

The Link Between Elisha and Elijah

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound connection between Elisha and Elijah, emphasizing the Church's role in manifesting resurrection power through diligent service and unwavering faith.

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:9

Topics: "Resurrection Power", "Commitment to God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound connection between Elisha and Elijah, illustrating how Elisha represents the Church empowered by the resurrection. He emphasizes that Elisha's ministry begins with a double portion of Elijah's spirit, symbolizing the Church's call to greater works through the Holy Spirit. The sermon highlights key events in Elisha's life that demonstrate the transition from death to life and limitation to fullness, underscoring the necessity of being fully committed and diligent in one's earthly vocation as preparation for divine service. Sparks warns against half-heartedness and stresses the importance of relying on God's power rather than personal strength, culminating in the understanding that true ministry begins at the Cross and in the resurrection of Christ.

Transcript

The second book of Kings has very largely to do with the life and ministry of Elisha, the prophet; and Elisha undoubtedly brings before us the Old Testament illustration and type of the Church living and working in the power of resurrection. We are familiar with the point at which the ministry of Elijah gives place to that of Elisha. When the Lord took up Elijah in a chariot of fire to heaven, Elisha's connection with that rapture, that ascension, was a matter of his being on the spot and seeing his master taken up, and of having fulfilled in himself the request that he should receive a double portion of the spirit of Elijah.

Elijah thus very clearly becomes a type of the Lord Jesus ascending, and the Holy Spirit as a double portion of His Spirit coming upon the Church, fulfilling His own words: "...greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father." In the case of the Lord Jesus the Church followed, proceeding in the fullness of the Spirit to work out the ministry of Christ on a larger scale than He in the days of His flesh had been able to accomplish. His own prayer in those days was that the baptism with which He had to be baptized might be accomplished, because He had come to scatter fire on the earth. That scattering could not be until the baptism of the Cross was a realized thing, and He longed therefore for His emancipation from the limitations of the flesh. When that baptism of passion was fulfilled, and He was translated to the glory, the fire was scattered in the earth, and His desire was fulfilled through His Church; His limitations

were removed.

That has its foreshadowing in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. So that which came in with Elisha is that which comes in with the Church - fullness by the Spirit in the power of resurrection. There we begin, with Elisha coming in on resurrection ground for the purpose of showing forth the fullness of the ascended Head. The fact that Elisha does speak of the power of resurrection, and the full meaning of life on that ground, is amply borne out by the outstanding incidents of his life. If you cast your eye over them you will see that it is, firstly, a matter of changing from death to life, and then, secondly, of changing from limitation to fullness.

We begin with

The Waters of Jericho,

the new cruse and the salt. By these means the waters were healed, and the fruit of the ground delivered from the bondage of death and corruption, and made living, abiding, and full. Then

The Three Kings in League

were in a most paralyzing situation for want of water, in danger of being delivered into the hands of Moab. There was the digging of the trenches in the valley by faith, and silently, without noise or demonstration, the torrents of water coming down; then the deliverance from captivity to the enemy, from the hand of the spoiler. It is the power of resurrection life in fullness.

The Widow's Oil

A calamity had overtaken her, leaving her in a predicament. There were the vessels, not a few. The fullness of life is typified in the poured forth oil, the limitation of which was not on the Divine side but on the human side. Then we have

The Woman's Son,

given, taken, raised from the dead. That speaks for itself as to the power of resurrection, and as to the fullness of life.

The Poisoned Pottage

The sons of the prophets found death in the pot, and by the casting in of the meal the death elements were destroyed - death turned to life, fullness, and satisfaction. Next we have

Naaman the Syrian Leper,

his washing, if you like, his baptism in Jordan; all of which speaks for itself to those who know anything of the meaning of Jordan - from death unto life, the fullness of the power of His resurrection.

The Loose Axe Head

We have the sons of the prophets again, building their place of instruction; the incident of the axe head coming off; falling into the water and sinking; the casting in of the branch of the tree, causing the iron to float. Once more is seen the miracle of life triumphant over death, and fullness of satisfaction. There follows

The Feeding of the Multitude

with a small amount of bread;

The Unseen Horsemen

in the day of peril and threatened death;

The Arrows,

which were the arrows of deliverance; and finally

Elisha's Death,

and a man brought to life by touching his bones.

