

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE LEGACY

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And 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. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him” (II Kings 2:13-15).

We come now to an interesting act—the will of the departed prophet is unsealed, and Elisha is the heir of an inheritance, the like of which the world had seldom seen. Let us contemplate the happy man somewhat more closely in the enjoyment of his heritage, and consider Elisha,

- I. With Elijah’s mantle;
- II. With Elijah’s God;
- III. With Elijah’s spirit;
- IV. In Elijah’s office.

I. At the moment when Elijah was taken up in his fiery chariot, his prophet’s mantle, loosed by an invisible hand, fell from his shoulders, and floated down before Elisha

Although this was a trifling circumstance in itself, yet it is so significant that, we cannot overlook it. With his mantle Elijah had forever thrown off the burden of his commission. When formerly he cast his mantle upon Elisha at Abelmeholah, it was but as a preparatory vocation to the prophetic office.

But Elisha, on inheriting this mantle, is henceforth called to take the place of his great master, and to carry on his work. This singular legacy was therefore very significant to Elisha. The mantle came flying towards him heavily laden. But with the onerous commission he thus received, was connected the encouraging circumstance, that it came accompanied by such a precious memorial of his paternal master. It was now no longer the mantle of the redoubted reformer, but the robe of a blessed heir of heaven, borne thither on the wings of the cherubim. It would remind him, and others, of the kindness and love of God to sinful men, expressed in a most unusual manner.

The ascension of its owner to heaven had rendered it a truly festal garment; and thus it would contribute to refresh the spirit of Elisha in his arduous office; and, at the same time, to identify him as that gracious messenger of peace, who was to announce to the house of Israel, like the rainbow after a storm, the Lord's goodwill towards men.

It was also a significant circumstance to Elisha, that the official garment he was afterwards to wear was cast to him, as it were, out of the open heavens. What else could he perceive in it, but an immediate investiture and vocation on the part of the living God? And indeed, every priestly man ought to carry the same significance now. I mean, that every clergyman, teacher, missionary, or whoever else labors in God's vineyard, ought to be able to say with Elisha, "I have received my commission from heaven—my call is of God."

But, in the present day, people commonly make the mantle themselves, esteeming it as an idle tale that anything should fall from heaven but rain or snow, and looking upon the sacred office of a minister as upon any other profession, which may be taken up at pleasure, or for the sake of a maintenance. The parents decide for their child that he shall be a clergyman. The vain youthful student, especially if he be conscious of possessing some little talent, immediately thinks himself fit for the sacred office. How many young men proceed to universities to enter upon the study of divinity, without even the most distant thought of asking counsel of God, in order to learn by the directions of Scripture, by circumstances of Providence, and their own qualifications, whether it will be his will to employ them in the work of the ministry; and when arrived at the university, they too often meet with no pious counsellor, such as Elijah was to Elisha, to take them aside, and inquire whether they had any other proof of their call to the ministry than their own notion and fancy, and the counsel of flesh and blood.

Hence it is, that we have now the mournful example of many a flock in Christendom, among whom grievous wolves fill the shepherd's office, to the subversion and ruin of souls. Is it then to be wondered at, that the common mariner should occasionally seize the helm, when the pilot knows not how to govern the ship? The persecutors of such would do well to consider, that they are only opposing what they themselves have contributed to bring into existence.

II. After Elisha had taken up the mantle in God's name, he commences his return to Jericho, doubtless much affected, and yet comforted; for not only Elijah's mantle, but Elijah's God remains to him

Of this he cannot doubt; but where is the faith which no longer requires a seal?

"**Show me a token for good,**" saith the Psalmist; and what ejaculation of his is oftener repeated than this? Elisha returns to the eastern bank of Jordan. He beholds the stream at his feet, and over it he must pass. Elijah is no longer at his side, and his mantle alone is not sufficient. Elijah's God must manifest himself.

We may easily suppose that he now heartily prayed, if not in David's words, "**Show me a token for good;**" yet in the language of deep submission and humble dependence on the divine power and faithfulness.

He takes the mantle of Elijah, folds it together as his master had done, and with it he smites the waters of Jordan, saying, **“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”**

This may sound strange the ears of some: nevertheless it was a right way of proceeding in the present case; and **“He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God”** (Romans 8:27).

The Lord was the portion of Elisha’s inheritance; and not the prophet’s mantle and commission only; and his faith could say, **“Thou shalt maintain my lot.”** Thus Isaac inherited the portion of his father Abraham; and to Jacob God declared himself as the God of Abraham and of Isaac. To believers also of subsequent times he revealed himself as the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; and thereby promised to them the blessings he had bestowed on those patriarchs; assuring them that he would bear them in his hands with the same, faithfulness. Hence the Old Testament saints, praying, directed their petitions to the Lord God of their fathers.

