

Chapel Flock



# ~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

"come just as you are"

Refresh, Restore, Rebuild = Healing

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Vol. 40 Issue 767

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## Worship Music

[Healer-Hillsong](#)

[I Surrender-Hillsong](#)

[Rise-Hillsong](#)

## Prayer

Lord, forgive me for allowing myself to get so upset in the past that I have acted unkindly toward my mate and made ugly remarks in moments of rage. I'm wrong for permitting my flesh to control me in such an ungodly way. Even though my spouse has been wrong as well, he (or she) couldn't have been any uglier or more hurtful than I was when I spoke those harsh, retaliatory words. Please help me to become more like Jesus—to release blessing after blessing as I speak only words of kindness to my spouse. I know that my words have the power of life and death, so help me turn around every difficult situation as I start speaking blessings into my marital relationship, in Jesus' name. Amen....

Sparkling Gems from the Greek.

## Video's / New Information/ Prayer Requests

Matthew 24:36 (AMP)

36 But of that [exact] day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

## "Daily Devotional"

Charles Stanley

## Radio Stations

[KWVE ...Calvary Chapel](#)

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[Bob Coy/Teachings](#)

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[Virtue for Women-  
Cathe Laurie](#)

Chapel Flock.....text a prayer..... request telephone number.....

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If you have a prayer request...please e-mail it to us so we can pray for you...or a person.....

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1 MOREOVER, THE Lord said to Job, 2 Shall he who would find fault with the Almighty contend with Him? He who disputes with God, let him answer it. 3 Then Job replied to the Lord: 4 Behold, I am of small account and vile! What shall I answer You? I lay my hand upon my mouth. 5 I have spoken once, but I will not reply again—indeed, twice [have I answered], but I will proceed no further. 6 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, saying, 7 Gird up your loins now like a man; I will demand of you, and you answer Me. 8 Will you also annul (set aside and render void) My judgment? Will you condemn Me [your God], that you may [appear] righteous and justified? 9 Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? 10 [Since you question the manner of the Almighty's rule] deck yourself now with the excellency and dignity [of the Supreme Ruler, and yourself undertake the government of the world if you are so wise], and array yourself with honor and majesty. 11 Pour forth the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him; 12 Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low, and tread down the wicked where they stand [if you are so able, Job]. 13 [Bury and] hide them all in the dust together; [and] shut them up [in the prison house of death]. 14 [If you can do all this, Job, proving yourself of divine might] then will I [God] praise you also [and acknowledge that] your own right hand can save you. 15 Behold now the behemoth (the hippopotamus), which I created as I did you; he eats grass like an ox. 16 See now, his strength is in his loins, and his power is in the sinews of his belly. 17 He moves his tail like a cedar tree; the tendons of his thighs are twisted together [like a rope]. 18 His bones are like tubes of bronze; his limbs [or ribs] are like bars of iron. 19 [The hippopotamus] is the first [in magnitude and power] of the works of God [in animal life]; [only] He Who made him provides him with his [swordlike tusks, or only God Who made him can bring near His sword to master him]. 20 Surely the mountains bring him food, where all the wild animals play. 21 He lies under the lotus trees, in the covert of the reeds in the marsh. 22 The lotus trees cover him with their shade; the willows of the brook compass him about. 23 Behold, if a river is violent and overflows, he does not tremble; he is confident, though the Jordan [River] swells and rushes against his mouth. 24 Can any take him when he is on the watch, or pierce through his nose with a snare?

