

Elisha and the Sons of the Prophets

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of Elisha's relationship with the sons of the prophets, highlighting the importance of humility, spiritual growth, and the power of resurrection life in spiritual ministry.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 19:18-24, 2 Kings 2:3-4, John 3:6, Romans 8:6, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 5:24, Philippians 3:10

Topics: "Resurrection Life", "Spiritual Maturity"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the relationship between Elisha and the sons of the prophets, emphasizing their spiritual immaturity and the need for true understanding of God's ways. He highlights the transition from priestly to prophetic ministry, where the sons of the prophets were trained to declare God's mind directly, contrasting their initial flippancy towards Elisha with their eventual recognition of his authority. Sparks warns against spiritual pride and the dangers of relying on human reasoning rather than the power of resurrection life embodied in Elisha. He illustrates the necessity of spiritual discernment and the importance of being grounded in Christ to fulfill their prophetic ministry effectively. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper acceptance of the implications of resurrection life in the believers' lives.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Kings 2.

In this chapter Elisha comes into view in relation to the sons of the prophets. They also are mentioned more than at any other time, and on quite a number of occasions they are in evidence in relation to him and his ministry. This has a significance which we must look into, and we should seek the Lord's help for an understanding of what this really means. Let us refer to a few passages:

2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 14, 15-16; 4:38-41; 6:1-7.

The Sons of the Prophets Who and What They Were

We have to go back to the days of Samuel for our introduction to this particular form of the prophetic ministry. Originally the work which was afterward taken up by the prophets was done by the priests. It was the priestly function to instruct the people concerning the law and the ways of God. But in the days of the Judges the priests became so degenerated, and the priestly ministry fell to such a low level, that it became well-nigh extinct, and altogether inefficient and inadequate. Then Samuel came on the scene, himself doubtless a priest. With him there came a transition, and with him there came certain reforms. One of

these was the instituting of these schools of the prophets, and we find reference made to one of them as existing at Ramah, with Samuel at the head. You will read about it in 1 Samuel 19.

We may say, what perhaps is hardly necessary, that the term, "sons of the prophets," must not be taken literally. It does not mean that these were sons of prophets, but young men of spiritual promise who were gathered together to be prepared for spiritual ministry. That preparation was along certain quite clearly defined lines, but mainly with one object. They were to be very thoroughly instructed and grounded in the law, especially the oral law as differing from the symbolic law.

The priestly instruction had been mainly along the lines of the symbolic law; that is, the priests taught rather by action than by word. What the priests DID was the method of instruction originally. But that was symbolism and type, and therefore the people had largely to have discernment and perception. They had to be able to see through a symbolic act to a Divine meaning. When things were in a state of purity the people more or less understood the meaning of those priestly activities; they were able to see Divine thoughts as represented by outward acts. When things degenerated, as in the years of the Judges, spiritual perception and understanding almost entirely disappeared.

What we have as to the natural state of Eli typifies the spiritual state of the people. His eyes had waxed dim, so that he was almost entirely without sight, and he had become so weak, that he had no power whatever to control even the moral life of his own household. And that is a twofold representation of the spiritual state of the people under the priestly order at its end. Spiritual perception, insight, had so far departed and ceased that moral paralysis had set in, and government according to the mind of God had practically disappeared. Therefore, because spiritual insight and discernment (or what was called in those days "vision") had disappeared, a new form of instruction had become necessary, and that was the oral form. The prophets were trained, not by the symbolic or typical expression of the mind of God, but by the direct declaration of it in word. So that it was the oral law in which they were trained, to proclaim by word of mouth, and not merely by symbolic act, what the mind of the Lord was.

These schools of the prophets were set up with a view to preparing men to declare in a direct way the mind of God. There were other things which were associated with that, such as the spiritual history of their people, and of the world, from the Divine standpoint. Read the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, of Jonah, Haggai, and Daniel, and you will see how much there is of history, direct or indirect, which has been a studied thing. Daniel tells us he was made to know by books, and he mentions in particular his study of Jeremiah. He had come to a knowledge of things through those prophecies, and when you look at Jeremiah, you find that there is a good deal of history in his writing. So that an additional object for which the schools of the prophets came into being was the teaching of "spiritual history."

