

ELIJAH, THE PROPHET OF FIRE

By

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Chapter 22

LESSONS OF THE MOUNT, AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

"And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. (Matthew 17:3-11)

"FOR YE ARE NOT COME UNTO THE MOUNT THAT MIGHT BE TOUCHED, AND THAT BURNED WITH FIRE, NOR UNTO BLACKNESS, AND DARKNESS, AND TEMPEST, AND THE SOUND OF A TRUMPET, AND THE VOICE OF WORDS; WHICH VOICE THEY THAT HEARD ENTREATED THAT THE WORD SHOULD NOT BE SPOKEN TO THEM ANY MORE. BUT YE ARE COME UNTO MOUNT SION, AND UNTO THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM, AND TO AN INNUMERABLE COMPANY OF ANGELS, TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CHURCH OF THE FIRST-BORN, WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN, AND TO GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL, AND TO THE SPIRITS OF JUST MEN MADE PERFECT." - Hebrews 12:18, 19, 22, 23. [328]

HAVING in the previous chapter endeavoured to describe, as minutely as the details furnished by the three separate Evangelists enable us, the scene and significant incidents of the Transfiguration, we shall proceed, in these closing pages, to speak of the objects which this beautiful New Testament sequel to the life of Elijah seems mainly intended to serve.

These were various. We shall restrict ourselves to the one which, while in itself most prominent, has also a more special connection with our Prophet - viz., the intimation thus given by visible symbol, *that the legal and prophetic dispensations were superseded by the Gospel.*

Moses and Elias were the representatives of the two former. Moses, the great lawgiver, who had received the ten commandments, amid the thunders of Sinai, from the hands of GOD Himself;

and Elias, as we now well know, the most distinguished in his own age, or perhaps in any age, among the Prophets of Israel. Both appear to do homage to JESUS; confessing their subserviency to Him, of whom both the law and the Prophets bore witness.

They lay down, as it were, the seals of office, - the warrants for their temporary ministration, - at His feet,

- Moses his [329] rod
- Elias his prophetic-mantle,

acknowledging that neither they nor the dispensations of which they were the representatives, had any glory by reason of **"the glory that excelleth."**

- The law seemed to say, through its representative, *'O Lamb of GOD, all my bleating sacrifices pointed to Thee.'*

- Prophecy seemed to say through its representative - *'O Prophet of the Highest, all my picturings and prefigurations centred in Thee.'*

The shadow is transformed into the substance.

'In Thee,' says Moses as he gazes on his transfigured Lord, 'I see the end, and meaning, and reality of the Passover - the besprinkled lintels,- the smitten rock, the serpent of brass,- the blood-stained mercy-seat.'

'It was Thee,' says Elijah, 'I saw in the sacrifice on Carmel, thee, I heard in **"the still small voice"** of Horeb.'

And when Peter, in the wonted ardour of his spirit, suggested the erection of three tabernacles - one to each of the glorified persons, - GOD gave a very significant intimation, that both the other ministers were to give place to **"the minister of the sanctuary, and the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man."** For **"while he thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them, and they feared as they entered the cloud; and there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son; hear ye him."** **"Hear ye HIM!"**

Ye have been accustomed to hear, and to regard with profound veneration, Moses and Elias and the other Prophets, - but a greater than these is here. This is the illustrious personage of whom your great lawgiver himself predicted, that **"a Prophet would the Lord God raise up unto you of your brethren;"** - this is He **"of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth;"** [330] - this is the true Elijah (**"the strong Lord"**) who shall **"turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."** **"This is my beloved Son; hear ye him."** ¹

And then, when the glorious vision departed, Moses and Elias disappear, and leave **"Jesus only;"** - a beautiful emblem, designed to intimate that the former dispensations were now done away!

Elias and Moses, two names which the disciples, in common with their countrymen; regarded

almost with religious awe, were to give place to a greater.

The work of the servants is done - merged in the glory of their Master; the rod of Moses is broken - the mantle of Elijah falls on the true Elisha - JESUS was to be hailed as "**King of the Jews.**"

By Him:

- the moral law was obeyed
- the prophecies accomplished
- the types fulfilled.

And now, in accordance with GOD's wonted dealings with His subordinate ministers, a solemn investiture takes place of the Great Antitypical - Priest, Lawgiver, and Prophet; the glorious company of the apostles - the goodly fellowship of the Prophets - the noble army of martyrs - praise Him!

