

# ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

F. W. Krummacher, D. D.

Copyright © 1880

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THE CALLINGS OF ELISHA

The manifold wisdom of our blessed Saviour, as seen in his intercourse with sinners; the consideration he showed for different shades of character, and the peculiar readiness and propriety with which he met everyone's disposition and situation, are sufficient of themselves to evince from whence he came. We have striking instances of this in Luke 9: 54-62.

In this passage we have the four principal temperaments of the mind before us: the choleric, the sanguine, the phlegmatic, and the melancholy: and we behold Christ treating each of them with consummate wisdom.

To the choleric, namely, his disciples who wished to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, he only presents his own spirit as a contrast to it, and unfolds his compassionate intention in coming into the world; showing that it was to save men's lives, and not to destroy them. Nothing could have been more appropriate to allay irritation of the feelings, and to give them an entirely different tone, than these gracious and gentle words of the compassionate Friend of man.

Shortly after this, a man comes up to him on the road, saying to him, "**Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest!**" Here was a sanguine disposition. The man appears to have been carried away with the brilliant actions and divine lovingkindness of Jesus; and it was necessary that this flighty and enthusiastic mind should be brought to sit down and count the cost. Hence our Lord thus answers him, "**Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.**"

Another comes to our Lord, and thus addresses him, "**Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father;**" by which he appears to mean, "Allow me to remain in the house of my parents till my father dies; I will then reflect further on the subject." This man then was of a phlegmatic temperament; a person slowly excited, quiet, even and cool. Our Lord again treats this person in a wonderful manner, entirely appropriate to such a disposition. He speaks strongly, seriously, and awakingly, in order to produce an immediate and firm resolution in this procrastinating spirit, and says, "**Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.**"

The Lord meets with a fourth, whom he had anticipated by saying to him, "**Follow me.**"

He replied, **“Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.”** Can we doubt what is the temperament of this individual?

It is the melancholy, the slowly roused, but deeply and durably susceptible; which as has been justly observed, is seldom taken by sudden *surprise*, but is oftener *stolen upon* by slow but strong affections; which is more inclined to care and sorrow, than to mirth and joy; which does not shun labor, but is wont to pursue its objects energetically. These characteristics are conspicuous in his very language to our Lord. The thing which first presents itself to his mind, is the dark and dreadful consequences of following Christ. Therefore he desires to embrace his family once more, and perhaps, as it seems to him, for the last time.

To meet such a disposition there was need of encouraging and firm language, which might disperse the clouds of melancholy, and give the resolution to break through a host of cares. The man needed an arousing call to the standard, and such a call the Lord addresses to him, **“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”**

Here then we may well admire the penetrating eye of the Searcher of hearts; the skill of the great Physician; the infinite condescension of the Prince of Peace All is equally great, glorious, and adorable.

In the last of these occurrences, a scene of Old Testament history seems evidently referred to. What the person whom Jesus called here requests for himself, is the same which Elisha requested of Elijah before he undertook to follow him; and our Lord, in the words, **“He that putteth his hand to the plough,”** &c, appears to have intended to refer the man to the example of Elisha, in order to excite him to a quick and cheerful determination. This example is presently to come under our consideration, in the portion of Elijah’s history at which we are now arrived.

**“So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.**

**“And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?**

**“And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him”** (I Kings 19:19-21).

We find Elijah, after he had departed from Horeb, arrived at Abelmeholah, in Palestine, near the river Jordan, on the estate of Elisha the son of Shaphat, commencing the accomplishment of what the Lord had commissioned him to do. He calls Elisha, and Elisha obeys the call; these are the two points which require our attention present.

**I. From the solitary desert of mount Sinai, we are now to follow  
the prophet back amongst the smiling lowlands of Jordan,  
and to walk upon the fruitful plains which surround  
the little town of Abelmeholah**

We there meet with twelve husbandmen behind their ploughs; eleven of them are servants, but the twelfth is the son of a substantial landed proprietor. He is called Elisha, and his father Shaphat. He does not esteem it beneath his dignity to put his own hand to the work; he drives in the sweat of his brow, his yoke of oxen before him, in the company of his servants.

The plentiful rains which had lately descended, had made it delightful to be out in the fields, and to follow the plough. The blessing of God sensibly perfumed the air; and the fields, which for three years and a half had been a barren wilderness, seemed now, after the refreshing showers, impatient for the seedtime, to unfold their newly derived powers. How often, perhaps, had this husbandman, as he broke up the furrows, conversed with his servants of the mighty wonders with which the Lord had of late visited their native land!