Then there was a further aspect of things bound up with these matters, which we might call spiritual patriotism. We emphasize the word "spiritual" since it indicates that God had chosen a people; that God had separated a people; that that people represented something for God in the midst of the nations, and that God was jealous over them because of what they represented for Him. Therefore the prophets were on fire with a holy jealousy that that people should fulfill its Divine vocation. That was the nature of their spiritual patriotism. They were jealous for Israel, because of Israel's Divine vocation. In the schools of the prophets, that which we call "spiritual patriotism" seems to have been nurtured and cherished.

These were, shall we say, incidental, subsidiary matters in the schools of the prophets. The primary function was that which is the very essence of prophetic ministry, that is, the revelation of the mind of God

by inspiration. Not revelation merely by study, by the deductions of the human mind, but revelation by inspiration; revealing the mind of God, because the mind of God had been revealed by the Spirit of God.

Thus the prophets stood as the instrument of Divine representation, the means by which God's thoughts, God's desires, God's will, should not only be proclaimed, but represented. The prophet should be not merely a spokesman, but the embodiment of the truth to be spoken. So we find that the Lord took the prophets through experiences in which the very message entrusted to them was brought out in their own hearts, so that they should be not only spokesmen, but living representations of the truth.

That brings us back to the schools of the prophets in Elisha's day, and we see that they were for that purpose, to produce men who were representatives of the Divine thought in a living way. You have there the starting point for the relationship between Elisha and these sons of the prophets.

There is this further factor to be remembered that, so far as the sons of the prophets were concerned as differing from the prophets, they were in immaturity, and in a state of preparation; hence the education which came by their relationship with Elisha. You find in the passages to which we have referred all the marks of immaturity in every case, and see what was necessary to bring them to the place where they could fulfill their prophetic ministry and serve God.

That Which Elisha Represents

We must remind ourselves before going on of what Elisha stands for. He represents the power of resurrection life, life triumphant over death, the full issue of the Cross. Elisha's roots were in Jordan; that is where he began. So that what we expect to find is that in his connection with these sons of the prophets in their immaturity they are under instruction as to what is essential in their ministry, and that that instruction is embodied in Elisha himself; that is, that they will come to see that he has the indispensable element for all ministry.

Take these first references to the sons of the prophets in chapter 2, at Bethel and at Jericho. They said: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" Here we start with a very elementary thing, perhaps almost too elementary to be mentioned, and yet something which it may be necessary for one or another to take account of. We notice that up to a point in this chapter Elisha is not honored by these sons of the prophets, but they address him in a somewhat frivolous and flippant manner. He is regarded as a mere servant of Elijah, so that whenever they see the great master moving on, and Elisha with him, they thus flippantly say: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" He is simply the servant of Elijah, and their attitude, their manner, their speech, betrays some superiority in their thought of themselves.

Here is spiritual pride and conceit. They have little or no respect for this layman. They are sons of the prophets: they are in the way of the work of the Lord; they are "called to service." They have about them an atmosphere of what is official. This man has no office, other than recently having come to follow the master, and wherever he goes the servant goes. That conveys to them nothing of spiritual meaning, so they regard him lightly. They have no knowledge whatever of his secret history with God. They have no perception at all as to what God was doing with him, and thus they take this superior, perhaps supercilious attitude.

