

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

F. W. Krummacher, D. D.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

VISIT UNDER THE JUNIPER TREE

“**Jerusalem is the city of the great king,**” saith the Lord, Matthew 5:35. Where is Jerusalem? Where tears of mourning after God start into the eye; where the knee and the heart are bowed at the throne of grace; where the hands of faith are lifted to the cross, and lips of sincerity utter their prayers and praise—there is Jerusalem.

This is the lovely city of God, on whose towering heights the banner of the cross waves; this is the joy of the whole earth, and this alone of cities. There is nothing beautiful, nothing noble, and nothing worthy of regard but Jerusalem. Who would like to dwell in the wilderness of this world, if Jerusalem with its peaceful tabernacles did not stand in the midst of it? What is it makes this life of banishment tolerable, yea delightful? It is Jerusalem.

Jerusalem! O it is good to be within thy walls, to sit together as fellow-citizens according to the Privilege of the new birth; to sing together in the days of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord in the midst of us; to speak often one with another upon faith’s bright prospects that lie before us, to number up our joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not, or to place ourselves at the windows toward the east, and breathe the morning air of the everlasting day, and refreshing ourselves with thoughts of the blissful futurity that awaits us. **“O Jerusalem, if I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning!”**

- Where are the treasures of God displayed, and the jewels of heaven exhibited?
- Where burn the torches of eternal light, and where springs up the fountain of peace and joy which is inexhaustible?
- Where does the soul look into the opened books of life?
- Where does the true Israelite obtain the oil of joy from the flinty rocks?
- Where drops the balm which heals every wound?

Where, but in Jerusalem? They shall prosper that love, O Jerusalem! They shall go on from strength to strength who set their heart upon the ways Zion!

But if all this is true of the spiritual Jerusalem on earth, what shall I say of the Jerusalem which is above, which lies on the other side of the river of death, where the everlasting palm trees grow, and the still waters flow from the eternal hills, and angels sing to their golden harps among the trees of paradise.

Thither we are journeying, we happy pilgrims, from Jerusalem to Jerusalem: whilst ye who love the world, and the things that are in world, are on your way to Tophet, to the vails destruction, to everlasting night, we are going to full and cheerful day, and on our staff is inscribed "**The citizenship of heaven.**" And if we sometimes appear to you as those that dream, and you see our eyes glistening with tears whilst looking at the far blue distance, it is because of our longing for home. And all you can say is, "They are weeping after Jerusalem!"

And who has built us the city, and who has made it so beautiful for us? Jerusalem is the city of the great King. "**This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell!**" saith he. He dwells there, and the city rests peacefully under the wings of his love. We are traveling to Jerusalem.

"And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God" (I Kings 19:5-8).

This narrative belongs to the children of God, especially to the afflicted among them. The Lord's faithful care over his servants, especially in the season of clouds and darkness, is here displayed the most heart-refreshing manner. This Divine and gracious protection is made apparent,

- I. In the answer to prayer, which the prophet receives;
- II. In the appearance of an angel, whom the Lord sends him;
- III. In the miraculous refreshments, of which he partakes;
- IV. In the delightful prospect which God opens before him;
- V. In the supernatural strength given him for his journey through the desert.

Let us devoutly meditate on these delightful manifestations of the paternal love of our God.

I. Elijah had wished for death, after being obliged to give up the hope of the regeneration of his beloved Israel

Life had now no longer any attractions for him. The love of life can bear up under the privation of many earthly endearments but it cannot survive hope. When Elijah sees this flower fading, he sinks, and is weary of his existence. And if he had not been a man of God—who knows into what still more dreadful abyss than that of impatience and despondency he might have fallen!

It appeared as if the Lord had suddenly given up his work, and his prophet with it. The divine superintendence was concealed too deeply in the disguise of second causes for a mortal eye to penetrate through it. Nay, it seemed to have been withdrawn and to have left room for human vicissitudes—at least it seemed so to the prophet. He was unable, in such an unexpected turn of affairs, to discover the intentions of God. He found himself, as it were, in a dark labyrinth, without any candle of the Lord to shine upon his faith, or any clue to conduct him through it.

