

Discipleship

*As Typified in
the Story of . . .
Elijah and Elisha.*

BY
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DISCIPLESHIP,

— As typified in the story of —

ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

IT was a great day for Elisha when he came into personal relations with Elijah. The story, as recorded in 1 Kings xix. 19-21, shows it to have been just an ordinary day upon which the call came that was to transform his life. One supremely vital fact stands out clearly in the inspired narrative, namely, Elisha's whole-hearted response to God's claims upon his life then made by the significant action of the man of God. Never again could life be the same to him, for the call of God had reached him; and "he arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him." Henceforth he was to be definitely and decidedly associated with the true man of God, and the testimony to God bound up with Elijah.

This is surely typical of what has happened in the history of every true believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. Who that has known it, can forget the day when the claims of God, expressed by the action of the true Man of God, were recognised, and the heart won to Himself? The actual date may be unknown, the real fact, however, is undeniable.

The Man of God, who in wondrous grace had come where we were by giving Himself a ransom for us, drew us by His grace, and our souls truly feasted as, like Elisha, we arose to go after Him in simple faith and obedience.

GILGAL.

Elisha is next found in company with his new master at Gilgal (2 Kings ii.). Here he is shown as about to go forward in newness of life and full purpose of heart through a series of experiences truly typical of a Christian believer's pathway in this world.

Gilgal was a spot fraught with solemn and significant memories to a godly Israelite; and as a type, serves to remind the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ of what must of necessity be the true starting point of a walk of faithful testimony to God, and of realised fellowship with Christ.

Gilgal was the place where in the early days of their national life, Jehovah rolled away the reproach of Egypt from His redeemed people. Egypt, with its bitter memory of hardship, idolatry and slavery, was the house of bondage out of which, by the sprinkled blood of the Paschal lamb, and by the might of God's outstretched arm, they had been for ever delivered. At Gilgal, therefore, by the distinctive rite of circumcision—sign and seal of the covenant of grace made to Abraham—the people re-affirmed their separation to God and death to the old life.

It also became the starting-place from whence Joshua led the redeemed people from victory to victory against the entrenched foes in the Holy Land. To the Christian believer, baptism represents what Gilgal stood for in the history of the Israelites. In baptism, the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ confesses deliverance from the tyranny of Satan and the thralldom of sin through the death and resurrection of his Lord and Saviour. For the true believer is, in Christ, delivered from all condemnation, freed from the law of sin and death, and perfected for ever by the one Offering—the body of Jesus Christ (Heb. x.).

Thus being baptised unto Christ's death, the believer owns that he has died with Christ out of the old life; that Christ died *for* him, and he died *in* Him to the world with its hostility to Jesus our Lord; to the flesh with its seductiveness; and to the devil with all the power he has usurped over man through sin. It is a present, personal and permanent deliverance, to the praise and glory of the Lord Jesus, in which that believer rejoices, who reads aright the meaning of Christian baptism. Buried with Christ in baptism unto death he thus confesses the real lordship of Jesus. Christ, who died for our sins according to the scriptures *and was buried*, rose again on the third day as Victor over death and the grave, and we exultantly hail Him as Lord of our life and the God of our salvation. We rise again from the typical grave of our baptism to walk with Him in newness of life; for as surely as we died with Him we also live together with Him. This we confess, as we steadily set our minds on the things that are above, where Christ our Risen Lord now is.

Thus the call of God which comes to us in conversion is

but the commencement of our new life ; and baptism becomes the real starting-point of the Christian course here on earth.

As Elisha discovered at Gilgal, so the believer also finds that there are many steps forward to be taken if the companionship of the Master is really desired ; and the affections and real purpose of heart will be tested again and again.

“ Tarry here, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel,” says Elijah ; and the believer to-day finds the love and loyalty of his heart tried from those he loves very dearly. “ Have you not gone far enough ? ” they enquire. “ You have professed conversion, and been baptised—why go further ? ” “ No,” says Elisha, and “ no ” emphatically replies the loving, loyal heart of Christ’s true disciple. “ As the Lord liveth, I will not leave thee.” As one has said :—

“ The Master is so fair,
His smile so sweet to banished men,
That they who catch it unaware
Can never rest on earth again.”