That introduces what is a very elementary factor, but it is not an uncommon thing in the modern schools of the prophets. It is one of the perils of the institution, of having had a "call" to serve the Lord. Oh, the perils

of a "call" to serve the Lord! Oh, the perils of a sense of having been chosen by the Lord! the perils of being mentally in a different category from those who have not so heard the call and been chosen! One of the marks, if not the hallmark, of spiritual immaturity is conceit, or pride. No one who has any measure of spiritual growth and development, is marked by spiritual pride. That is a very challenging statement. There may be an enormous amount of knowledge, all that the "schools" can impart, not only the special colleges, but the general schools of doctrine; there may be a very comprehensive grasp of the teaching of the Scriptures, and accompanying it spiritual pride and superiority, which regards others who have not come that way, who have not been through those schools, as something inferior. It does not matter how comprehensive, how great such knowledge may be, if there is a trace of that spiritual superiority, you may at once decide that that is immaturity. That does not represent any point of spiritual advance. Such people have yet to learn from the beginning. Let us ask the Lord continually to deliver us from spiritual pride, from superiority, from conceit. The word "conceit" simply means having the seat of things in yourself. We sometimes speak of "having the root of the matter in you." That phrase is used in rather a different sense. The opposite of conceit is of having everything in the Lord, and nothing in yourself; and that is spiritual growth.

The sons of the prophets then do not come before us in a very good light, but we must remember that they are in a state of immaturity and preparation, and we must rather take our warning from their example. God was doing something in Elisha. God had His hand upon Elisha. There was an inner history between Elisha and the Lord, and the Lord and Elisha, which no one else could see. The official people were entirely unable to discern that, therefore they misunderstood. Let us be careful that we do not ride roughshod over the exercises in other lives on the part of the Lord which are not manifest at present outwardly, because we think that we have something and are something. We never know but what something very deep is going on in a life which at present has not revealed anything so far as we can see of what the Lord is doing.

It is so true that anything in the nature of spiritual pride is a blinding thing. It paralyzes the optic spiritually, so that any kind of self-sufficiency makes it impossible for us to see what God is doing elsewhere. We can never see that the Lord is doing anything anywhere else, if we are so self-satisfied that the Lord is really bound up with us, and we are the beginning and the end of all the Lord's interests. Pride blinds, and pride dulls spiritual sensibilities. Elisha had good reason to feel very sore, had he been a smaller man than he was, because of the frivolous and flippant attitude of the sons of the prophets. But he was a big man, and his dealings with them later show that he bore no resentment. He really did live out that which he represented, a life which has no interests down here, but is a heavenly life, a life above.

We pass on to chapter 2:7, after which follows Elijah's rapture, the mantle falling, and Elisha smiting the waters of Jordan and crying: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" the waters parting hither and thither, and Elisha passing through (2:14).

That brings us to verses 15-16. Here you have an advance, a good movement. There is now some recognition on the part of the sons of the prophets of Elisha, and of what God has done with him, and of the position in which God has placed him. Remember that Elisha stands for the power of resurrection, and although doubtless the sons of the prophets would not have put it in these words or understood it in this way, the spiritual explanation and interpretation of their action is this, that they recognized, accepted, and subjected themselves to the absolute preeminence of the power of resurrection in their lives. That is, they saw and they accepted that this was to be the governing thing in their own case, that for them all their life, their ministry, their future, was to be under the sway of Christ in resurrection. They were to fulfill their

ministry in the power of His resurrection; they were to be subject to the risen Lord on the principle that resurrection life was to govern. That is the spiritual interpretation. That is the typical meaning of Elisha's position as here, and of the sons of the prophets, recognizing and accepting and subjecting themselves to that principle. But this is only in a formal and outward way for the time being; that is, what Elisha did really represent spiritually had not become an inwrought thing in its meaning and value.

To bring that to up-to-date experience and application, it simply means this, that there does come a point when we are confronted with a great fact, a comprehensive fact, a fact such as this, that all life, all ministry from this time onward has to be in the power of His resurrection, and in no other power - under the absolute dominion, government, control of the risen Lord in His risen life. That may be presented to us, and we see it, observe it, take account of it, and say, Yes, it is true, I recognize that that is the truth; I accept that, I surrender to that, I subject myself to that. We mean it. We cannot get away from it. We cannot argue around it. The thing for us as a truth is final. We are shut up to it. It is not a thing against which we have any resentment. We see that it is God's way for us, that God has appointed it, God means that. And in a very honest, sincere way, like these sons of the prophets, we bow to it, and we say to the great truth of Christ risen, and of the government of His risen life from henceforth: I submit myself to it, I yield myself to it, I accept that; henceforth that is to be the pre-eminent principle in my life.