And if we consider how such situations of the godly are always taken advantage of by the powers of darkness, and how the tempter doubtless assaulted the fugitive under the juniper tree with the fiery darts of distressing doubts and horrible suggestions, we can easily comprehend how even such a champion as Elijah could thus despond; and, in the deepest dejection and anguish of soul, cry to heaven, and say, **“Lord, it is enough! Take now my life from me, for I am not better than my fathers!”**

Such prayers, however, which ascend towards heaven more in the wild bursts of carnal passion than in the sacred fire of divine love, and which are not borne upwards to God upon the wings of faith and hope, but upon the gusts of natural excitement—such prayers the Lord is not wont to answer; yet he does hear, so merciful is he, the breathings of the pious soul, ascending through all this clamor of carnal feeling, and in spite of it.

Experience shows, that he is not willing to let his children finish their course in vexation and sadness. However violently the storms may rage around that spiritual life which is in them, he suffers it not to be swallowed up and drowned in the commotion. Their sky generally becomes serene again before they reach the harbor—if not temporally, yet spiritually.

Listen, ye wounded and sorrowful souls! Your hour of removal will not arrive till the Lord has first reconciled you to his providential government and gracious discipline, and compelled you cheerfully to acknowledge that **“He doeth all things well!”** A calm will succeed the storms and tempests of your life, although it may not be till the evening of your pilgrimage; and you shall be enabled to say, **“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!”**

Yea, you shall become willing to bear, even still longer, the cross after him, if it be the Lord’s pleasure. Your course will terminate—not tumultuously—no, but in the cheerful serenity of a sabbatical dawn, and in the midst of a radiance, beaming from the heavenly Zion, will your Divine Friend translate you to the joy of the eternal hills, that his guidance may be extolled not only above, but even here below, and his grace and faithfulness be glorified in the sight of your surviving brethren, and of an ungodly world.

This sabbatical morning had not yet dawned upon Elijah. It was now one of the darkest moments of his life, in which he seemed like a man who had fallen out both with God and with the world. The request which, in time of weakness and gloomy despondency, he had ventured to prefer before God, was denied him. His life was not taken from him. He must yet live to see glorious things and learn again to praise the faithfulness of Him whose promises are Yea and Amen; he must yet be brought to feel humbled and astonished at his former doubts and anxieties; to find the most pleasing solution of every apparent difficulty and contradiction in God’s dealings with him, and to be placed in such a sunshine of Divine favor as he had never before enjoyed. And then would be the time to say, **“It is enough;”** and the hour would come, when—not under a solitary tree in the dreary wilderness—no, but in splendid triumph, on a highway, he should be carried directly over the dark valley into the land of everlasting rest.

O that we were not so impatient when gracious God occasionally denies our requests!

How kind it is, with respect to our real and best interests that the Lord gives us according to his will, and not according to our own; and that he condescends graciously to guard us against the attainment of our poor and often foolish wishes! We may rest assured, that whenever we pray without success that which we desire is not only not best for us but is either injurious, or at least inferior to what he really intends for us.

- How many a minister would never have experienced the Lord's faithfulness crowning the labors of his servants, had he been called away from this life at the time when, gloomy despondency, he desired it!

- How many a Christian pilgrim would never have seen anything of the spiritual manna, and of the spiritual streams from the rocks, had God listened to him when, with fear and trembling, he besought him not to lead him into a desert!

- How many a brother would this day be unable to rejoice that the power of Christ has so rested upon him, if the thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan, had been removed at the time he entreated such relief with many cries and tears!

Take courage, therefore, my brethren! Believe that the denial which the Lord occasionally puts upon our requests will eventually yield us as abundant cause for praise, as the assent with which he at other times graciously crowns them.

Do not think the time too long which you have to wait. You may be ready to exclaim, "O Lord, make an end; it is enough!" But no, beloved brethren! You must first travel, like Elijah, through a desert unto Horeb, that you may there hear the "**still small voice**" of peace. There must first come things which shall compel us to exclaim, "**O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face!**" And after that, the end; then the Pilgrim's staff is dropped—and the longed for "now" of good old Simeon is arrived, and we are "tabled to sing,

Thou needest, Lord, no more,
To turn me o'er and o'er:
The clay at length has rest,
Thine image is impress'd.

Elijah did not die—his hour was not yet come. Thus his petition remained unanswered, yet not entirely so. The prophet longed for rest. Rest he was to have, not however by the stroke of death, but by the boon of natural sleep. He lay down and slept under the juniper tree. It was indifferent to him where he lay—whether on a silken couch or upon the heath—under a thorn-bush or in a royal pavilion.