So Elisha, from start to finish, is a most conspicuous type of the power of resurrection, and of what that means as fullness of life.

All these are aspects of the one comprehensive truth, and each has its own particular message to bring in connection with it. We are not going to touch any of them in particular until later. They have been reviewed simply for the purpose of getting our minds clear as to what Elisha really stands for, and of giving us a further point from which to move forward.

Elisha's Preparation in His Natural Vocation

That which will occupy us now is connected with the preliminary stage in Elisha's life, before he moved out into this full expression. There is always a preparatory stage, and a preparatory dealing with us on the part of the Lord.

The first time Elisha comes before our notice is very significant of what the Lord takes account of, when He puts His hand upon a man or a woman, to make such a vessel of His fuller Testimony. It is found in I Kings 19:19-21:

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 over unto 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 from following him, and took the 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 (A.S.V.).

Here you have some features of a life upon which the Lord looks, or has already looked, with a view to bringing that life into relationship with Himself and His Testimony in a way of fullness. The characteristics of Elisha here are such as the Lord looks for in His would-be servants.

What Elijah found was a man of whom, by reason of his thoroughness in what he did, a note was made in the Divine records, which goes down through the ages. He was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. He was putting all his resources into the work. In his ordinary course of life he was not having anything in reserve. Twelve yoke of oxen represent the doing of things thoroughly; doing what your hands find to do

with all your might. Oxen are types of strength in service, and, although Elisha was but in his ordinary natural vocation, in that there were no half-hearted measures. He was doing it with a downrightness that is taken account of. It may seem to be a very simple thing, but the Lord puts His workers on a probation to watch for that very thing. We may be waiting for the time when we shall be able to serve the Lord with all our might and main, and in the waiting time we may be reserving ourselves just a little along other lines. That can be put in different ways, but you may take it as settled that the Lord will never put you into a ministry of manifesting the power of His resurrection, of being of any special value to Him in His Testimony, if He has seen slothfulness in the ordinary walks of life, if He has observed any trace of halfheartedness in other directions. There is an infinite peril associated with waiting for what we call our life work. The waiting should be of a positive character, and during that time we should be in nothing less than a hundred percent energy in what there is about us to do.

This is a word of warning, and a word that we are constrained to give. It is not the sort of thing we like to say, and yet it is a word which those of us who have had time to observe, to watch the preparation of many lives for the work of the Lord, feel to be a necessary word. We mark how that the time before the Lord can visit a life and say, "Now the hour has come for you to move out into that for which I have prepared you," is a time that is so often marked by a lack of wholehearted abandonment to the ordinary natural vocation; that the things which we call "natural" are put in a place second to the spiritual, and regarded as of less importance, and as calling therefore for much less diligence.

We need not increase words, but it is a thing for us all to guard very carefully. The Lord is watching in the ordinary vocations of life, in the things which we may regard as by no means of any great spiritual value, to see if in those very things we are diligent. We must remember that His own words are: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." That is a law; and faithfulness in that which is least is qualification for increase.

On the other side, when the Lord sees a man or a woman who, like Elisha, is putting all his energy, all his resources into his ordinary vocation, and doing it with all his might, the Lord marks that man or that woman, and the time will come when that life will be drawn into association with the Lord in something of peculiar value to Him.

You see this in the first phase, before any thought or suggestion had come to Elisha of prophetic ministry. It is not as if he were as one of the sons of the prophets preparing for his ministry. No suggestion whatever is made that he is to be a prophet. We do not know that he had any such idea. What we do know is that he was doing farm work, and that he was putting all his might into it, and the Lord took account of it. Before ever there was a thought of, what many people would call, spiritual work, this man was seen by God as one who would go a long way with Him. Of course Elisha was a godly man, not just a man of the world diligent in his business.