#### Chapter 40

Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said, Shall he that contends with the Almighty instruct him? (Job 40:1-2)

"Job, are you trying to instruct me?" Isn't that ridiculous? Can you think of anybody trying to instruct God? How foolish! But you're looking at one. How many times I've tried to instruct God. "Now, God, this is the way I see it, and I think You ought to work it out this way." "Lord, why aren't you doing it this way?" I have been so foolish thinking that I can instruct God, and I get upset when He doesn't follow my instructions. That's the dumb part. I seek to instruct God and then get upset when He doesn't follow them. Unfortunately, there are those who are espousing some kind of a doctrine that really deals with instructing God and telling God exactly what to do and when to do it and how to do it and He's got to do it if you instruct Him in the right ways. And they take the power out of God's hands and put it in man's hands of man's destiny. "You control your destiny; it is your confession that controls the destiny." Making the positive confession, that's the control of your destiny. And they take the control of a man's destiny out of God's hands and put it into man's hands, and they are constantly instructing God. That's dangerous.

God said to Job,

Shall he who contends with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproves God, let him answer it. Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? (Job 40:2-4) God said, "Hey, look, you've been trying to instruct Me, contending with Me, trying to instruct Me. All right, answer Me, Job." Job said, "What can I say? What can I answer, Lord? I am vile. Trying to instruct You, contending with You. God, I am vile."

Once I have spoken; but I'm not going to answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further. Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up your loins like a man: I'm going to demand of thee, declare unto Me. Will you also disannul my judgment? will you condemn me, that you may be righteous? (Job 40:5-8)

Think about this for a moment, because I think quite often we are guilty of this ourselves. Condemning God in seeking to make ourselves righteous. "I don't know how God could do that to me. After all, when I'm so good and I'm so pure and I'm so righteous. Why would God allow that to happen to me? God isn't fair to me. God isn't just. He's allowed it to happen to me." Dangerous.

Have you an arm like God? or can you thunder with a voice like him? Cast abroad the rage of your wrath: and behold everyone that is proud, abase him (Job 40:9, 11)

Now God says, "Here, do this now. Go ahead and,"

Deck yourself with the majesty and excellency; array yourself with glory and beauty. And cast abroad the rage of the angry person: behold everyone that is proud in the earth, abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; bind their faces in secret. And then I also will confess to you that your own right hand can save you (Job 40:10-14).

God said, "If you can do these things, then I'll confess to you your right hand can save you. If you can abase every proud person and bring them low and all." Now God goes and He gives the illustration of the elephant and talks of the elephant, again one of His creatures and of the description of the elephant, its size and its diet and so forth.

(Through The Bible c 2000 Series; Chuck Smith; Bible commentaries,1979-1986)

The Life and Times of Elijah; C. H. Mackintosh – Index

### Introduction

The exercise of prophetic ministry in Israel, of old, was always a proof of the nation's decline. So long as the great national institutions were maintained in their vigour, and the machinery of the Mosaic economy carried out according to its original design, there was no need of anything extraneous, and therefore the voice of a prophet was not heard; but when failure had set in — when those laws and institutions which had been enacted, and set on foot by God Himself, ceased to be carried out in their pristine spirit and power, then there was a demand for something additional, and that something was supplied by the energy of the Spirit in the prophets.

There were no materials in the whole range of Levitical rites and ceremonies for the formation or maintenance of such a ministry as that of Elijah the Tishbite; there was too much of the carnal element in them for that. The message of a prophet could only be delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore, so long as the Levitical institutions fulfilled their end, the Spirit had no need to put forth any fresh energy.

There was no need of such a minister as Elijah in the days of Solomon's glory and greatness; all was in order then — the whole machinery was in a sound condition — every wheel and every screw worked effectually in its own place — the king on the throne wielded the sceptre for the maintenance of Israel's civil interest — the priest in the temple discharged in due order his religious functions — the Levites and the singers were all at their respective posts: in a word, all moved on in such a measure of order as to render the voice of a prophet unnecessary.

However, the scene soon changed; the mighty tide of evil soon set in, and swept away the very foundations of Israel's civil and religious system: ungodly men, in process of time, ascended the throne of David, and sacrificed the interests of the people of God at the shrine of their own vile lusts; and to such a height did wickedness rise, that at last the wicked Ahab, with his consort Jezebel, occupied that throne from which Solomon had administered the judgement of God.

