

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER SIX

DELIVERANCE FROM THE MOUTH THE LION

“**Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad,**” was the injunction of the Lord to Laban, the Syrian, when he “**so hotly pursued after**” Jacob, as if he meditated revenge. Genesis 31:24. His tongue was immediately tied, his hand bound, and his heart turned back again.

Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their protector, who “hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon, who shutteth up the sea with doors and bars, saying, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; who stilleth the raging of the sea and the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people.” A proof of this will be seen in that part of the history of our prophet which we are now about to consider.

“**And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel**” (I Kings 18:17-20).

Here is:

- I. The wonderful protection of the prophet.
- II. The unjust accusation brought against him.
- III. The bold language he uses;
- IV. The secret power he exercises.

I. Obadiah had gone at Elijah’s bidding

He had sought out the king, informed him that he had met with Elijah, and that he was still continuing at the place where Obadiah had found him. Ahab accordingly, with what feelings we may better imagine than express, went to meet Elijah. Instead, however, of any of that manifestation of royal anger which is as the roaring of a lion, not a stroke falls. Not an arrow flies; nothing ensues but the feeble question, “**Art thou he that troubleth Israel?**”

Here is not even an outrageous curse or menace, as if the volcano had been suddenly exhausted and only emitted a little smoke.

Thus, the Lord our God can stop the mouths of lions and enable his people to tread on serpents and scorpions, so that nothing shall by any means hurt them when they are upon his errands.

Yes, the same God who was thus a wall of fire round about Elijah, defeating the resentment of Ahab and Jezebel; who delivered Daniel and his three companions; who released Peter from prison also, in the case of Luther, the poor Augustinian monk of Wittenberg, put to shame the power of the pope and of other numerous and mighty persecutors; the same God still liveth in the great Head of the church, Christ Jesus; and he is with his people alway, even to the end of the world; he is their succor and defence. Depend on it, Christians, you would not pass your days and nights so quietly as you do, were it not for his continual interposition against those who would molest you. The enmity of the prince of this world, and of his servants, the children of disobedience, is still unabated.

Many an arm of strength, both in the higher and lower walks of life, would be stretched out against you, but that he stays it. For as many as have their heavenly Father's name written in their foreheads, as many as profess Christ sincerely and faithfully before men, as many as will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer molestation on that very account in this present world. And that we live so peacefully and quietly "In" our dwellings, and that our lives are so safe, though in the midst of dangers, is altogether owing to the protection of our almighty Saviour, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; who never remits his vigilance over us day or night; who with his mighty angels encamps about his people, and is himself their bulwark. In eternity we shall discover, to our great astonishment, how enemies the Lord God prevented from injuring us, and from how many of the hands of men he has delivered us. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." O how safe in such a tower of refuge! Thus Elijah experienced, and thus may we.

II. As the protection which Elijah experienced was of the same kind as that which all the servants of God are wont to experience

So, in like manner, the accusation charged upon him, as if it were he who troubled Israel, was only another characteristic of the people of God. "**Art thou he that troubleth Israel?**" said the wrathful monarch, and thus cast upon the prophet the whole blame of God's heavy judgments upon the land. But, from the beginning of the world, this crying injustice on the part of men is one of those afflictions of the cross which they are called to bear after their Lord and Redeemer. Painful as this must ever be found to flesh and blood, it is one salutary means for purifying us from the remains of indwelling sin.

It indeed often appears as if ministers were the storm-birds and messengers of misfortune; the disturbers of peace, and such as "**turn the world upside down,**" just as Elijah seemed to be, when, at his word, the season of famine overspread Samaria. Religion enters a family, and instead of peace comes division; unanimity is banished from the circle.

A believing son or daughter may, to their great grief, excite against themselves their unbelieving parents; and a minister, in like manner, by his faithfulness, may offend the most influential of his congregation, and these may stir up a majority against him in order to get rid of him. Faithful preaching of the Gospel may sometimes be like the sinking of a burning mountain in the sea. Sleepers awake, and the dry bones are stirred.

On such occasions the thoughts of many hearts become revealed. Drunkards become sober, and the sober drunken.

O what divisions of heart may we then witness! Congregations splitting, and parties forming! Then, also, as in the apostles' time, it is always the case that the faithful and awakening preachers of the Gospel are regarded as the offending parties, "**the men who have turned the world upside down;**" whereas the whole blame rests with those whose hearts are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, and who "**love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.**" Nevertheless we must be content to bear the blame of being the troublers of Israel.

"The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough that the disciple be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household? Therefore fear them not; for there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed, nor secret that not be known."