You may say: That is reckoning on the natural. Well, the Lord does take men into account as to their spirit, and although a man may be very often mistaken as to the method, and as to the way, the Lord looks on the heart. We are thinking of Paul himself. He was certainly very blind, and very mistaken in the way that he took, but he took it with all his might, and there was no question that what he did was with every ounce of his being, and we are not to say that the Lord did not take that into account. The Lord takes account of diligence and devotion and wholeheartedness, in whatever realm it is. When the Lord gets hold of men and women of that kind, He may have deep and mighty lessons to teach them, but He knows that He has a vessel that will be suitable to Him, and that will go on with Him.

That is a simple word, almost in the nature of a homily, but it is an important one, and we must never expect the Lord to say: "Come up higher," until we have given ourselves to the very last measure in the place where we are. We rejoice that there are men and women like Elisha, who just put themselves into the menial things, the ordinary things, the things which men would not call specifically spiritual service, until the Lord says, "That is enough." This is preparation; and remember the Lord is taking account!

Everything of Spirit

The next thing in the case of Elisha follows closely upon the intimation that he was called. Elijah threw his mantle over him. Then it looked as though Elisha drew back; it looked as though he might be numbered with certain in the New Testament who said: "First suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house"; "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father"; and soon. But there is the fact that something deeper had been registered in Elisha, which did not allow him to do the thing he had contemplated doing. We do not read of any farewells in the way he suggested them to Elijah; but what we do read is that he went and rid himself of all that was behind. He burned his bridges, cleared up things straightway, distributed the proceeds, and went after Elijah. Again, the marks of thoroughness!

Here is a man who is not saying: "Well, in case things go wrong, and I do not get on very well in my new sphere of work, I had better keep these oxen alive, so that I can come back to this!" The thing had gone to his heart. He knew the hour had struck; he knew God had touched him; deep down in his being there was something which had made him a prisoner, from which he found no release; so he simply cleared up everything, and went in the way of that inward call.

The point is mainly this, that it was not Elijah's call that did it. On the strength of Elijah's word alone Elisha could look back; that is, he could contemplate going to have a valedictory; but there was something deeper than Elijah's word. Something had come through from God into his inner being, which put away all that was merely sentimental or earthly, and made him do a thorough work of breaking, and going out for the Lord. It is important for us to hear something deeper than the voice of man when we move into the work of the Lord. We must have something more than the outward appeal. We can have many appeals, strong urges, in meetings arranged for that purpose, to appeal for workers. We can have the appeal from the outside. We can have the urge. We can even have people tell us that we ought to go, that God has really called us. But that is never enough. What we must know is that God has spoken more deeply than any kind of outward appeal. We must know that God has done something, and that because of this there is no question for us whatever of keeping in reserve the old relationships, the old associations, the old interests; that deeper challenge has settled everything, and the only thing we can do is to make a complete break, and go out with the Lord.

Again, this is very elementary, but it is very important. A great many go out on the strength of an appeal, or an urge of man, and that is always a very dangerous thing. It is equally dangerous for us to put our hands upon people, and to tell them what they ought to do, what God would have them do, what and where their call is. Let us seek to keep our hands off people altogether as to their life, and leave them with the Lord. Run a thousand miles from them rather than try in any way to shape their life course for them. If God does not speak, we shall only make havoc of lives in trying to influence them of ourselves. We must never be influenced by anything but the Word of the Lord in our heart. Someone may speak, and through that someone there may strike home like a shaft the Word of the Lord, but we must have that extra element before there can be certainty. When we have that, we know it; God has spoken, and everything is changed.

It is interesting that we hear nothing more of Elisha from that day, until the day when Elijah finishes his ministry. It is fitting that it should be so. In 2 Kings 2, Elisha comes in in connection with the translation of his master, Elijah. There are three things in that chapter which are factors in this preliminary stage in the preparation of this vessel of the Testimony.

