obtained.

It was a noble request. He was evidently called to succeed to Elijah's work; but he felt that he dare not undertake its responsibilities, or face its inevitable perils, unless he were specially equipped with spiritual power. It is not often that we can count an Elijah among our friends; but when we may, we shall do well to invoke his intercessions on our behalf, that we may be endowed with a similar spirit. And there is at least One to whom we can all go with this sublime request, sure that He is more eager to give us His Holy Spirit than the tenderest earthly father to satisfy his children's hunger with bread.

Oh for this spiritual hunger, insatiable for the best gifts!

Men of the world hunger for name, and rank, and wealth; and they get what they seek because they will take no Nay. Blessed should we be if we were as eager after the Spirit of God; and if, instead of giving up opportunities of usefulness because we did not feel qualified to fill them, we rather sought and received a new baptism of power, a fresh endowment of the Holy Spirit.

Who need shrink from attempting Elijah's work, if first he have received Elijah's spirit?

Instead of relinquishing a work for which you do not feel naturally qualified, wait in the fervency of entreaty, and in the expectancy of faith, until you are endued with power from on high. There is no work to which God calls you for which He is not prepared to qualify you.

Let it never be forgotten that Elijah himself did what he did, not by inherent qualities, but because through faith he had received such copious bestowments of the Spirit of God; and what he did we may do again - the weakest and humblest may do - if only we are prepared to wait, and watch, and pray, until our Pentecost breaks upon us, with or without its sound of rushing wind, and its tongues of flaming fire.

II. LET US CLEARLY UNDERSTAND THE TWO CONDITIONS IMPOSED ON ELISHA

(1) *Tenacity of purpose.*

Elijah tested it severely at every step of that farewell journey. Repeatedly he said, “**Tarry here.**” But he might as well have tried to uproot a cedar of Lebanon, or to stir Carmel from its base. Neither Gilgal, with its panoramic scenery; nor Bethel, with its memories of the angel-haunted dream; nor Jericho, the border-town - were able to attract or retain him. And though their course lay through the Jordan-flood of death, it sufficed not to deter that eager spirit.

Elisha knew what he sought; he read the meaning of the discipline to which he was being exposed; and his heroic resolution grew with the ordeal, as the waters of a stream grow against an arresting dam, until they overleap it and rush merrily on their way. It was thus that the Syro-Phoenician woman prevailed with CHRIST. It was thus that the Apostles waited for the promise of the Father, undaunted by ten days delay.

Before giving us the Holy Ghost, our Father will certainly try us, to see if we can live without Him. If we can, we may. And it is only when we give signs of a resolution which will take no denial, but detains the Angel with its imperative importunity, and vows its unalterable determination to be blessed - it is only then that God, who had never been really reluctant, and had only been testing us, turns to us with a smile, and says, “**O child, great is thy importunity; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.**” “**The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; and the violent take it by force.**”

How often we persuade ourselves that we can acquire the greatest spiritual blessings without paying the equivalent price! Thus James and John thought that they could obtain a seat each on the throne for the asking. They did not realize that the Cross preceded the crown, and that the bitter cup of Gethsemane lay between them and the coronation anthem.

- We must pass through the Jordan;
- Daily must we take up the Cross and follow Jesus;
- We must be conformed to Him in the likeness of His death, and in the fellowship of His sufferings;
- The old nature must be crucified;
- The Divine will must be lovingly accepted, though it cost tears of blood and bitter sorrow.

Then, having evinced the steadfastness of our purpose, we shall approve ourselves worthy to be the recipients of God’s supreme gift.

(2) *Spiritual insight.*

“**If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.**”

There was nothing arbitrary in this demand. And it would have been hardly possible to have devised a more complete criterion of the spiritual condition of this eager aspirant.

To see the transactions of the spirit-world requires a spirit of no ordinary purity, and of no ordinary faith. No mere mortal eye could have beheld that fiery cortege. To senses dulled with passion, or blinded by materialism, the space occupied by the flaming seraphim would have seemed devoid of any special interest, and bare as the rest of the surrounding scenery. Perhaps there was not another individual in all Israel with heart pure enough, or spiritual nature keen enough, to have been sensible of that glorious visitation. Had we been there, we should probably have been unconscious of anything, save the sudden disappearance of the prophet.

But since Elisha saw it all, it is clear that his passions were under control; his temper refined; his spiritual life in healthy exercise; and his whole being of such an order as to admit him into the foremost rank of the spiritual world, without risk. Such must we be, by the grace of God, ere we can aspire to possess or wield similar powers.

Our reception of the Spirit will be in exact proportion to the subjection of the flesh, and the consequent vigor of our inner life.

III. THE ANSWER

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him.”

Ah, that falling mantle! How much it meant!

It is said that the bestowal of the mantle has always been considered by Eastern people an indispensable part of consecration to a sacred office. When, therefore, Elijah’s mantle fluttered to Elisha’s feet, he knew at once that Heaven itself had ratified his request. He knew that he had Elijah’s post. He believed that he was anointed with Elijah’s power.

I do not for a moment think that there was any emotional or sensible indication of the mighty change which had been wrought upon him. His spirit was still. There was no tremor in his pulse; no thrill of consciously added power in his frame. The torrent of spiritual force had entered him as quietly as light enters the world, and as the forces of spring thrill through the woods.

If, in patience and faith, we claim of our Father the filling of the Holy Ghost, we must never ask ourselves if we feel full. We must believe that God has kept His word with us, and that we are filled, though no celestial sign accompanies the entering glory of that power **“which worketh effectually in them that believe.”**

But others will become aware of the presence of something that we never had before, as they see us stand by some tameless Jordan, and behold the turbulent waters part hither and thither before our stroke. Directly we receive some great spiritual endowment, we may expect to have it tested. It was so with Elisha. “He went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan.”

Did he hesitate? If so, it was but for a moment. He had seen Elijah go; and he believed, though probably he did not feel, that therefore the double portion of his spirit had fallen to his lot. He, therefore, acted upon the assurance of his faith.

“He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.”

As soon as Jesus had been anointed with the Holy Ghost, He was led into the wilderness to be tempted. The title **“Son of God,”** uttered over the waters of baptism, was made the subject of Satan’s wildest attacks: **“If Thou be the Son of God, . . . “**

So must it be ever. But difficulty, temptation, and trial, avail to bring into greater prominence, both for ourselves and others, the reality and glory of the blessing we have received. The parted Jordan proves the presence of the Spirit.

“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

That cry has often been raised when the Church, bereft of its leaders, has stood face to face with some great and apparently insuperable difficulty. And sometimes there has been more of despair than hope in the cry. But though Elijah goes, Elijah’s God remains. He takes His weary workers home; but He is careful to supply their place, and to anoint others to carry on their work. It is His work, not ours. On Him is the responsibility, as to Him shall be the glory.

If you ask where He is, an answer close behind you whispers, “I am here.” Catch up the mantle of the departed. Emulate their lives. Seek their spirit. Smite the bitter waves of difficulty in unwavering faith: and you shall find that the Lord God of Elijah will do as much for you as for the saints who have been swept to their reward, and are now mingling with the great cloud of witnesses that are watching your conflicts, your triumphs, and your joys.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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