Elijah was accused of troubling Israel, and certainly he was God's instrument for chastising the idolatrous and wicked kingdom. The children of God, though they are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world, and though the world overlooks or despises them, have very much to do with the turn of its affairs; they are of no small account in the sublunary disposals of Providence. How many a single potent adversary has been felled to the ground; how many a community has dwindled and decayed because of their opposition to the people of God, who are continually praying, "**Thy kingdom come!**" How many a blaspheming tongue has been prematurely laid silent in the grave because of that universal prayer of the church, "**Hallowed be thy name!**"

Yes, if our adversaries knew how many things take place in the world on our account, whether for the strengthening of our faith, for our succor, or for the crowning of our prayers—if they knew what influence "**the quiet in the land**" exercise, even here below, upon the fate both of individuals and whole nations; and how often it is given into their hands to open heaven or to close it—to bring blessings upon a place, or to take them away—to bind the arm of the mighty, and to bring to nought the counsels of the prudent—if they rightly understood in what sense the Prince of the Host, whose banner we follow, has made us not only priests, but also "**kings unto our God**"—their rage would exceed all bounds: and how would they then cry out, "**Ye are they that trouble Israel!**"

III. Let us now consider Elijah's answer to Ahab

The prophet stands before a mortal enemy, who is the despotic ruler of the land; and how does he meet his false accusation?

- Does he excuse himself, and cry for mercy?
- Does he have recourse to flattery or artifice?
- Does he, in order to save himself, begin to “**prophecy smooth things?**”
- Does he conceal from him the true cause of God’s judgments upon the land?
- Does he even endeavor to moderate the king’s displeasure, by announcing to him the good news of approaching rain?

No; Elijah is a man only for the truth, and for such truth as the occasion calls for. His great and only concern was that the tyrant, together with his people, should judge themselves, humble themselves before the living God, and give him the glory. This was of more importance to him than his life. He knew whither he was going, and death had no terrors for him. His answer therefore is, “**I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.**”

Such language as this is seldom heard upon earth. The world is full of flatterers and dissemblers, and such characters abound not only in palaces, but also in ordinary society; but faithful servants of God, who are dead to self-interest, who so love their brethren as to be unwilling to suffer sin upon them—such men are rare indeed. O, Ye ministers of Christ, among high and low, let us not complain of the little fruit of our labors till we have first complained of our own too great love of pleasing men.

We should see greater things, were not the salutary and awful, “**Thou art the man!**” so entirely unknown amongst us. It is not enough that we deal in general truths concerning human corruption, openly acknowledged in our church confessions. How far is all this below the faithfulness of prophets and apostles. If Elijah, or Paul, or John the Baptist were here, you would hear the trumpet give a very different sound. To how many an Ahab of the present day would it then be said, “**I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord.**”

- How many a Jezebel would then be told to her face, “**The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**”
- How many a publican, “**Demand no more than is thy due.**”
- How many a Herod, “**It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.**”
- How many a Felix, how many a Drusilla, who at present hear only smooth words, would then be forced to submit to one closet sermon after another from plain and unsparing lips, upon righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come!

You may well pray, my friends, that it may be given to your ministers to make a better use of the liberty which is thus divinely committed to them as an awful and most responsible trust, “**to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine.**” And what is the nature of our commission? We have a heaven to promise, and a hell to threaten. We stand forth as messengers in Christ’s stead, as the stewards of the mysteries of God. We speak not from ourselves, but that which One who is greater than all commands us to speak. We go forward, surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, as the ambassadors of the King of all kings, and have the right to announce our message to sinners in the name of God, with “**Thus saith the Lord!**”

O the dignity of our calling—the holiness of our office! O that it more thoroughly pervaded us, and that we were more like Elijah, or Nathan, or the Baptist, or the apostle Paul. And were it so, that by the unpleasant sound of truth we lost a whole squadron of worldly friends, we should soon, perhaps, find the loss made good by others collected by the Gospel trumpet from among publicans and sinners. Nay, were the measure of our trouble and reproach doubled, the fruit of our labor in God's field might be doubled likewise.

We may well humble ourselves, one and all, for our insincerity and men pleasing, in allowing ourselves to cry, "**Peace, peace, when there is no peace.**" This is not tenderness, though it assumes that name; it is the want of true love to our neighbor, a indulgence of our own indolence and ease. May the Lord kindle a purer flame in our souls, and give us a better love, a love which, where truth, the honor of God, and the salvation of our brethren require it, can speak and act disinterestedly and self-denyingly; yet so, that no strange fire mingle with that which is holy, nor we ourselves, as is often the case, break to pieces, in our zeal, both tables of the law.