1. The Test of Faith and Perseverance

The first thing is Elisha's test of faith and perseverance after he had received the knowledge of a call. You notice and it is a familiar story how Elijah, on the one hand, seemed to be trying to shake off Elisha: "Tarry here...." "Tarry here..." ; "Tarry here...." To every such urge of Elijah, Elisha rejoined: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." On the other hand, the sons of the prophets in every place they visited said: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" seeking to discourage, to deter him. There is no element of encouragement about this repetition. Elisha replies: "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." It makes no difference to me: I am going to follow on to the end: I am going to see this thing through. It may be the Lord's will to take him away, but I am going to be there when it happens. And so, whatever the meaning of Elijah's repeated effort to get him to stay may have been, he could not influence this man one bit, could not shake him off. Elisha was exercising faith, with a persistence and endurance which is the outstanding feature of this chapter.

In what connection is his faith being exercised, and in what connection is his persistence being tested? Well, Elijah has what he needs! It comes within that realm of some being discouraged, being able to be put off, and saying, while others go on, "These are hard sayings, who can hear them?" "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." They are discouraged more or less easily, and they go away. And the Lord turns to the twelve and says: "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter answers: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." The Master has what is needed, and there is no thought of going away, being put off, discouraged, but the thought is to go on with Him, because He has the essential elements of that life. Elisha knew that Elijah had what he needed for his life, for his ministry. So that when Elijah said: "Ask what I shall do for thee," Elisha replied: "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Elijah's rejoinder was: "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee..." Elisha knew that Elijah had the essential, and was not to be put off, or easily discouraged. Although it seemed that Elijah was trying to get rid of him, the other man refused to be got rid of; he was clinging to him for life. He was, moreover, being tested as to his faith, and as to his perseverance.

It is a part of Elisha's preparation, and that of all true instruments of the Lord. They will go through experiences in which they are tested to the very last ounce of endurance, along the line of it seeming to be that even the Lord is trying to shake them off. That is a very crude way of putting it; but so often there is every opportunity, if you are ready to accept appearances alone, to be discouraged, to feel the Lord does not want you, that after all, although you may have had the sense of a call, the Lord is not going through with it. Rather it looks as though you are being put back, and put back again. Can you be discouraged? Can you be shaken off? Can your faith easily give way? If so, you are of little use for this calling. If you are going to be an instrument of the Testimony of the power of His resurrection, you are going to have a very great deal that you will come up against, that will put you out of the fight, if you can be put out. It is very necessary to be established before you start; in some measure that proves that you are not one to be easily put off, easily discouraged.

Elisha went through the test; on the one hand, his own master being the occasion of the testing, and on the other hand, those who were in a spiritual position, sons of the prophets - supposed to be the people who had spiritual knowledge - being anything but encouraging, rather being discouraging factors. Very often those who ought to be helpful by reason of their spiritual position - officially, at any rate - are anything but encouraging; they would put us back. All that we are left with is: "The Lord has called me; I know that in my heart. The Lord has led me this way. The Lord has caused me to take this step that I have taken. I have burned my bridges; I have cut all my ties; I have stepped out on the Lord. Now, although I have done that, the Lord is testing me, seeming to give me very little confirmation and encouragement, and the Lord's representatives - officially - are by no means helpful: 'Nevertheless I stand to it, I am going on with God.'" A man or a woman who can go on like that is going to count for God. Elisha had nothing whatever to fall back upon save his inward knowledge of the Lord. He went through on that.

It is a very nice thing when we get encouragement from every direction in the way of our conceived call; when the Lord comes along and confirms it in all sorts of ways, and then everyone else, and everything else, says: "We are with you; we will stand by you; we are going to support and uphold you." We can get on all right that way. But if the Lord gives us no special conspicuous providences, sovereign acts; if He hides Himself, so that what we do see is rather discouragement from going on, even from the Lord's side - and one of the most difficult things is the hiding of the Lord, though He is there hiddenly doing things, and marvelously carrying through unto enlargement and enrichment, while allowing nothing that the flesh can take hold of - then it is a matter of faith going on with God, even when the Lord seems to be hiding Himself, and allowing much of discouragement to remain on our horizon. At such a time no one else can enter into it. Everybody else to whom we might look, and from whom we might expect something, is of no use to us at all. All that they have to say is something that is melancholy: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" Elisha seems to be a little impatient with that. It might have been expressed in this way: You are a morbid crowd, and I would sooner you kept quiet if you have nothing better to say! They are not inspiring at all. And that is very often how we find the people to whom we look for encouragement. They see the difficulties, they see the dark side of things, they tell us of what we are running our heads into, of the calamities that will overtake us. The question is: "Will you go on with God?" Elisha went on! The statement is: "They two went on." There is something in that which leads to a large place, which means much for the Lord.