How often, perhaps, was the name of Elijah mentioned, and the fiery sign on Carmel made the subject of discussion. For they had probably been eyewitnesses of that miracle; and might belong to that seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Perhaps it was at the very time when they were thus conversing of those wonderful days that, behold! a man draws near to them, of venerable aspect, covered with a mantle, and having his loins girded as a traveler; and as he comes nearer, the oxen stand still, and the husbandmen look at each other as if they would say, "Who can this stranger be, and what brings him here?"

But who shall describe their joyful surprise, as they recognize in the solitary traveler, now approaching with quicker steps towards the son of Shaphat, the very man whose name and deeds had resounded through the whole country— Elijah the Tishbite!

The sacred historian says that he found Elisha; whether this implies that he knew him before, or whether he was enabled thus to find him, by special Divine direction given him for the purpose, we are not informed. But of this we may be certain, that Elijah had not for a long time found a more gratifying acquaintance than this. Elisha was the first child of God, whom, after a long period of solitude, he had the happiness to meet; he found in the Person of the son of Shaphat, the first and the chief of the seven thousand, and the first seal of the promise granted him at Horeb on behalf of his people.

The simple and pious Elisha was the man, in whose sphere of action the still small voice of God's tender mercy and love would be heard by the children of Israel, so as to turn them to the Lord their God. He was the first messenger of the Lord who should sow the fruit of righteousness in peace upon the land which his predecessor had broken up by judgments; yea, who should bind up the hearts which had been broken. Even his name expressed the character of his divine commission. It signifies, "*My God is salvation;*" and the history of his ministry is given, as it were, in this one word. His labors, compared with those of his predecessor, appear upon the whole peculiarly evangelical.

He goes about in meekness, and his peaceful course is marked with benefits and blessings; nor is it accompanied by the dreadful majesty of divine and burning jealousy, but by the mild and amiable light of the Lord's condescending love. He stretches out His right hand, not to close heaven, but to bring down its showers of blessing. His office is evidently that of a deliverer, sent to announce that "**the Lord is gracious.**"

An entirely new period was therefore to commence with Elisha's mission; a period of divine lovingkindness, after the days of judicial punishment; a period of the "**still small voice.**" Elijah seemed to be aware of this; and it may be easily imagined with what delight he must have embraced Elisha, as the man who was to be instrumental in fulfilling his best hopes for Israel.

Elijah found him behind the plough. It is without meaning that this is mentioned in the history. Here then we have a pleasing picture of a man, who, notwithstanding the gifts with which he was endowed, continued lowly in his own eyes, and led a humble and unassuming life.

How many, gifted like him, would have thought themselves too good for the plough, and born to a sphere of life above that of a simple farmer; would have persuaded themselves that they must not withhold their talents from mankind, that they must go forth into the field of public labor, to enlighten and guide the world. But such thoughts did not enter the mind of Elisha. His pretensions went not beyond his plough and his husbandry; he saw his vocation in these quiet and rural occupations, and well satisfied with this, he "**minded not high things.**"

How much more amiable and beautiful is such a disposition than the opposite one, which is now so frequently met with among Christians! "Labor for the kingdom of God," is become the watchword of the day; we certainly rejoice at it, but with very mingled feelings. There is too much vanity and self-complacent pushing forwards, which, alas! may be seen on this field of activity. No sooner does anyone imagine he has found himself possessed of talents and gifts ever so small, than he hesitates not to regard himself as a pillar of the church of God.

The condition and calling in which he has been hitherto, is no longer the proper one for him. He immediately begins to think, if not to talk, of a higher station, to which he imagines himself born. We ought undoubtedly to let our light shine before men; but then everyone should do so in the situation in which Providence has placed him. Nor does God intend, by this command to let our light shine before men, to refer simply to the office of the ministry, or to any official teaching in his church. It is not merely thy lips, Christian, but thy life, which is to be the lamp. It is thy general character and conduct which are to edify thy brother and glorify God.

He intends that all thy thoughts, words, and works should silently testify that thou art born of God, and that the peace of God rules in thy heart. Then it is that thou throwest around thee that gracious radiance which the Saviour means when he bids thee let thy light shine before men; then it is that thou preachest the Gospel, as the power of God unto salvation, more effectually than can be done by thy words.

And remember that those spiritual lights have the purest radiance which are the least conscious of their own brightness; and that those divine flowers diffuse the sweetest fragrance which make the least display.

That excessive pressing of religious men into public notice, which characterizes the present day, is only another sign of the spiritual poverty of the times. There is a great dearth of truly great and noble spirits in our modern Christendom. No eagle pinions at present soar in our firmament; hence the smaller birds, the minds of inferior cast, having no living standard by which to discern their own littleness, are emboldened to regard their own modicum of talents and endowments as an evidence of a divine vocation to great and exalted things.

