

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE PASSAGE THROUGH JORDAN

“**The king’s daughter is all glorious within.**” In these sublime words the inspired psalmist speaks of the true church of God on earth. Psalm 45:13.

A Christian is the highest style of man, however little the world may be of this opinion. “The World,” as it cannot receive the Holy Spirit, so neither can it comprehend that which is Divinely great and glorious; consequently it knows not how to appreciate the nature and actions of him who is born of God.

There is something sublimely great in the gift of true repentance; for true repentance is an open rupture with sin and with Satan. There is something great in truly Christian desires; for it is the Supreme Good alone that is able fully to satisfy them.

There is something noble in truly Christian prayers; for in these the Christian speaks from his heart to God his Father, and treads the world beneath his feet. Great also are the hopes of the real Christian; for they embrace nothing less than a participation of the glory of the Divine Redeemer.

Even godly sorrow has a greatness in it, as working repentance unto salvation not to be repented of; and as originating in regret at the loss or absence of what is invaluablely great and good. And if the sorrow, then also the joy of the true Christian is great; and at times amounts to “**joy unspeakable and full of glory,**” even in this world, because it is “**joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Much more might be added concerning the intrinsic excellence of him who possesses it; so true is it that “**the king’s daughter,**” the church, “**is all glorious within.**”

And in the eminent servants of God this inward excellency and glory is much greater and more admirable than the most splendid scenes and actions of their outward life. Indeed the grand events of their external history almost cease to be surprising, when we consider the dignity and elevation of their inward characters.

Let us bear this in mind, while we reflect a little upon the miraculous act with which we see the prophet Elijah concluding his wonderful course.

“And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground” (II Kings 2:7-8).

We now follow this master in Israel from those precious plantations, the schools of the prophets, to the banks of the Jordan. Let us contemplate, for a few moments,

- I. The escort of the sons of the prophets;
- II. The passage of Elijah and his companion through the river Jordan.

I. Here, in the wilderness of Jericho, where Israel’s hosts first trod the soil of the promised land, Elijah and Elisha pass on together, and arrive at the brink of Jordan

Fifty men of the sons of the prophets followed them at a distance, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. These sons of the prophets could not find in their hearts to stay that day in the town.

It was their master’s parting-day, during which they might still see him, but for the last time. They felt, as it were, constrained to follow him, to behold him once more. They were sensible that no common loss awaited them. A loss which they had then as much reason to regret, as we should at present have to rejoice, if it pleased the Lord to favor this age with a man like him.

We cannot doubt that these sons of the prophets, in expecting their master to be taken away, anticipated that he would be translated to happiness. So that, sorrowful as they must have been to part with him, their sorrow must have been strangely mingled with joy at the thought of his triumphant exit. O how true is this also of the surviving Christian friends of every departing saint!

And how indescribably heart-rending is it, on the contrary, to see any beloved object going out of the world, without a well-grounded expectation of this good exchange! Truly the most valuable thing which our dying relatives can leave us, is a scriptural hope and confidence that they have fallen asleep in Jesus. We then no longer regard them as lost, but contemplate them as heirs with us of the future glorious resurrection.

It does not appear that the sons of the prophets were witnesses of the ascension of Elijah to heaven. We cannot venture to say, with certainty, why this transporting sight was withholden from them. But it is easy to conclude, with respect to ourselves, why we are not made acquainted with all those circumstances of triumph which departed saints enjoy. For we should then so languish for our own expected blessedness, as to be unfit for the duties of the life that now is. The present constitution of our nature cannot bear to become familiar with more than what faith is able to realize from the Word of God. It is therefore an instance of the divine wisdom and goodness, that more than this is for the present withholden from us, and that darkness and the shadow of death are suffered to intercept the glories of the invisible world, and to attemper us to a patient continuance in this land of exile and sorrow.

That the sons of the prophets stood afar off, and did not advance nearer their departing master, is beautifully characteristic. They knew their spiritual father too well not to be aware that he was not desirous of any host of human witnesses at his approaching glorification, and they possessed sufficient delicacy of feeling not to intrude themselves upon him.

O that among ourselves this more refined, spiritual decorum were less rare than it appears to be! There are many cases in which such delicacy is peculiarly appropriate; but persons in general are unhappily not acquainted with it. If, for example, we perceive the influence of Divine grace beginning to show itself in some person eminent for rank or talents, here is a case which calls for much holy discretion on our part. We ought to observe the thing as though we observed it not, and keep it amongst us as a pleasing secret; and if one or another should tell us of it, it ought to be said, as at Jericho and Bethel, “**Yea, I know it; hold thou thy peace.**”

Such persons, especially at their first setting out, must be dealt with discreetly, and the more so in proportion to the degree in which the fashion of this world has hitherto influenced them, and in which they have moved high in society; for should it come to the ears of such persons that the report of their conversion is bandied abroad, it would naturally make them shrink back, and thus tend to retard them considerably in the way of grace. But it is too common to disregard all this, and to forget that a shoot just springing up requires very different treatment from a full grown tree.