"I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

What then was the special sin which Elijah here holds up to view as the chief cause of the whole calamity? Is it the intemperance, or the covetousness, or the frivolity, or the unchaste life of Ahab, and of his father's house? No; it is departure from God's Word and Statutes.

O brethren! if sins of this sort be the greatest of all sins; if God has visited nations, countries, and cities with fire and sword on account of them, what must be his displeasure in these times, when infidelity is becoming the very fashion in so many circles everywhere; when the forsaking of the statutes of the Lord, and the following of a heathenish rationalism has found its way even into the cottage and the work-shop; when the declaration, "**we will not have this man to reign over us!**" virtually becomes more and more general, and the very voice of Baalim is, in this sense, to be heard from many a pulpit, many a professor's chair, and many a schoolmaster's desk!

When true religion, the belief of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of the Lamb, is not only slighted, but even branded as fanaticism; and the true life in the Holy Spirit, the life of love to Christ, and the following of his steps, is so often declaimed against as pietism and enthusiasm!

How will it at length fare with such a generation, if we do not betimes fall down weeping before the lifted rod of the great Preserver of men! And what kind of days have we to expect, sooner or later, in a country where more than one Noah preaches the righteousness of God; where more than one Jonah calls to repentance; where more than one of Zion's watchmen sounds the trumpet louder and louder, because he sees the sword approaching, and still but a small band is gathered of those who faithfully adhere to and take up the cross; while thousands upon thousands treat the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing, scoff at the word of the Lord, presumptuously turn with disgust from the precepts of Christ, bow the knee to any or every shameful lust, and thus virtually bring their offerings to the abominations of the Moabites and the Amorites!

What vials of wrath must at length be poured out upon this favored region! Will it have sufficed that the Lord has affected us with lack of employment and want, with stoppage of trade and business, and visited us with plague and pestilence? Will he not see it necessary to come with still severer judgments?

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee!! Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell.”

O that my people would turn from evil ways, that the Lord God might repent of this evil concerning us, and turn from the fierceness of his anger, that we perish not!

IV. Elijah, having thus faithfully deliverer his message, now begins to make preparations for a scene which has not it's like in sacred history

The Lord God is about to show, by signs, and wonders and mighty deeds, that he is God and none else; and Baal is to be overthrown in one day. **“Now therefore,”** said Elijah authoritatively, like a representative of God, **“Now therefore,”** O king! **“Send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.”**

He speaks the word and Ahab obeys, and collects the prophets unto mount Carmel. See how matters are reversed! The subject prescribes, and the king, yes, such a king, complies! **“The thing is of the Lord.”** The hearts of all are in his hands! The servant of God have, through faith, **“out of weakness been made strong, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained the promises.”** If we, as lambs are sent in the midst of wolves, yet we are clothed with a divine panoply, and often with a divine influence upon others, if we are Christ's faithful servants.

We have not, and we need not, any carnal weapons, offensive or defensive. When despised or reviled, we must neither despise nor revile again, much less must we have recourse to the swords with which the world is wont to fight. Instead of all this, there is something else given to the servants of God. **“This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.”**

True faith is always accompanied by the illuminating light of the Holy Spirit, whose temples we are, and who always manifests himself as the Spirit of the mighty God. Here is a divine something that can do wonders. With this something can babes and sucklings still the enemy and the avenger; and defenseless sheep have often with it disarmed their most violent persecutors.

This is the true star of honor which gleams through the clothing of humility; as it is better than all the wisdom of the wise and the cunning of the prudent, so is it of more value than all the honor of the noble, than all the power of the mighty. With it the most simple may remain steadfast against the most seductive subtleties of false philosophy, and put to shame the whole array of abused talents and learning.

This secret *something*, which Christians carry about with them; this unction from the Holy One, which pervades their whole being; this sign of the Son of man, and seal of the Lamb upon their foreheads, is the supernatural armor in which the servants God do exploits, carry on their conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; and, like their Saviour: **“bring forth judgment unto victory.”**

Yea let them beware of being exalted above measure. Our safety lies in being ever lowly at feet of Jesus; and the spirit of his precept disciples may well apply to us, **“Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather: rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”**

All other joy, yes, even the joy at the victories we gain, tends to darken the inward eye, and remove poverty and dependence from our view. But if the prize of our high calling be continually kept before the eye of faith, its brightness will make us see our own unworthiness.

Joy in our present gifts and endowments is mutable and evanescent, for they may be wholly or in part withdrawn from us; but the joy of our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, is permanent; for we know that the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **“The Lord knoweth them that are his, and he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.”**

O happy they whose names are written in the book of life, and doubly happy they who rejoice in this, above their chief joy! Amen.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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