Happy would it be for Zion were that vain activity, which is not of God but of the world, confined to the world itself, and not obtruded within her sacred enclosures. Happy would it be for her people, were there not so mournfully prevalent among them an idolatry of worldly instrumentality and mere human talents! Why is it that God so frequently calls home his most excellent servants and evangelists, in the bloom of life, from their useful labors, but—as one purpose at least—to secure them from the peril of that idolatrous admiration with which these mortals are wont to be extolled, in what are called the religious periodicals; and to let the survivors know, that the pillars of the temple are not flesh; that wisdom does not die with any creature; and that none but Himself is the basis, the support, and the builder up of his kingdom.

When Elijah has found Elisha, he takes his prophet's mantle from off his own shoulders, and throws it over those of the son of Shaphat, without speaking a word. What must have been the feelings of the plain and unassuming husbandman upon this occasion! for he well understood this significant action, and could view it as nothing less than a consecration to the prophetic office, and a call to be the assistant, follower, and representative of the Tishbite.

It is to be lamented, that, in the present day, the Christian ministry is too exclusively and systematically confined to persons who have undergone a certain mode of education; which was never the case with the church in its purest times.

May God raise up and put forth amongst us more of those who are taught rather by the unction of the Spirit of God, than by the mere external apparatus of scientific institutions! Not that these are to be despised or neglected; far from it! but they furnish, after all, only the exterior of a Christian minister's qualifications.

After Elijah had cast his mantle over his successor, he went away without uttering a word; and this he appears to have done to render more impressive the meaning of his symbolical action.

Elisha well understood it. He lays the reins on the necks of his oxen, leaves them standing with the plough in the midst of the field, and hastens after the man of God. We do not find that he either resisted the call with a variety of objections, or made many words about the too great honor done him, or about his own incapacity for the office; no, the matter was briefly and speedily settled.

He thought not about himself, but about the heavenly Caller, and his power and grace. He leaves in God's hands the dignity and burden of his office, and receives the prophetic commission with the same equanimity as he had taken in hand the plough or the mattock. O lovely simplicity, and serenity of a humble and child-like spirit!

Elisha, however, had more to leave than his team and field. His father and mother were living, and then he felt bound, first of all, to inform of his high calling, and to desire their prayers and parental blessing. Accordingly he runs after Elijah, and requests of him a short interval, saying, **“Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee!”**

How very differently does the son of Shaphat begin his prophetic career from what is related of Elijah! Him we find descending from the mountains of Gilead, as if he had come from another world; and his first prophetic utterance is that of a delegate of Omnipotence: — **“As the Lord, the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”**

His family connections are concealed from us. Not a word is mentioned of his father and his mother, nor is there any where an allusion to his genealogy or relationship. The softer feelings of domestic alliances seem shaded by the experience of his elevated soul, and he steps forth, gigantically conspicuous above his age and generation. There is an imposing majesty in his whole character, which keeps everything about him, as it were, at a distance; he is like Sinai itself with its bounds set round about the mount.

Elisha’s character is quite of another kind, and in the circumstances of his coming forth into public notice, he appears as any other man. The sacred history conducts us to his house and family. We are made acquainted with his occupation and connections. We behold him at his plough as a common husbandman, as one whose feelings and experience are much the same as our own; who participates in all our relative circumstances; who, like ourselves, is closely allied by blood, affection, and tenderness, to the circle in which he lives; who is a stranger to none of the sensibilities of our common nature; who can feel the pain of separation and taking leave of friends; and in whose bosom beats, in every respect, the heart of an ordinary member of the family circle. We can venture familiarly to approach him, and we feel our hearts gained to him in so doing. Now, all this was suited for the official character which Elisha was to sustain in Israel.

While Elijah was as another Moses, a vindicator of the Divine holiness, and an ambassador of divine wrath against all who violate his law, and therefore appeared as he did; Elisha, on the contrary, was appointed as an evangelist and representative of the Lord’s lovingkindness, and was to shine before men in a very different light, not to threaten and terrify, but to allure persuade, and convert. Hence God sent him to the tabernacles of his brethren as one of themselves, and stationed him as a friend, in whom the most timid might feel confidence, and whose humane and affable intercourse might operate benignly on the minds of men.

Elisha shows himself to have been a beloved and affectionate son; and we at once feel our hearts drawn out towards any one in whom we perceive such features of character. Partings in some respect like that which Elisha had now to undergo, but far more bitter and painful, are those which take place when a love to Christ in one part of a family, and an opposite feeling in the other, divides and causes variance between parent and child, brother and brother, friend and friend. What is every real conversion but a virtual taking leave of worldly connections—a hastening away out of their spiritual atmosphere—a withdrawing from the jurisdiction of their thoughts, opinions, and influence, into a different, and, to them, strange and distant province.

Though such a separation is a most felicitous one for those who renounce the course of this world, still it has its pain and bitterness; for, alas, it is uncertain whether he who forsakes all for Christ, may not now have become separated forever from those who are dear to him by nature's ties, and may not have to miss them in heaven; and what a painful thought is this!