2. Learning the Secret of Power From on High

Another lesson which Elisha had to learn was that although he was a man of energy, a man who gave himself very thoroughly and fully and used up all his natural strength in what he did, his power was from on high. What we have said as to a man being diligent and in earnest, and putting all his strength into things, does not in any way contradict this, that even such a man has to learn, before he can move into his full spiritual usefulness, that the power for that is not in himself, but from on high. The Lord may take account of that man before, but even as it was with Paul with all his zeal and all his earnestness, he has to come to the place where all his strength is drawn from above, and not from himself. Elisha had to learn that it was power from on high, the Spirit sent down, that was the secret of strength. It is only so, that we shall be living testimonies. It is only so, that we shall be vessels of such a Testimony as this. We are not speaking of the general kind of Christian work, we are speaking of the Lord having His fullness of Testimony in us. The fullness of the Lord's Testimony is the expression of the power of His resurrection in our very being, and for that there has to be a coming to the place where we know, in every realm of our being, that our strength is not in ourselves, but in Him Who is above. It is the One Who has gone up to the right hand of

God, Who is the Source of our strength, the Spring of our energies; because He lives, we live; by His power, and His power alone, we live and work. It is the Lord in glory Who is our energy. Elisha learned that in type. For all the future, his resource was the Spirit from above, the spirit of his ascended master. We have to learn that in ever deepening ways.

3. Having His Beginnings in Jordan

Finally, he had to come to the place where all his beginnings were at Jordan. The last step of that journey with Elijah, and the first step of his journey under the Spirit, were at Jordan. He went over with Elijah in death; he came back through Jordan in the power of resurrection. The sons of the prophets, fifty men, were watching, and as they saw him come back across the Jordan they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." His beginnings, shall we say his roots, were in Jordan. We know that there has to be a rooting in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, life having its very beginnings in the death and resurrection of Christ experimentally known. Into the life of such an instrument of God there has to come an experience which registers, once and for all, that this life - in its good and its bad, in all its energies, even for the work of God - has been brought to an end, so far as that one is concerned. Even in Christian activities, and religious interests, and passions for service, that life has been brought to an end, and nothing is possible except in the power of His resurrection. It is one thing to say that, and to hold that as a teaching; it is quite another thing to know that, and to have that registered in your being every time you seek to move in relation to the Lord; to know that every day of your life, so far as the Lord's interests are concerned, you draw all from Him, that everything is in the power of His resurrection, there is nothing else. To have that settled, registered, established once and for all, demands a deep Jordan experience. That is a deep death, a deep sinking into Jordan, but that makes possible a wonderful Testimony to His risen life. That is the opening of the door to the vast, the evergrowing knowledge of Him in resurrection life.

Calvary closes the door on man by nature, but Calvary opens the door to the man who means that all is to be out from God, and not from himself. Elisha came to the place where all his beginnings were in Jordan; every bit of His future was born in Jordan. You and I have to learn to be vessels of this Testimony; those who know Him in resurrection life.

That is preparation. If all who have gone out in the Lord's service had gone out on that basis, a very different story would have been told. We cannot hold ourselves responsible for all who have not, but what we can do is to recognize this to be the truth, and, so far as we are concerned, ask the Lord to make it true in our case. It is a deep death! This is an end, but also a beginning. What is before us is Testimony in what we are - not first by what we say - as to Him in resurrection life. If that is what is before us, that can only be on the ground that we ourselves have ceased in every realm of knowledge and of life which is not that; and that is the meaning of our union with Him in His Cross. This is preparation. This is equipment. This is where the Lord begins with His vessels for the fullness of His Testimony.

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