In the same manner may we regard whatever our **“God manifest in the flesh”** did for men in the days of his flesh, as a pattern of what he will now do for all who diligently seek him. Thus we may say, “Where is the God of the penitent malefactor? where is the God of Martha, and Mary and Lazarus? where is the God of Paul, and of Peter, and of Mary Magdalene? where is the Lord, who after his resurrection, on the shore of the lake of Galilee, prepared a fire of coals, and bread and of fish likewise, for his disciples, and who had repeatedly fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes?” Yes, “this God is our God for ever and ever: he shall be our guide even unto death.” **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and forever!”** Lo, he is **“with us always, even to the end of the world.”** Amen.

Surely it is something very great and blessed, that we are permitted to call the God of all the favored individuals mentioned in the New Testament, our God. But the privileges of true Christians may be expressed in yet stronger language than this, because of their mystical union with the only begotten Son of God. They can therefore say, “Where is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?”

For what is it that Christ himself saith of them in his prayer to his Father? **“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved ME”** (John 17: 21-23).

Oh, incomprehensibly glorious and adorable mystery of godliness! God indeed manifest in our flesh! We are therefore as true believers, who keep his commandments and do those things which are pleasing in his sight, warranted by his own express word, to expect, hope, and desire of God the supply of all our real necessities, as confidently and as assuredly as Christ himself, with respect to his human nature, was thus warranted during his sojourn upon earth.

Think only, with humble and adoring gratitude, what unsearchable riches of blessing are implied in such a privilege as this. And shall it ever cease? No more than the love of the Father to Christ himself can cease. Such is the love to those who believe in his name.

Live! Beloved brethren, daily in the faith of such as this; and it will enable you to overcome every difficulty in the path of duty; to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.

III. No sooner had Elisha smitten the waters of Jordan, than the manifestation of the Lord God of Elijah is vouchsafed

The stream of the river is again parted by an invisible hand, the course of the upper part of it is arrested by an invisible barrier, and the prophet descends with a firm and sure step upon its dry gravelly bed.

It would be vain for me to attempt to describe to you the feelings which his soul must have experienced on such an occasion as this. A deeply humble and contrite person, experiences some sudden and evident answer to prayer; or a young and modest man of God, who may have been tempted tremblingly to doubt whether he had received a divine call to his office, but who sees in the first loaded fishing net he draws to land, a divine ratification, as it were, of his call to the ministry—such persons will be the first in the present day to sympathize with the unspeakable joy of Elisha, upon beholding the river divided at his word.

In his wonderful passage across its bed he must have experienced feelings something like those of Israel when passing through the Red Sea; and of him also it may be said, that he was baptized in Jordan. Filled with the consciousness of God's nearness to him, he must have felt every doubt and scruple vanish away, like the mists before the morning sun.

He now strikingly experienced that the Lord God of Elijah had caused a double portion of his spirit to rest upon him; God having given him the same power to exercise over the river, was an earnest of what he had granted him besides. How wonderfully also was his office as a prophet to Israel magnified by this miracle!

Upon his arrival on the other side Jordan, **“the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him: they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha; and they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.”**

This reverential homage had not so much reference to the man, as to the Spirit that rested upon him, the divine power which showed itself in him. These sons of the prophets not only perceived what was Divine, but they viewed it with affection and veneration. This was a beautiful feature in their character; whereas **“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God”**

Happy is it also for us, if we are affectionately and reverently affected towards Divine things.

It is recorded of one of the most distinguished painters of former days, that when he was a mere boy, after viewing a painting, by Raphael, for some time, with silent transport, he suddenly broke out, with joy beaming in his countenance, as if he had found a treasure, “I too am a painter!” He then left the picture-gallery, mixed his colors, and afterwards produced works not unlike that which had kindled in him such enthusiasm for his art.

In like manner, it may be regarded as a joyful sign in ourselves when the spiritual image of an Abraham, an Elijah, or a Paul, transports us with affection, and kindles the ardent wish within us, that our hearts were formed like theirs. And it the consoling thought suggests itself, (I am speaking to those who love and keep the words of Christ,) that we also are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, that in us there is something of the same spirit which animated those eminent saints, we ought not to reject such a thought.

For he who knows how to understand and appreciate those in their peculiar character, and is constrained to embrace them with affection on account of their spiritual excellencies, certainly indicates that something of their mind exists within him; for like is only understood and loved by its like.

Hence the Lord says, “**He that receiveth a prophet in name of a prophet,**” that is, in the character of a prophet, or because he is a prophet, “**shall receive a prophet’s reward;**” for by this reception, he shows himself to be like-minded with him whom he receives.