Adoring Him as Redeemer, they proclaim through these, their two sainted representatives, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!**"

The accompaniments of that scene of glory, too, were such as to vindicate the superiority of the Gospel over any of the previous dispensations. The legal dispensation was ushered [331] upon the world from amid a fearful canopy of cloud and darkness, thunderings, and tempest. The other, from the summit of a mountain, too; but now the thunders are hushed - the blackness has passed away; and in its stead a cloud of surpassing brightness overshadows.

We behold Moses on the one - his language is, "**I exceedingly fear and quake;**" - Peter on the other, "**Lord, it is good for me to be here.**" On the one, we listen to a voice which shakes the earth; and "**they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more;**" - on the other, we hear a voice, - but it is the still small voice of love, pointing us to CHRIST, saying, "**Hear ye Him!**"

Elias, on the same Horeb-mount, comes forth from his cave, muffling his face in his mantle, gazing with trembling awe on the winged symbols of vengeance that passed in succession before him. Now with open face, he beholds, as in a glass, the glory of his transfigured Lord, and is "**changed into the same image from glory to glory!**"

As a further reason why Moses and Elias were employed on this occasion in preference to other ransomed saints, we may infer that they were sent to bear attestation to the great plan of the Redemption which is by CHRIST JESUS; - "**that neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.**"

Of those who had entered on the inheritance of the promises, if any there were, who could have attained Heaven on the ground of their own good works and meritorious deeds, it would doubtless have been the two who are here with the Lord on the mount.

We know well the [332] history of the one, - how in his life of exalted purity, there is but one

solitary recorded blemish - discovering him to be a "**man of like passions.**" A similar intimacy with the other, would unfold a marvellous display of faith, humility, devotedness, heroic endurance, self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness. So that if any of the human race could have laid claim, so to speak, to the kingdom above, on the footing of personal merit, we should have pointed to these two illustrious representatives of the two earlier dispensations - these two heads of the sainted hierarchy.

But we could not have been more powerfully or impressively told, that every Redeemed worshipper before the Throne, from the least to the greatest in the kingdom, owes his place there to another righteousness than his own. These mightiest of glorified mortals talk of nothing but "**the decease that was to be accomplished at Jerusalem!**"

They appear in shining raiment, - but they proclaim that these robes owe all their brightness, these crowns all their lustre, to the Saviour of Calvary.

We may regard them, therefore, not only as the representatives of bygone dispensations of type and figure on earth, but as the representatives of a higher dispensation of glory in Heaven, - sent down from the ransomed multitude above, to tell to the world that not a robe is there from Abel's downwards, but what is washed in the blood of the Lamb, - that every jewel that sparkles in their crown they owe to His cross and passion.

We may regard them as commissioned to tell of the intense interest with which that approaching "**decease**" was contemplated by the companies of the upper sanctuary.

In this view of it, while the scene on the mount would greatly strengthen the faith of [333] the disciples in the hour of trial, it would also tend, and was doubtless designed, to impart courage and consolation and support to the great Redeemer Himself, in the prospect of coming anguish.

Oh! would He not be cheered and strengthened for His approaching conflict, when He descended the hill with the approving smile of His heavenly Father resting upon Him, - conscious that He carried with Him to the garden and the cross, the awakened interest and sympathies of a Redeemed multitude which no man can number, who waited in profound suspense for the moment of Victory, when He should cry, "**It is finished,**" and bow His head and give up the ghost!

Let us try to imagine the wondrous converse. "**They spake of His decease!**"

They would strengthen His soul, by telling of the mighty results that decease was to accomplish, - the transcendent lustre it would pour around the throne of GOD, - magnifying every attribute of His nature - securing peace on earth, and glory in the highest.

They would tell of the august lesson it would read to a wondering universe, - what an attestation to GOD's unbending holiness - His spotless truth - His hatred of sin, and yet His love to the sinner!

They would tell of the countless multitudes who had died in the faith of this "**decease,**" and were now rejoicing above in the prospect of its accomplishment, - of the myriads, in unborn ages, who

were to reap its fruits, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue.

Yes! we may conceive that the eye of the Transfigured Saviour (as of old from mount Pisgah did that of the lawgiver of Israel, who now stood by His side) would, from the top of this northern height, survey the land of covenant promise.

Stretching far beyond the plains of Galilee. He would see, in [334] majestic perspective, the nations of the earth confessing Him as Lord, and rejoicing in that very decease He was about to accomplish.

Amid the stillness of that midnight scene, He would direct His own eyes, as He had done those of the Father of the Faithful ages before, to the starry firmament, and behold there an emblem of His unnumbered spiritual seed! Thus seeing of the travail of His soul, He would be satisfied. The thought that He should thus turn many to righteousness, who should shine as the stars for ever and ever, would mightily nerve Him for the hour and power of darkness.