A variety of cases, wherein such delicacy on our part is required, might be mentioned here. But it is not difficult to understand, that what is called in the world “refinement,” may well have its counterpart in the kingdom of God; and that there is a nice attention to feeling and social decorum which well befits the sons and daughters of Zion.

II. Elijah having arrived with his companion at the brink of Jordan does not tarry there as if he doubted how he was to pass over the river

He had not forgotten Moses, who, with one stroke of his rod, parted asunder the water of the great deep, that the ransomed of the Lord might pass over; nor could he forget that Moses’ God was also Elijah’s God.

A miracle similar to that of Moses now ensues. What a spectacle! The stream is divided. On one side it flows rapidly away; on the other it piles itself up like a wall of crystal, and the two prophets pass over, dryshod, to the opposite shore. As soon as they are over, lo! The watery heaps rush again down the channel, the invisible bounds are removed, and the unfettered stream has flowed on ever since in its ordinary course.

How great a God is our God, who ruleth so absolutely in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and who doeth whatsoever pleaseth him! At his rebuke the seas dry up, and well-watered land become a desert; the winds and the sea obey him. Happy the man whose refuge is in Him! Yes, whosoever hath this Rock of Israel for his strength, all things must tend to his salvation, even though it be against their natural tendency to do so. With this God we leap over every wall, and faith in his name removes mountains of difficulty out of the way.

The dividing of Jordan formed the last in the chain of wonders which ran through the prophetic course of Elijah; and it serves to show that this man, with all his trials and fatigues, had not become decrepid in his faith, but held fast and maintained the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end. This last honor put upon Elijah's faith, might serve a variety of valuable purposes.

- It might serve to invigorate and encourage the faith, and promote the honor of his successor who accompanied him.
- It might serve the same purpose also, to the sons of the prophets, who stood afar off, but saw the miracle.
- It might serve as a new sign to the whole people, a further demonstration that there had been a prophet of the Lord in the midst of them.

To Elijah himself it might serve as another gracious visitation from his God, another memento of his faithfulness and truth; and with respect to ourselves, surely it serves to remind us that the Lord is with his people even to the end. This act of the departing prophet resembled the ruby splendor of the evening sky, which tells us that the sun, though it has vanished from our view, is not extinguished, but only departed to shine in another hemisphere.

Elijah's passage over Jordan, while it reminds us of that of his forefathers over the same stream, seems far to excel it. At the passage of the Israelitish host, what solemn arrangements and preparations were made for it!

Here there was, so to speak, an acting impromptu, and how rapid was it! There, the Ark of the Covenant was sent before, while the people followed at a measured distance; and it was only before the tabernacle of the Almighty that the waters yielded; here they yield before a folded mantle in a human hand.

Had the Israelites, who passed over under Joshua, witnessed this wondrous act of Elijah, with what astonishment would they have beheld it! Would they not have confessed the Lord as dwelling in very deed with man? And yet in this honor put upon Elijah, there was but a faint representation of that which God has reserved for the children of the New Testament dispensation.

When Elijah folded his mantle together to smite the waters of Jordan, he already seemed to anticipate a princely dominion over the earth and its elements. This act of his faith seems the effort of a soul aspiring to higher degrees of advancement, to full emancipation and liberty. He seems no longer to know anything of bondage to the elements of this world. He appears like one advanced to the dignity of a seat in the heavenly places with Christ; his faith would cast mountains into the sea and pile up the sea to mountains were it necessary.

What is miraculous in the eyes of man, appears to have become almost familiar to his faith. A new region must shortly be opened to his soul, for which this earth has become too narrow and contracted. Ye heavens unfold! Ye boundaries of earth and time retire, for his abode is no longer below.

Elisha's spirit, too, must have been strengthened and refreshed by all this that he witnessed and experienced at the side of his master. And here it may be observed that those who are especially honored of God, in any age of the world, are thus honored for the benefit of others around them, quite as much as for their own. From the divine answer given to their prayers, our faith and confidence may learn to ascend with theirs on high.

When they, in the night of their adversity, have new songs put into their mouths, is it not the spirit of joy may take possession of us also, and that we may not succumb under our worldly cares?

When they pass in triumph through the valleys of the shadow of death, how is such a sight adapted to encourage us, and to raise us higher on the vantage ground of faith! They seem almost to bear us away with them in their noble career. And, reference to the peculiar times in which we live, let us remember that it is the Lord God of Elijah, who ruleth all things in the person of Jesus Christ, who is "**the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.**"

He too has promised that a time shall arrive when the weakest shall be as David and the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord before his people. Zechariah 12:8. "**Yea,**" saith the Lord, "**I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph; and they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine; yea, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord**" (Zechariah 10: 6, 7).

Such honor have all his saints. Blessed are they that wait for him! Amen.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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