That is where the sons of the prophets came. That is where we come. And yet there is all the difference between accepting a position like that, and having its implications wrought into the very substance of our being. We find that after this that thing had to have a practical working into them, so as to be made real in experience, and not only true in mind and general acceptance.

There again we are confronted with a challenge, because we are so often brought up against the great facts and realities of God's will, God's purpose, God's way, God's means, the thoughts and desires of God as they affect our lives, and we find ourselves shut up to it. It is as clear as it was to the sons of the prophets that the spirit of Elijah did rest upon Elisha; and seeing it thus, we bow to it, we accept it, we say: We will to be subject to that henceforth. That is very good! That is a good step! It is certainly a very big step in advance of the position in which we found these sons of the prophets earlier in the chapter. But never let us think that the acceptance of a position in our minds and in our hearts means that we have come to the position. We may yet have some way to go before that which we have accepted becomes a reality. All the practical implications of that may yet have to be wrought into us. The unfortunate thing with so many is that they see the thing so clearly, it is so patent. There is no argument, there is no question. It is true, it is final. Then they go off thinking that because they are convinced, even overwhelmed with the truth of it, that they have it, and they begin to talk about it, and preach it. They have seen something, but very often that thing begins to break down in their lives. They find that, while they embraced it with all their heart, the thing was not true in their experience, and they begin to get into trouble by the very thing that they have accepted. And because they go through experiences which, from the Divine standpoint, are intended to bring them experimentally to that position, but for the time being are so contrary to it, they very often say: "Well, this thing does not work. I was certain that it was right; there was no question in my mind about it, and even now I do not see anything else; but, so far as I am concerned, it does not work." And they get into confusion and contradiction, and then they abandon the whole thing. Others hold on in the midst of the mystery, and go through with God to a clear place.

It is as clear as anything can be that these sons of the prophets accepted something in a comprehensive way, and their acceptance was very genuine, but that did not mean that the implications had been wrought into their hearts. From the standpoint of God there has to be an acceptance like that; full, complete,

honest, final: but then the Lord begins to apply that.

It is most significant, from the standpoint of spiritual history, that there is no break whatever between their acceptance of Elisha, their bowing to him, and then their beginning to argue with him, as you will see from verses 16 to 18. That is a contradiction of subjection, a denial of their accepting him as the governing principle of their lives. Immediately it is found that what has been in all honesty an accepted thing is not yet a thing which is a part of their being. Do you notice what is involved? If Elisha is the power of life triumphant over death, then he is up against features of death all the time, and this incident affords one example of making room for death by these sons of the prophets. Elijah had been taken by a whirlwind into heaven, and they argued: "...lest peradventure the spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley," making room for something far less than the utter and the ultimate thing. It is as though they said: "Well, after all, he may be lying dead somewhere."

There is a large scope for contemplation there, if we bring the matter into the realm of the New Testament, as to our failing to grasp the reality of Christ in heaven, the meaning of the Lord Jesus being at the right hand of God, and our falling below that, and all the death that is let in by such a failure to grasp, to apprehend its full value. But it is not our intention to explore that realm. We only mention it because there is a very big factor involved.

We keep to the simple line for our present purpose, pointing out, that here there was a making room for death by acting on the level of natural reason in spiritual things. Here was a great spiritual factor, which was embodied in the very man standing before these sons of the prophets. Elisha would never have been there as he was in that capacity, with that endowment, if Elijah had not gone into heaven. They were in the presence of the fact of the power of resurrection, and yet they must handle such spiritual magnitudes with the natural mind, and drag it down from its high level of heavenly reality on to the low level of human reasoning. They must verify spiritual things by their own natural minds.