The burden of life was alleviated, the juniper tree lent him its refreshing shade, the inward tempest of his soul subsided, grief and uneasiness departed, tormenting thoughts gave place to sweet and spiritual rest, body and mind became completely renovated. Such intervals of rest from labor fall to the lot of all that bear the cross. Even in the midst of the desert our gracious God is able to provide for us a place of repose; the storm does not rage incessantly; the peaceful hours intervene unawares, and the burden upon our shoulders becomes for a while a resting pillow to our heads, upon which we insensibly gather recruited strength.

At one time the Keeper of Israel sends us bodily slumber in the midst of our sorrows; and what a welcome guest may it not prove to us, particularly when spiritual conflicts threaten to confuse the senses and absorb the spirits! At another, pleasant dreams perform to us the ministry of angels; poor Lazarus is in thought translated into Abraham's bosom, and lonely Jacob is borne aloft from his stone pillow into the opened heavens. At another season, a sympathizing Jonathan visits me in my outcast condition; and, by his affectionate conversation, imperceptibly removes my depression. At other times, some consoling truth of revelation is by a text or hymn suggested to my mind, and hope diffuses its mild and cheering light in the midst of my darkness.

In short, the very days of storm and tempest have their hours of repose and mercy, heretofore let no one be anxious, however steep and thorny his path, however dreary and rough his road. When his weary knees are ready to sink, God will know how to provide him a resting place, and he shall be able to say, **"I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me."**

And although these may be only short pauses, still they remind us how easily he could, if he pleased, at any moment deliver us out of every trouble. And a believing assurance of this is sufficient to overcome every anxiety and fear.

II. The man of God lay and slept under the jumper tree

To all outward appearance he was as one forsaken, and, like the disciples in Gethsemane, "sleeping for sorrow." Yet a Divine watch is kept over him. Grace, mercy, and peace are with him. Here we have a sensible demonstration given of the ministry of the elect angels about them that fear God, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. An angel **"touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat."**

Here is one instance, among several which are given in the Holy Scriptures, of the pleasure enjoyed by angels in ministering to God's saints on earth. Behold then, in this gloomy wilderness, the ministry of an angel of God, who finds an addition to his happiness in preparing help and refreshment for a servant of God in his distress and sorrow. O Israel, a people saved by the Lord, what people is like unto you in this world, wherever ye are scattered and dispersed, or in whatever age ye live! What glorious attendants minister unto you, even to the least heir of salvation among you!

Solitary as any one of you may seem in many a path of duty, that is the very situation where he is attended by company of the best and noblest kind; thus was Jacob attended at Mahanaim. And indeed it may be adopted as a general remark, that where the world closes against any servant of God, there heaven opens to him. What a wonderful mixture is there of poverty and dignity in the condition of the children of God, even as there was in that of Christ himself upon earth, to whose image and likeness all his people conformed.

The action of the angel, in waking the prophet and bidding him **"Arise and eat,"** may be spiritually applied to many a one among ourselves. Though the weary pilgrim stood in great need of bodily refreshment, he does not appear to have felt the want of it, and required first to be incited externally to make use of it.

So an afflicted soul may often need nothing so much as the food of the Word of God; and yet, by brooding over his troubles, may go on for some time insensible of this want. Though he open the Bible, he may feel no attraction for the truths it contains, nor any desire for the benefit of Divine ordinances, and may be ready to ask, "What good will these things do me?" This a pitiable and melancholy condition; but the help of God arrives to relieve it, either by a suggestion immediately from his Spirit, or by the medium of a Christian friend, or of some apparently accidental, but in reality providential occurrence, that he should arise and eat; should take up and read, or go and hear the word of life. He now finds a spiritual appetite returned, and his soul is strengthened by the Word of God.

III. "And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again."

Thus he appears to have been so well lodged and provided for here in the wilderness, as to leave him nothing more to wish for. Oh the tender compassion of God; for "**so he giveth his beloved sleep**" (Psalm 127:2). Yet how few learn to cast all their care and anxiety about temporal provision on Him who careth for them!

What a serious and difficult thing does it seem to many of us to practice that instruction of the inspired apostle, "**Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.**" To "**cast all our care on Him who careth for us,**" appears, to blind natural reason, a perilous method of proceeding. But is not our reluctance to follow this direction a reason why we experience, in our own lives, so little of His aid, who ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, and who hath the hearts of all in his hand!