Oh! when, from this holy converse, the past, and present, and future, all seemed to combine in proclaiming the results which were suspended on His decease, - when He saw the tide of glory that would thereby roll in to the Throne of GOD, - when He thought of the mighty moral influence of His death, not on the family of earth only, but on unknown worlds - varied orders of intelligence throughout the universe, - in the dispensation of the fullness of time gathering together in one all things in CHRIST, both which are in Heaven and in earth; - He would descend to the conflict rejoicing to think, that, though His own garments were to be rolled in blood, the garments of a myriad multitude should by that blood be made white, - contemplating such results as these, not only would He willingly enter the garden, and drink the cup, and endure the cross; but, as if longing for the hour of victory, He could exclaim, **"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!"**

In addition to this more special design of the Transfiguration, there are many other interesting and comforting truths [335] which may warrantably be deduced from the consideration of the hallowed scene.

Among these is the testimony borne to the state of immediate bliss into which the souls of believers pass at the hour of death, - that the moment the spirit leaves the walls of its crumbling earthly prison, it soars into the presence of GOD, and engages forthwith in active errands of love and duty.

The appearance of Moses and Elias surely affords a conclusive refutation of the cold cheerless theory, which is not without its modern advocates, that, after death, the disembodied soul passes into an intermediate state of torpor and inactivity - a condition of lethargic slumber; that there is an arrest put on its spiritual activities, until the Resurrection morning welcomes it back from its sojourn in this dream-land, and reunites it to the raised and glorified body.

If the case of Elias be deemed peculiar, he having been translated, soul and body together, without dying, - it is not so, at all events, regarding his brother delegate. The body of Moses was mysteriously entombed amid the solitudes of the Moab mountains. over against Baal-peor, - his limbs composed by angels, - his grave dug by GOD Himself, (for **"God buried him,"**) though

sedulously secreted from the eye of man. But we see the Hebrew Prophet on the Transfiguration-mount, a visible, living, speaking, recognized representative of the family of the ransomed. He comes forth, along with a kindred spirit, from the brotherhood of the redeemed; and as if the theme, too, in which they had been just engaged with the adoring multitudes around the throne, were still thrilling on their tongues. His body slumbers amid the ravines of Pisgah, - it has long ago crumbled away in [336] insensate dust; but the true MAN is a conscious, thinking, living being - a ministering angel before GOD - embarked in the ceaseless energies of holy service.

Behold, too, in visible symbol, the blessed bond of union which links together the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven, - Moses and .Elias, from the bright-robed company above, - the three disciples from the Church in the wilderness, have their eye centred on ONE peerless Object of adoration and love. The note which the two glorified ones last struck on their golden harps within the veil, is taken up on the earthly mount: "**Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.**"

It was for Him - in order that they might testify to His sufferings and their resultant glory - that these two immortal ones left their thrones and their bliss for that hour of earthly rapture; and it is in active embassies of love for "**that same Jesus,**" that the redeemed are now delighting, and will delight to exercise the noblest energies of their natures through all eternity.

Yes! as we leave the history of the great Prophet, whose life of marvel has so long occupied us, it is surely delightful and interesting to bear away the recollection that the last glimpse we get of him, as he is hidden from our sight by the enveloping Shekinah on the mountain summit, is adoring the Redeemer of the world, - casting all his mighty deeds, his zeal, his humility, his heroic endurance, his untiring self-consecration - all at the feet of the Lord who died for him!

Ay, more, - we believe, were we to draw aside the mysterious curtain which hides the invisible, we should behold him still in his old attitude, - rejoicing in a living Saviour-God, before whom he stands.

And as others among the company of the redeemed, [337] who revered his hero-deeds on earth, might still love to rehearse them in his presence; we may imagine him, with the tongue of fire, now burning only with love, exclaiming in self-renouncing lowliness, 'Perish the memories of Cherith, Sarepta, Carmel, Jezreel, Jericho, the chariot-rapture, - "**God forbid that I should glory, SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!**"'

Blessed thought - CHRIST the all in all of Heaven! The saints may be lustrous, radiant points of light, - hallowed luminaries, emitting rays of sacred glory: "**But the city had no NEED of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof.**"

We can think, indeed, of the Redeemed, bound to one another by the same mental and moral affinities and idiosyncrasies which affiliate them on earth, - bands of the white-robed multitude gathered around some favoured spiritual father, - embarked with him in congenial occupation, whether that be worship, or contemplation, or active service and ministry of love.