IV. Elisha, with the spirit of his great predecessor, inherited also his office and his flock

Elijah had not commenced his prophetic course under such favorable circumstances. He had entered upon a waste moral wilderness; whereas his successor found the fallow ground, as it were, broken up; nay, he even saw here and there a blooming plantation, whose fresh and vigorous shoots already bore the promise of future blessings to Israel.

A minister of the Gospel of Christ ought to esteem it no small advantage to find, on entering upon the care of a church, a little flock of really believing souls already waiting to receive him. However small their number, he discerns among them a little leaven, as it were, which is easily capable of further extension, and an echo to his instructions, his prayers, and his praises, from the hearts of affectionate brethren.

In this consists the prosperity of a church, and not in earthly property and endowments. A church that is rich in the Word of God, is rich indeed. It has then the keys of the invisible world; the weapons against death and hell; the universal remedy for every evil; the wondrous staff that divides every river; the tree of life, whose leaves are for effectual healing; and the lamp which lights the way through time into eternity.

And even should this precious treasure remain like an unemployed capital, and the word be possessed only in outward respects, and not yet have become an inward possession, still a church may be congratulated if it have only the Word. It lies at least within the territory of hope, and is like a field which has received the seed into its furrows, although it has not sprung up. The husbandman regards it with a hopeful eye, for it needs only that the gentle showers fall, and it may by and by appear clothed in the most beautiful verdure. We have to congratulate the inhabitants of our own happy valley, that all its churches are more than such fields.*

* Referring to the valley of Barmen

In many places the Word has sprung up, and we have long had amongst us many living men of God. If we look around us in our church meetings, how many a brother and sister's face beams upon us there! If we pass through our streets, where is there one in which we might not somewhere or other greet a tabernacle of God with men? Yea, there are quarters of the town in which house after house is a pavilion of the Lord, and where we meet with groups of humble and obedient Christians.

And O, how many a beautiful flower, how many a lily of our valley blooms in modest concealment, known only to the heavenly Husbandman who refreshes it with his dew, or perhaps to one or two among us that has accidentally discovered it! How many a holy soul walks in the midst of us unobserved, and without talking or boasting while few know the rich treasures of grace it bears within it, and the ardent love with which it is attached to its Saviour!

Yes, were all who fear the Lord among us to come together into one place, I believe we should be astonished to see how numerous they are. It is true, they are of various forms and complexions in outward respects; but they are of one spirit, one faith, and one hope. Oh, how we rejoice in being able to call such husbandry ours! Blessed inheritance, which our never-to-be-forgotten predecessors have left us! The praise, honor and glory belong to Divine grace alone.

But, to return to Elisha, we find him on his way to Jericho laden with the fruits of the Spirit abundantly, to become a blessing to the land; his own mind sparkling like the starry heavens, with a thousand stupendous thoughts and hopes.

Elijah's legacy to his successor may serve to remind us of the better legacy which is bequeathed to every faithful disciple of Christ. The mantle which our Saviour has left to every one of his followers is the robe of his own righteousness, a festal robe indeed! It answers the purpose of armor here, and of priestly glory also, for our entrance into the holiest. It is so interwoven with personal holiness, that the two are always joined together; so that it constitutes the wedding garment of the soul, and sanctifies the members of the body for the service of God.

The God whom we serve is "**a just God and a Saviour,**" who "carries the lambs in his bosom," who deems not the angels too high for our ministering attendants, who combines his own glory and our happiness in one and the same everlasting love.

The Spirit of holiness which he imparts to us, though he does not divide the waves of the sea, yet quells in us the troubled conscience; and though he does not act in us as a spirit of prophetic vision, yet "**witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.**"

He does not excite us to call down fire from heaven, yet he enables us to cry, "**Abba, father!**" and though he does not make us workers of miracles, yet he makes us temples of the living God. Yea, and the office of ministers of the Spirit, as all true Christian ministers are, transcends the office of any prophet of the Old Testament in some important respects. For our ministry is that of reconciliation, which cries to men, "**Ye are complete in Him;**" and that "**there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;**" and that "**he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.**"

- We are not only Christ's messengers, but are commissioned to "**beseech men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God.**"

- We are sent even as the Father sent him.

- We act in the name of the Son of God, not only to carry the standard, but the keys of the kingdom of heaven. John, 20:23.

Let us rejoice always in these superior blessings of divine grace; and, accounting that "**the lines fallen to us in pleasant places, yea, that we have a goodly heritage,**" let us pray and labor, and labor and pray that we may live accordingly. Amen.

~ end of chapter 26 ~

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