There is a real purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord when He is the supreme attraction, and valued solely for His own matchless worthiness.

In our chapter we now find that Elijah and Elisha proceed together to Bethel.

BETHEL.

Bethel was a place of hallowed and interesting associations. Here it was Jacob had seen the ladder reaching from earth to heaven ; here also the Voice of God in unconditional grace had reached the wanderer’s heart.

But in the days of Elijah, Bethel, in spite of its suggestive and typical name—the house of God—had, alas ! become a place of transgression and confusion. The very religious surroundings had become abominable because of established idolatry.

But to Bethel Elijah and Elisha came, just as in the walk of faith and testimony the believer in Christ comes after baptism, to that which bears the outward name of the house of God now on earth.

To the vast Christian profession—commonly called Christendom—every baptised person is by his baptism intro-

duced; and Christendom itself—like Bethel in Elijah's day—is a city of confusion and transgression. Yet in the midst of it there is to be found the church of the living God, the house of God upon earth. Therein God dwells by His Spirit; and therein every believer should know how he ought to behave himself. The Apostle in his first letter to Timothy specially emphasises the need of this (1 Tim. iii. 15).

Into God's house, believers in the Lord Jesus are brought solely, by that one baptism of the Holy Spirit whereby every member of Christ is baptised into one body (1 Cor. xii. 13); but into the public profession of Christ's Name on earth by their baptism in water in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This modern Bethel—Christendom—which of necessity contains the true House of God on earth, had by transgressions of God's word, and corruptions of God's word, become a place of great spiritual confusion and grave dishonour to Christ's Name (2 Tim. ii., iii.). Hence the Holy Spirit through the apostle in 2 Tim. ii. 19-21 exhorts "every one who names the Name of the Lord to depart from iniquity"; not surely to leave Christendom, for this would be personal apostasy, but to separate oneself from the vessels to dishonour therein, and to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, *with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*" (2 Tim. ii. 21, 22). The company of God's saints is our society on earth, and all the privileges and responsibilities at once attach themselves to us. This solemn but happy position is a great honour, and this honour have *all* His saints.

Thus walking in the company of the Master, the believer desires and discovers the blessedness of fellowship with the other members of the body of Christ.

Again, however, the testing voice is heard, "Tarry here; you may surely settle down among the blessed associations of the house of God, and find therein both congenial society and pleasant occupation for heart and life."

"As the Lord liveth I will not leave thee" is Elisha's reply at Bethel, for the way of the testimony to God by Elijah leads on to Jericho, and thither they go in company.

To the same suggestion the loyal and loving heart of the Christian believer replies in effect, that while Christians are

good, yet Christ is all; and learning that the way of faithful testimony is not in settling down in spiritual ease and sloth, but leads onward through the world where Christ alone suffices as an object for the heart.

Forth from the corruptions and confusions of Bethel unto Him, who suffered outside the gate, bearing His reproach goes the truly loyal servant, finding true discipleship in following Christ's steps.

JERICOH.

This city is a very obvious type of the present world. In spite of its pleasant situation and many attractions, it was a city cursed with bad water and barrenness of land (2 Kings ii. 19).

The world of business life is suggested by its fords and busy customs offices; the world of pleasure by its graceful palm trees and generally pleasant situation; the world of conventional and established religion by its school of the prophets; but nothing can disguise the real barrenness of the place, nor the most unsatisfactory state of the water supply. Yet even to Jericho the servant may safely go in close company with his master; as the Christian believer to-day, although not of the world and chosen out of the world, is sent back into the world to bear witness of truth with the assurance of his Master, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end."

There is testimony still to be rendered to God's long-suffering patience in grace; there is testimony to righteousness to be borne in a world given over to unrighteousness; there are souls to be won for the honour and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; in short, the word of the Master still presses in binding obligation upon all His disciples, "Occupy till I come."

But voices make themselves audible to the ear of the believer as he passes through the Vanity Fair of this Jericho-world.

"Tarry here," cries the testing voice; but alas! many a true believer has followed in the steps of Demas, who left the company of the apostle, "having loved this present world." The test which should have been a trial of faith,

has, through hearkening to his own evil heart, become a temptation of the devil.