His remarkable interpositions in behalf of Elijah we are too apt to regard as prodigies of a golden age long since gone by; hence almost the only sounds heard in the tabernacles of the righteous, at present, are sighs and lamentations for embarrassments, disappointed prospects, and unsuccessful undertakings.

The bread and the water with which God nourishes souls in the wilderness, are the truths of his word and promises. But as the cake was baked on the coals for Elijah, and the water placed at his head in a cruse, so we need to have the truths of God's word prepared for us by his Spirit, and set before us by his providence, that we may take the benefit of them for our spiritual refreshment and nourishment.

And how refreshing and strengthening do we find those truths, when God has again spread his table for us, and we again feed on the bread of life, by faith in our hearts, with thanksgiving, and refresh ourselves with the divine promises, and rejoice with renewed confidence in the divine favor! Then do we thank God for the season of hunger and sorrow through which we passed; it then seems to us as if we had never before feasted at such a passover; and we become more sensible than ever of the value of that bread of life which our gracious God has prepared for us. Hence we learn the goodness of God's ways in suffering us for a while to feel hunger, or deadness of spirit.

Elijah, apparently more asleep than awake, stretched out his hand, tasted the bread, drank of the water, and sank down again, weak and weary, and fell asleep. For that he fell asleep may be supposed from the angel's touching him a second time. We, however, should have thought that his surprise would have been so excited, and his thoughts so set in motion, as to have rendered it impossible for him to fall asleep again immediately. But here is no appearance of surprise expressed. He partakes of the refreshment, not as if he were lying in a desolate uninhabited wilderness, but as if he were at home in his own dwelling.

If he was not in a half awakened state, he must have been absorbed, like Mary Magdalene at her visit to the sepulchre, in higher thoughts. This is no unsupposable case; and, spiritually applied, it is a very common one. Persons of weak faith, and under strong spiritual temptation, may hear the word of consolation, and receive it; but taking only a hasty draught of the living waters of promise, the enjoyment is soon gone again. It is however not without its use. If it effects nothing more, it serves to revive and confirm the persuasion, that He who can cast a ray of comfort into the benighted soul, is able at any moment to send into it the full day of peace.

The sleep of Elijah serves also to remind us of those who are for the most part spiritually asleep, and have never yet been thoroughly awakened. they eat and drink, or, in other words, they hear much that is good, they read the Bible, and are regular in attending the worship of God, yet everything seems lost upon them, and not the smallest decided proof of spiritual life is discoverable in them. Yet let no one venture to say, before their course is ended, that such persons have eaten and drunken in vain. They may suddenly one day prove the contrary to your face. The food they have received may at unawares be found effectually to have nourished them. Let all diligently use the means of grace.

IV. "The angel of the Lord" then "came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee."

Though God allows his servants to be tried beyond their own inherent strength, he never suffers them to be tried beyond what he himself enables them to undergo. He prepares and strengthens before he leads them to any conflict, before lays his cross upon them. When we enjoy days of special refreshment in spirit, it is generally a sign that new trials of faith await us, for which, through this refreshment, we must make vigilant preparation.

Elijah now "**arose, and did eat and drink,**" and his slumber and weariness disappeared. The word of the angel seems to have quickened his soul as much as the food had refreshed his body. The angel had spoken to him of a further "journey" the prophet had now to undertake: which was the same as telling him that God had a new commission for him, and that he was still on a career of which he had not yet seen the end even at a distance. It had seemed as if his own "**heart**" had "**devised his way**" into this wilderness; he finds that "**the Lord directed his steps,**" and was still directing them. He is again persuaded that God is present with him, and he springs up as a young roe, and no longer goes "**whither he would,**" but, in the name of his gracious God, he again sets out on his way.

O how blessed is it, after going on for a season in uncertainty and darkness, sighing with David, **“I am sorrowful and forsaken,”** unexpectedly to discover some indubitable proof of the divine presence with us, some scriptural evidence that things are really different from what we supposed, that we are really walking in a path which God has marked out for us!

V. Elijah is now himself again; he has found God to be the lifter up of his head

“And he went the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God.”