He who has never experienced such parting pangs, either does not naturally love his worldly connections, or else he is not yet effectually separated from them; and though in his exterior religious habits he may be different from them, he is not really so in the dispositions of his heart.

It happens occasionally, that this spiritual parting takes place with much anger and strife; not only on the part of those that remain behind— who can be surprised at this?—but even of those who, as they say, are desirous of leaving the world. It seems to me, however, that it is incomparably more in accordance with the nature of a true conversion, that the separation take place, on the part of the converted, with affectionate regrets, as in Elisha's case; and I confess that where I see anything else, it wounds me like an arrow, and so contracts my heart towards a new brother, that I can-not ardently welcome him.

I have seen many a soul turn from the world and come to the Lord; but oh! what separations were they, when the persons were in true earnest about their conversion It was just as if their first love now filled their very hearts to the brim: "O that my dear father, or my dear mother, would but accompany me! O that my brother, or my friend, would choose the same good part!"

How tenderly did they entreat them to be reconciled unto God! What anxiety to perceive any traces of the work of grace in their dear Relatives! What inward sighs and supplications. "O Lord, be merciful to them also, and save their souls, as thou hast done mine!"

Everyone must be counted happy, whom the hand of mercy leads forth from the multitudes of the blind and dead into the kingdom of light; but more happy is he, who, when God awakens him, needs not to bid farewell to his dearest friends on earth, but can say to them, "You went before me; I am now, by God's grace, following after you. My name is inscribed with yours in the same book of life, and your Lord and Master is now mine!"

O what a blessed welcoming; and embracing then commences! They were once divided, but are now united forever! O ye converted parents of unconverted children, ye believing children of unbelieving fathers or mothers, O that such a joyful day may soon dawn upon your dwellings!

Elijah had no objection to Elisha's request. "Go," said he, "**and return again, for what have I done to thee?**"

The natural endearments of his paternal roof would not be found any temptation to him, for the Lord himself had stirred him up; and what had Elijah done to him, except to communicate the outward and visible signs? Family connections have often stood in the way of many a converted person, but Elisha's father and mother evidently appear to have been no such hindrance to him. They were probably devout and pious persons.

And though it required no little self-denial to give up a faithful and affectionate son, perhaps their only son, the joy and prop of their old age, especially with considerable danger of his falling a sacrifice to the idolatrous hand of power, still they readily complied, and doubtless said, "The will of the Lord be done."

While Elijah was proceeding on his way towards the wilderness of Damascus, Elisha went and took a yoke of oxen, probably those he had been accustomed to drive, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat.

This action appears significant, as if Elisha hereby meant to seal his covenant with the Lord, to take a solemn leave of his previous station, life, and occupation; and to testify his entire and voluntary resignation and dedication of himself to God, who had called him to his office.

A similar procedure must spiritually take place in our house and in our hearts, if we desire to enter into life.

**"He that forsaketh not all that he hath,"** says Jesus, **"cannot be my disciple."**

Whatever thou lovest out of him, or more than him, must be given up.

- Is mammon thy idol? Renounce it, otherwise Satan holds thee by a golden chain.
- Is it credit and reputation among men? Away with it, and seek the honor which cometh from God only.
- Is it wisdom and understanding? Renounce them, and become a fool for Christ's sake.
- Is it a life of ease, fashion, or pleasure? Burst these silken but slavish bonds, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.

We cannot be God's people unless we are so entirely, with all that we have and are.

But this is not all. The very instruments of the oxen must be given up, the very garments spotted by the flesh must be hated; every weight, every besetting encumbrance must be laid aside and hewn in pieces.

A whole and entire sacrifice is what the Lord desires for his altar; and his watchmen cry, **"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord!"** (Isaiah 52:11)

The parting meal with which Elisha now entertained the people, while on the one hand it was hospitable and cheerful, had in it, on the other hand, something solemn and sacred. Elisha, as the ruler of the feast, seems willing to leave with them his parting blessing, in a manner best suited to give them a cheerful idea of the Lord's service.

It may be imagined how Elisha felt upon this occasion. The mysterious memento which Elijah had left with him, and his own consciousness of the prophetic call, had put His mind upon the stretch.



However dear to him were his beloved parents and connections, he embraces them, and leaves them.

As to his future provision for this world, he casts all his care upon the God who feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies of the field.

Thus he sets out with a light heart and a cheerful countenance. **“He arose and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.”**

In like manner must we all be ready to follow the Lord Jesus. He has cast upon us his mantle. If we are his disciples indeed, our hearts are so touched and animated by his Spirit, that we can prefer nothing in the world before him, nor can we suffer any other object to rival him in our hearts.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*