That brings us back to Romans 8:6, "For the mind of the flesh is death..." These men were, after all, dwelling mentally in the realm of death, not in glory, ascension, rapture. They were not in the heavenlies in spirit. They were mentally dwelling in the realm of death. "Lest peradventure the spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." That was their horizon, that was the realm in which they were living and thinking. And it was simply death, because it was the mind of the flesh.

We pass from Romans to Corinthians: "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged." That is death: and when we try to handle, analyze, pierce through heavenly and spiritual things with these minds of ours, this natural reasoning, we come to a deadlock, we come to an impasse, and we move in a realm of spiritual death.

These very men had seen what happened. They saw Jordan cleft; they had knowledge of the risen and ascended Lord, but they were not taking their own position in an experimental way upon it. They wanted to have a certain confirmation in the realm of sense. Oh! how the natural man longs to get confirmation through his senses. He longs to see something, feel something, to have evidences. Beloved, one of the marks of resurrection is that so often the whole thing goes on without any evidences in the realm of our senses. Do you think that the people who live in the power of His resurrection are always conscious of being simply overflowing with Divine life? Very often, like Paul, they feel as dead as anything can be in

themselves, and yet the miracle is that there is that which is not of themselves enabling them unto the work, carrying them on. They are conscious of weakness, emptiness, dependence, and yet there is something of God which carries them on. If they were to stand still and say: "I am not going on any longer until I know in every part of my being, and in every factor of my life, the overflowing of His resurrection," they would not go on. The Lord does not meet us on that ground at all. These men showed immaturity by wanting evidences in the realm of the senses. Elisha shows how utterly he represents the principle of resurrection life by standing against all that is merely sentient. The flesh must have its proofs, and its evidences along its own line, but the spirit sees through and acts in another realm: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

So these sons of the prophets sought to take hold of resurrection life and draw it down to the limitations of man's doubts. If you and I do that, we shall fall out of the realm of that ministry and testimony to which the Lord calls us. It is a very great temptation all the way along to want evidences of the spiritual in the realm of our feelings and of our natural knowledge, instead of going on and knowing quite well that the going on is not by our own power; that it is impossible so far as we are concerned, and yet we are going on by reason of Him Who is our life.

Looked at naturally, all those who have known and lived on the principle of the risen life of the Lord Jesus would appear a very poor lot indeed. If you could gather all the men and the women of this New Testament dispensation who have lived wholly upon that principle of life triumphant over death, and you looked at them as men look at people, you would say: "That is a poor crowd." Take Paul! Some people would get a big surprise if they could see Paul as he was. We have all the romance of nearly two thousand years of the effect of Paul's ministry. We have all this volume of literature on Paul, his life, and letters, and work. If Paul were able to meet us as he was then, and we had no spiritual perception, but simply saw him as a man, we should say: "Is this the man who created all this literature, and caused all this talk, who has stirred the world to its very depths for nearly two thousand years? I do not see anything in him!" But there is a deeper side. So you ask him: "Paul, did you know all the way through your life, when you were in this great work, such resurrection power that you never had an ache or a pain, and never felt tired, and never knew what it was to be depressed, to feel fears, to be anxious?" He would answer: "I knew them all as few men have known them, fightings without and fears within. I knew what depression was; I knew what it was to be tempted to doubt; I knew what it was to go through dark patches where ultimate questions arose; I knew what it was to despair of life." We may take it that there were many, many occasions when Paul was not conscious pre-eminently of the power of His resurrection, and yet he was living on it, and that accounted for everything.

That which is real and that of which we are conscious may be two different things. All that we know at times is that we go on in spite of ourselves. What is it that carries us on? It is that other "something" that is deeper than thought, deeper than understanding, deeper than feeling; it is the Lord going on in us.