“Acquire wealth, fame, influence; it may be used by you to uplift the world, bless humanity, further the very cause of Christ.”

It is significant that our Lord bade His disciples, “*Take heed, and beware of covetousness*” (Luke xii. 15), and that His apostle writes by the Holy Spirit, “The love of money is the root of all evil: *which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows* (1 Tim. vi. 10).

To the subtle suggestions of Jericho as a type of the world, the only safe and satisfactory reply is, as in Elisha’s case, “As the Lord liveth, I will not leave thee.”

“And they two went on.”

JORDAN.

They arrive now at Jordan, type of the death of Christ as admitting the believer into the heavenly places. The parted waters tell of the passage made by the mantle of the man of God, and now the secret of a successful and victorious spiritual life is told. “Ask what I shall do for thee”—so speaks the master to the servant, disclosing the fact that prayer is the key to unlock the blessing.

Elisha exhibits both intelligence and humility by his request, as he asks for a double portion of his master’s spirit.

It is the portion of a first-born; and in like manner the Christian believer learns that not only is the relationship of children with the Father the result of faith in Christ Jesus, but that the dignity of sonship before God is ours through the One who is the First-born among many brethren. In Him we stand as sons of God, led by the Spirit of God.

The humility of Elisha’s request is seen, too, in his conscious need of a double portion of Elijah’s spirit to enable him to prove a worthy successor in testimony to Jehovah.

One indispensable condition is stated by Elijah, “If thou see me when I am taken.”

How closely now would Elisha observe his master’s movements!—how carefully guard against losing sight of him!

The moments speed as the two converse together, and then

the whirlwind catches away Elijah, and Elisha sees him no more. To the servant is granted, however, a sight of the chariot and horses of fire, as though to assure his heart of the abiding presence and power of God still with him for all the service and testimony to which he is called.

Elijah the master is taken up, but the mantle of the ascended man falls upon Elisha, who forthwith, in the energy of faith, acts in the name of the Lord God of Elijah.

What rich lessons for the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the ascended Man of God, are to be learned from this part of the narrative!

From that first moment when the mantle of his authority was thrown over Elisha, and responded to by him, until the last hour when he gazed upwards on his ascending master, one deep purpose of heart is seen—"I will not leave thee."

Repeated trials of faith; voices of others telling him what was no news to him; nature that would bid him tarry—all only served to throw into greater relief the love and loyalty of a devoted heart that found everything in his master Elijah. We, too, as believers in Christ, know the charm of that Blessed One who called us in grace to His allegiance when we were occupied entirely with other things. In His company we learned something of the meaning of Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho and Jordan as we were called to testify to His death as delivering from condemnation and bondage to Satan and sin; as we were led into the blessed fellowship of His own people, and learned something, too, of the house of God on earth; as we were brought to see that, although in the world, we were yet not of it; as we understood the entrance into the holy land of conflict and victory through His death.

The soul-searching enquiry, too, came to us by the Spirit, not only who was our object, but what was our deep, secret desire. "Ask *what* I shall do for thee."

Then the ever-growing yearning for *His* Spirit, *His* mind, *His* secret of life, coupled with the clear conviction that only by His Spirit could we ever *be* or *do*, led us to realise that all our walk, worship and work depended upon looking off unto Jesus, our ascended Master, from whom all grace to help comes down.

Conversion, confession in baptism, communion of saints, conquest over the powers of evil, all alike depend for reality upon the ascended Lord from whom the Spirit came; and it is our wisdom, in love and loyalty to His Person, to walk with Him simply, sincerely, and humbly, so that the power of Christ may be upon us, and others may note—as in Elisha's case—that the Spirit of his Master doth rest upon him.

Shortly after the foregoing experiences of Elisha we find him referred to in a significant fashion. "Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah;" and again King Jehoshaphat bears witness, "The word of the Lord is with him [Elisha]."

His willing lowly service to his master is recalled as descriptive of himself, and the further fact of being God's mouth-piece is recognised by such as are in difficulty and need guidance as to their course. This surely is testimony of a practical kind borne, all unknown by himself, to a man who had learned the true secret of loyal, loving, purposeful discipleship.

W.G.T.

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