We can think of Elijah, for example, - "*Prophet of Fire,*" as ever, - gathering his band of Seraphim around him, enkindling them with his own unquenchable ardour, - yoking still his

chariot with its fiery steeds, to speed him and them together in whirlwind embassies of flaming zeal, to comfort distant saints, or regenerate distant worlds; or we can suppose him collecting together contemplative spirits among the ranks of the ransomed, as he did of old the sons of the prophets, and pursuing in concert with them the deep studies of eternity. But all revolve around a more glorious centre. They - their persons, their deeds, their studies - have no glory by reason of the glory which excelleth. [338]

In the great sidereal system, in the firmament above us, while dependent planets circle around their different suns, astronomers tell us these aggregate suns themselves own a mightier influence, - wheel in stupendous revolution around Alcyone, the supposed great common centre of the material universe. So, whatever may be the separate groupings among the Redeemed, - whatever their minor revolutions, - there is one peerless, sovereign Sun, around whom they all lovingly revolve, - one sublime song, - the music of these "heavenly spheres," - which circulates to the remotest circumference of the celestial glory: **"Unto HIM that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen!"**

Thus the loftiest idea of a future Heaven - the true **"hill of God"** - is that of an eternal Transfiguration, - the concentric circles of saints and adoring angels gazing with unquenchable rapture on the glorified Son of GOD, and exclaiming, **"It is good for us to be here!"**

If such were the lofty themes of converse which occupied the delegates from Heaven on the heights of the Holy Mount, let us take a parting glance outside the cloud, when all is over, on the disciples - the representatives of the earthly Church. The heavenly messengers have come and gone; the cloud, the radiance, the lofty converse, the august voice of paternal love, - all have vanished.

The cold, chill, morning air, the drenching dews of early dawn, the fleecy clouds in the valley, the smoke in the distant hamlet - all denote that they are back to the dull world again - that soon they shall [339] once more be involved in the rough contacts of daily life. What a contrast with the past night of seraphic bliss!

"Alone!" - ay, "yet not alone!" **"When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."** Bereft they are of their celestial companions; but they have one compensating solace for all they have lost. The stars and satellites and moons have waxed and waned and departed, - the taper-lights have been extinguished; but the great Sun still remains to illuminate their path, and perpetuate the bliss of that glorious Sabbath hour and scene - **"they saw no man, save Jesus only."**

JESUS ONLY! - it is enough - they ask no more.

With His love and presence to cheer them, they pursue their path, ready for duty, for trial, for suffering, - animated by the sight of the crown, they descend more willing to bear the cross.

JESUS ONLY! - what a motto and watchword for us!

Many of the most loving and beloved of human friends come only, like Moses and Elias, on

angel visits, - illuminating the night of earth with a transient, yet blessed radiance, - then leaving us, like the disciples, amid the chill, gray mists of solitude, - our path moist with dewy tears, as we hurry back once more to a cold, unsympathizing world. But blessed be GOD, to His true disciples, as to the favoured three on Hermon, their best Friend is still left.

JESUS ONLY! - "Fear not,"

He said on another occasion to these same disciples:

- **"I AM; be not afraid."**
- **"I AM,"** - then perish every desponding thought.
- **"I AM,"** - faithful among the faithless, changeless among the changeable!

Oh, blessed antidote to all cares! blessed balm for all wounds! blessed compensation [340] for all losses! blessed solace in all sorrows! - to descend from the mountain-heights of worldly bliss to the deepest valleys of humiliation and trial,- with **JESUS ONLY!**

"PROPHET OF FIRE," farewell! We shall long for thy return - if not in person, ² at least in spirit - to rekindle the watch-fires on the walls of Zion! Let the last glimpse we have of thee on the inspired page direct every wavering eye to the source and secret of all thy greatness and power; the Transfigured ONE, who alone can **"baptize with the Holy Ghost and with FIRE!"**

**"HE WAS NOT THAT LIGHT, BUT WAS SENT TO BEAR WITNESS OF THAT LIGHT.
THAT WAS THE TRUE LIGHT, WHICH LIGHTETH EVERY MAN THAT COMETH INTO
THE WORLD."**

[341] [342-344 Left Blank]

¹ *Stier well remarks- "He who fulfils the law and the prophets holds a select council with the personal representatives of the law and the prophets. Moses and Elias appeared together as closing the old covenant, (See Malachi 4:4, 5;) and now, in the heavenly imperial council, before the throne of the excellent glory, they stand upon the threshold of the new covenant."*

² *See Appendix.*

~ end of chapter 22 ~