He travels through the sandy desert alone; yet not alone, for God is with him. He is not anxious as to whither the Lord is directing him, or about the purpose intended by this strange journey. Forty days and nights he travels on, without rest or intermission, through the silent wilderness—a miraculous journey, which was performed in the strength of the food with which God, by his angel, had refreshed him. To help by many means or by few, or with no means at all, is one and the same thing to Him, who upholdeth all by the word of his power.

He, who multiplied the loaves and the fishes at his pleasure, could give to a little all the virtue of much. In Short, Elijah had no need, during the whole journey, of either refreshment or rest. The hot wind during the day did not exhaust him, nor the difficulties of the night fatigue him. Thus he bore about with him, in the renewed courage of his spirit, and in the unexhausted strength of his limbs, an abiding seal and pledge that the Lord was with him, and that the hand of the Almighty sustained him.

The desert, over which Elijah traveled forty days and nights, was the same through which the tribes of Israel traveled during forty years, under the convoy of the cloudy and fiery pillar. Surely this, if any, was holy ground. It had been traversed by the feet of the mighty, it was rich with the most stupendous associations of thought, and with the most interesting recollections. Here the whole miraculous history of the ancient fathers would revive before him in the liveliest colors. Fresh images and scenes from that age of wonders would recur to his mind at every step, and the very profound silence around him would assist in the consideration of the sublime things of which these spots had been once the theatre.

As often as he descended into a green and palmy vale, he alighted in spirit upon some resting-place of his fathers. As often as the shade of an overhanging rock received him, it was as if the incense of the sanctuary breathed around him; for the prayers of the pilgrims of God had hallowed these shades. Here or there, he would think, perhaps Moses had rested and taken counsel in the sacred circle of his elders; and the leader of Israel would still seem kneeling before the Lord, and speaking to him, **“as a man talketh with his friend.”** Thus one heart-elating thought would follow another. The history of the forty years’ journey would attain a form and a vitality beyond what he had hitherto realized. At one time he would seem to be gathering the manna with the ancient fathers; at another, to be standing with the wounded before the brazen image of the serpent, and feeling with them the return of health. Presently he would be in spirit at the altar which Moses built, and called it **“Jehovah-Nissi,”** the Lord my banner; and then again he would hear the desert resound with loud thanksgivings and solemn hymns of praise to the faithfulness’ and truth of Jehovah.

Every new scene on which he entered, would bring before him some new event and feature of those journeyings which were irradiated with the glory of God; and whatever consolation and encouragement is comprised in these histories, would rush upon him with sublime and overwhelming wonder, or exhilarate him with a ring of hope and joy, that seemed to give wings to his feet, and banish the last remains of fear and care from his spirit.

Assured that he was pursuing his way under the shadow of the same Almighty hand which once covered the whole host of Israel, he would cheerfully pursue his journey, not doubting that he was led by the right hand of Him who under the juniper tree had given the sign for him to depart, and had endued his feeble frame with a strength which no toil or fatigue of the long journey was able to diminish; and that as soon as the end was attained, he should be bidden to rest and lay down his traveling staff in peace and safety.

What a blessed gift is faith to the children of God! Its wondrous power deprives privations of their horrors. That which is distant it brings near; it develops hidden things, and awakens past events to new life. It merges the gloom of the present into the bliss of the future, and paints the sky of many a departing sun with the dawning radiance of a better world.

In the midst of sublunary changes, it anticipates a peaceful paradise. It peoples our bereaved family circles with holy and heavenly company; associates both worlds in close connection, and unites things past, present and to come. In its light, the sacred narratives seem acted over again, and our own personal history becomes a sacred record of Providence. It has the power of realizing the dead as if they were alive; the ancients are our contemporaries, although their ashes repose in the sepulchre for six thousand years. By its voice they still converse with us, although to human ears they speak no more; by its realizing aid they visit us in our darkness with kindness and consolation; by its light we see a cloud of them as witnesses encamped around us; and whatever grace they experienced is, through faith, appropriated to ourselves.

It nourishes us with the promises made to Abraham; it sustains us with the strong consolation of the oath divinely sworn unto Isaac; it gives us the staff of Jacob to support our steps; it enables us with Moses' rod to divide the sea, and with David we leap over the wall and rampart! O faith, thou door-keeper of every sanctuary, thou master over all the treasures of God! May he that is thine Author draw near unto us; and he that is thy Finisher incline himself towards us!

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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