The sons of the prophets made room for death by opening the door for human evidence, proof through the senses. That is spiritual immaturity. They will never graduate to the full prophetic ministry, until that which is true of Elisha has become true of them. Let us recognize that if Elisha comes out of Jordan, has his roots in Calvary, and, therefore, is the embodiment of the meaning of the Cross, then for these sons of the prophets, and spiritually for us, he points to the absolute necessity for the natural mind going to the Cross before ever we can know the risen life in Christ. They would seek to be justified by their works, and so they scoured the mountains and the valleys. They would have been justified if they had taken the spiritual position and believed.

Turn to chapter 4:38-41. Here we see that these sons of the prophets went out to gather herbs for a meal, and when they found some wild gourds and cast them into the pot, it almost meant disaster. The lesson is a simple and clear one. It is again the coming in of the element of death: "...there is death in the pot." Death comes in here amongst the sons of the prophets along the line of a lack of discrimination in what was suitable to the maintaining of the spiritual life. There is a dearth in the land, the very life of the Lord's people is endangered, imperiled. And so that which is necessary for the sustenance and maintenance of life is the primary issue. These men (note again) are in preparation for spiritual ministry, and one thing which will most certainly arise in their ministry, and a primary thing, will be the question of what is suitable for the spiritual life of the people of God. And the one thing that they will need in the fulfillment of that ministry is to have discrimination. Moreover, they are going to fulfill their ministry in times of sore need and pressure; for the prophets came up, as we have seen, in connection with the state of spiritual declension. Prophetic ministry is to be exercised mainly in times when the order of God in its fullness and clearness is not obtaining, when things have swung away from the Lord's full thought, and the glory of the heavenly order is no longer existent. There will be, therefore, pressure and difficulty in the times when the prophets fulfill their ministry. The people will be in a state of great spiritual need, and the prophets will have to be in a position to say what it is that is suited to that need.

Pass your eye forward, and you will see the clash between the true and the false prophet. Certain false prophets prophesied the things which were pleasing for popularity's sake; things that they were expected to say; things that they would get reward for saying. And so they prophesied smooth things, and these things were death. The true prophet had to withstand the false, and prophesy the things which very often were not popular and acceptable. These sons of the prophets were preparing for their spiritual ministry, and that ministry was to be the ministry of life triumphant over death. And a great factor in such ministry is ability to discriminate between what is of life and what is of death, what is living and what is dead.

In this incident in the fourth chapter they go through a practical experience. They gather for their sustenance in a day of pressure, but they gather indiscriminately, and find that death is in the pot. When such a state exists, and there is pressure, it is so easy to mix things up. It is so easy to bring along something which really is not life because it looks all right. The devil is taking advantage of a time of spiritual famine today to get into the pot things that are poisonous and deadly. There is a great need today amongst the Lord's people. There is a dearth of real spiritual food, and with it a sense of need. The enemy is taking advantage of that sense of need, and unfortunately it is those instruments which have no spiritual discernment who are bringing in the thing which is deadly to the Lord's people. One of the marks of our day is a lack of discernment and perception, an incapacity for discriminating between the true and the false, when the false looks like the true. Wild grapes and wild gourds look so much alike. You can be easily deceived by appearances, and so they are all put in together. And today you notice the mixture of the false and the true, and that is the deadly element. There is the true there, but there is something else mixed in, and in the long run it is proved to be not life as it promised to be, but death, a deadly deception, a deadly contradiction, a deadly denial.

The whole point is that of the absolute necessity of spiritual understanding, by which spiritual discrimination is made as to what is suitable to a true spiritual life, and what is not suitable. You cannot feed what is of God upon something which is of man or of the world. It is unsuitable. That which is of God is a species which cannot thrive upon anything else but that which is of Him. If you feed it on anything else you introduce poison. We cannot live the risen life of the Lord upon anything other than what is of the Lord, and so Elisha cast meal into the pot. And what is the meal if it is not the Lord Jesus, the meal

offering to God, God's absolute satisfaction with Christ? Prophets must always know what really is living food for the people of God. The sustenance of the Lord's people is by the impartation of Christ in His moral and spiritual excellencies.