Jehovah could no longer forbear; He could not allow the tide of evil to rise any higher, and He therefore sent forth from His quiver a polished shaft to pierce the conscience of Israel, if haply He might bring them back to their place of happy allegiance to Himself. This shaft was none other than Elijah the Tishbite — the bold and uncompromising witness for God who stood in the breach at a moment when every one seemed to have fled from the field of conflict, unable to stem the overwhelming torrent.

But, before we proceed to the consideration of the life and ministry of this remarkable man, it may be well just to make one observation upon the two-fold character of prophetic ministry. We shall find, in considering the ministry of the prophets, that, not only had each prophet a distinct ministry committed to him, but that, also, in one and the same prophet, there was a double purpose carried out: the Lord dealt with the conscience about present evil, while He pointed the eye of the faithful one to the future glory. The prophet, by the Holy Ghost, brought the light and truth of God to bear upon the heart and conscience — he laid open fully and faithfully the hidden chambers of evil within — he spoke plainly of the people's sad declension and departure from God, and removed the foundations of that false religious system which they were erecting around them.

But the prophet did not stop here; it would have been sad indeed had he been confined to the humiliating story of Israel's failure, and the departure of their ancient glory; he was able, through grace, to add to the solemn announcement, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself," the consolatory assurance, "but in Me is thy help"; and herein we have developed to us the two elements which composed the ministry of the prophets, namely, Israel's total failure, and God's triumphant grace — the departure of the glory as connected with, and based upon, the obedience of Israel, and its final return and establishment as connected with, and based upon, the obedience and death of the Son of God.

Truly, we may say, this was ministry of a very elevated and holy character; it was a glorious commission to be told to stand amid the fragments of a crushed and ruined system, and there to point to the time — the happy time — when God would display Himself in the immortal results of His own redeeming grace, to the joy of His ransomed ones in Heaven and on earth.

### Part 1

#### THE PROPHET'S FIRST MESSAGE

The reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, was a dark and dreary time for the house of Israel; iniquity had risen to a fearful height; the sins of Jeroboam were little when compared with the black catalogue of Ahab's transgressions; the wicked Jezebel, the daughter of the uncircumcised king of the Zidonians, was chosen to be the partner of his heart and his throne, and this circumstance alone was enough to secure the oppression of Israel, and the entire subversion of their ancient worship. In a word, the Spirit sums up the whole matter with these words, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16: 33). This was saying enough for him. The whole line of kings from Jeroboam down, had done evil in the sight of the Lord; but to do more than all of them, marked a character of no ordinary degree of guilt. Yet such was Ahab — such was the man that occupied the throne of God's ancient people, when Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his course of prophetic testimony.

There is something particularly sorrowful to the spirit in contemplating a scene like that which the reign of Ahab presents. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of testimony hushed; the firmament in which many a brilliant luminary had shone from time to time, had become overcast with dark clouds; death seemed to spread itself over the whole scene, and the devil to carry

every thing with a high hand, when, at length, God in His mercy to His poor oppressed and misguided people, raised up a bright and powerful witness for Himself in the person of our prophet. But then it is just at such a time that a real witness for God is likely to produce the most powerful effect, and exert the most extensive influence. It is after a long drought that a shower is likely to be felt in all its refreshing virtue. The state of things at this time in Israel called for some mighty man of valour to come forth and act in divine energy against the tide of evil.

However, it is instructive to observe that Elijah is presented to us, in common with all his fellow-servants, in circumstances of secret training and exercise ere he appears in public. This is a feature in the history of all the servants of God, not excepting Him who was emphatically the Servant; all have been trained in secret with God previous to their acting in public with man; and, moreover, those who have entered most deeply into the meaning and value of the secret training will be found the most effective and permanent in their public service and testimony. That man has much cause to tremble for his destiny who has arrived at a position in public which exceeds the measure of his secret exercise of soul before God; he will assuredly come short.

If the superstructure exceed the measure of the foundation below, the building will totter or fall. If a tree shoot forth its branches into the air to a degree exceeding the depth of its roots, it will be unequal to the violence of the storm, and will come to the ground: so is it with the man who enters a place of public service; he must be alone with God; his spirit must be exercised in private; he must pass through the deep waters in his own experience, otherwise he will be but a theorist, and not a witness; his ear must be opened to hear, ere his tongue can be fitted to speak as the learned.

What has become of all those apparently brilliant lights which have suddenly flashed across the path of the Church of God from time to time, and as suddenly disappeared behind the cloud? Whence came they, and whither have they gone, and why have they been so evanescent? They were but sparks of human kindling; there was no depth, no power of endurance, no reality in them; hence they shone for a time, and speedily vanished away, producing no result save to increase the darkness around, or at least the sad consciousness thereof.

Every true minister of God should be able, in measure, to say with the apostle, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1: 3-4).

1 Kings 17, gives us Elijah's first appearance in public; but the Spirit, in James, has graciously furnished us with the account of a yet earlier stage in his history, and one full of instruction to us, be our sphere of service what it may. The sacred historian introduces our prophet in a way which might seem abrupt. He presents him to us as at once boldly entering upon his sphere of labour, with this grand and solemn announcement, "Thus saith the Lord."

But he does not tell us, in this place, anything of the prophet's previous exercise; he speaks not of how it was he came to learn how the Lord would have him to speak: of all this, though most important for us to know, the Spirit in the historian says nothing; He simply introduces him to our notice in the holy exercise of a power which he had obtained in secret with God: He shows us Elijah acting in public, and nothing more. But the apostle lets us into the secret of Elijah's prayer to God, before ever he came out in active service before man. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5: 17).

Now, if the Holy Ghost had not informed us about this important fact, by the pen of James, we should have lacked a very powerful incentive to prayer; but Scripture is perfect — divinely perfect, lacking nothing that it ought to have, and having nothing that it ought to lack; hence it is that James tells us of Elijah's secret moments of prayer and wrestling, and shows him to us in the retirement of the mountains of Gilead, where he had, no doubt, mourned over the lamentable state of things in Israel, and also fortified his spirit for the part he was about to act.

This circumstance in the life of our prophet teaches us a truly profitable lesson. We live in a time of more than usual barrenness and spiritual dearth. The state of the Church may well remind us of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. We have not merely to cope with evils which have characterised by-gone ages, but also with the matured corruption of a time wherein the varied evils of the Gentile world have become connected with, and covered by, the cloak of the Christian profession.

And when we turn to the state of those whose knowledge of truth and high profession might naturally encourage the expectation of more healthy and vigorous Christian action, we find alas! in many that the knowledge is but cold and uninfluential theory, and the profession but superficial, having no power over the feelings and affections of the inward man. Amongst persons of this class it will also be found that the truth of God possesses little or no interest, or attractive power; they know so much in the intellect that nothing can be presented to them with which they are not already acquainted: hence the lifelessness with which they harken to every statement of truth.

In such a condition of things, what is the resource of the faithful one? To what should he betake himself? Prayer; patient, persevering prayer; secret communion with God; deep and real exercise of soul in His presence, where alone we can arrive at a true estimate of ourselves, and things around us: and not only so, but also obtain spiritual power to act for God amongst our brethren, or toward the world without.

"Elias was a man of like passions with us;" and he found himself in the midst of dark apostasy, and wide-spread alienation of heart from God. He beheld the faithful failing from amongst the children of men; he saw the tide of evil rising around him, and the light of truth

fast fading away: the altar of Baal had displaced the altar of Jehovah, and the cries of the priests of Baal had drowned the sacred songs of the Levites; in a word, the whole thing was one vast mass of ruin before his view. He felt it; he wept over it; he did more — “he prayed earnestly.”