Finally, in chapter 6, verses 1-7: "The place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us." The desire for extending the house may be quite a good one, we have nothing to say about that. The sons of the prophets take their axes and go down to obtain energetically the means for that extension. They enter upon a course of action for enlarging the house. And as they are felling the trees one man's axe-head comes off and falls into the water - the river Jordan. That is a calamity, but there are always lessons hidden in calamities. The elements here are those of energy, and the energy is represented by the axe. An axe is an energetic symbol. It speaks of strength in action. But this man who is the occasion of the story has a loose axe-head. His strength, his energy, is of an uncertain quantity and quality, and it fails to get through; it breaks down on the way. The parable is perfectly clear; we hardly need apply it. Here is good purpose, good intention, good motive, the object is quite commendable, but the initiative is with the man, and the energy is of man: and man's energy in the things of God is a very uncertain quantity, and sooner or later it will break down, and a state of death will exist, because that axe-head is at the bottom of Jordan.

May we stay for a moment and recall a further reference to the axe-head in another part of the Scripture. You will remember that the cities of refuge were appointed for the benefit of such as accidentally killed another man, and this illustration is given: The case is supposed of two men who went one day into the woods to cut down trees, and one man's axe-head came off and smote the other man, that he died. It is interesting that that is cited as an illustration of how a man may die accidentally. The city of refuge was provided for him who caused the death, that the avenger of blood should not take his life for the life of the one who has died. But we must remember that there is a certain responsibility for seeing that your axe-head is not loose. It is all very well to say that it was an accident, but what about the responsibility for seeing before you started that the head was on the axe securely? There is a moral principle involved there.

Here is a man who started out with a borrowed axe, and he never looked to see whether his axe-head was perfectly safe. That loose axe-head instead of going into the Jordan might have gone into another man's head, and the question of death would have been involved. In principle it is the same thing. Morally it is one thing. The axe-head is at the bottom of Jordan, and typically a state of death has come about because of an attempt - spiritually interpreted - to do spiritual things with natural energies.

We need say no more, other than to conclude the incident. The axe-head came back, and the work was finished, though now in the power of resurrection. But for Elisha being on the spot as the power of resurrection, as that which had conquered Jordan already, as that which had triumphed over death as represented by Jordan, that was the end of that man's work.

There are other features, but we will not touch upon them. We are simply taking what seems to be the heart of these things.

So we are brought to the fact that preparation for full usefulness to the Lord in the power of resurrection means that we have to go through an experience where our energies are brought to an end, where the strength of the flesh is buried in Jordan, and where we can only go on because we discover the power of His resurrection.

With the seeking for the body of Elijah you have the natural mind at work. In the seeking for the food you have the natural heart at work. In the loss of the axe-head you have the natural will at work. Mind, heart and will, all having to pass through death, to come into the realm of the power of His resurrection.

So that Elisha's connection with the sons of the prophets is full of illumination. We shall miss the mark, if we just dwell with the typology. We simply use it, in order to get to the spiritual side of things. It would be quite easy for us to go to the New Testament and see this principle, and that principle, and the other principle laid down, but that would be but a statement made. We have preferred to go to the Old Testament and illustrate principles. The principles are in the New Testament as clearly as anything can be: for example, that the Cross does mean the end of the natural mind, so far as spiritual things are concerned: the Cross does mean that "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh and the affections and desires thereof": the Cross does mean that the strength of "I" has to be crucified with Christ. But the Cross does mean also that in mind, heart, and will, the power of His resurrection has to be established, and can be.

While these sons of the prophets accepted the position in the beginning, it was only wrought into them stage by stage through experience, and each of those stages was simply the making real in them of the implications of their relationship to Elisha, what was bound up with him as being their head, their governing law of life.

We go through experiences to bring us there, but as we go through them we come to the place where we do know Him, and the power of His resurrection.

The Lord teach us more fully what this means.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/elisha-and-the-sons-of-the-prophets/>

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