Here was the resource — the sure unfailing resource of the grieved prophet; he retreated into the presence of God; he poured out his spirit there, and wept over the ruin and sorrow of his beloved people; he was really engaged about the sad condition of things around him, and therefore prayed about it — prayed as he ought, not coldly, formally, or occasionally, but “earnestly,” and perseveringly.

This is a blessed example for us. Never was there a time when fervent prayer was so much needed in the Church of God as at this moment. The devil seems to be exerting all his malignant power to crush the spirits and hinder the activities of the people of God; with some, he makes use of their public engagements; with others, their domestic trials; and with others, personal sorrow and conflict; in a word, “There are many adversaries,” and nothing but the mighty power of God can enable us to cope with them and come off victorious.

But Elijah was not merely called to pass unscathed, as an individual, through the evil; he was called to exert an influence upon others: he was called to act for God in a degenerate age; he had to make an effort to bring his nation back to the God of their fathers; how much more, therefore, did he need to seek the Lord in private; to gather up spiritual strength in the presence of God, whereby alone he could not only escape himself, but be made an instrument of blessing to others also. Elijah felt all this, and therefore “he prayed earnestly that it might not rain.”

Thus it was he brought God into the scene, nor did he fail of his object. “It rained not.” God will never refuse to act when faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and we know it was simply upon this ground that the prophet addressed Him. It could afford him no pleasure to see the land turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, or his brethren wasted by famine and all its attendant horrors. No; it was simply to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers — to bring the nation back to its early faith — to eradicate those principles of error which had taken fast hold of the minds of the people: for such ends as these did our prophet pray earnestly that it might not rain, and God darkened and heard, because the prayer was the offspring of His Spirit in the soul of His dear servant.

Truly we may say, it is good to wait upon God: it not only leads to happy results as seen in God’s answer to it, but there is also much sweetness and comfort in the exercise itself. How truly happy it is for the tried and tempted believer to find himself along with God! how blessed to allow his spirit to flow out, and his affections to ascend to Him who alone is able to lift him above the depressing power of present things into the calmness and light of His own most blessed presence! May we all be found, then, waiting more upon God — making the very difficulties of our day an occasion for drawing near to the mercy-seat, and then we shall not only exert a salutary influence in our respective spheres, but our own heart will be comforted and encouraged by private waiting upon our Father, for the promise has never yet failed, “They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength!” Precious promise! May we make full proof of it!

Thus, Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his path of service; he came forth armed from the sanctuary of God with divine power to deal with, and act upon, his fellow-men. There is much power in the words, “as the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand”; they bring before us in a very special way the basis on which the soul of this eminent servant of God was resting, as also the principle which sustained him in his course of service. He stood before “the Lord God of Israel,” and so standing, he could speak with a measure of power and authority.

But how very little did Ahab know of the secret exercises of Elijah’s soul, ere he had thus come forth to speak to his conscience! He knew not that Elijah had been on his knees in secret before he presented himself in public. He knew nothing of all this, but Elijah did, and hence he could boldly confront the very head of the evil; he could speak to king Ahab himself, and announce to him the judgements of an offended God. In this, our prophet may be viewed as a fine model for all who are called upon to speak in the name of the Lord.

All who are so called should feel themselves, in virtue of their divine commission, entirely lifted above the influence of human opinion. How often does it happen that men who can speak with a measure of power and liberty in the presence of some, are before others cramped, and, it may be, altogether hindered! This we know would not be the case did they but realize with distinctness, not only that they had received their commission from on high, but also that they executed it in the presence of the living God. The messenger of the Lord should never be affected by those to whom he delivers his message; he should be above them, while at the same time he takes the humble place of a servant. His language should be, “But with me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgement” (anthropines hemeras).

This was pre-eminently the case with our blessed Master. How little was He affected by the thoughts or judgements of those to whom He spoke! They might thwart, oppose, and reject, but that never led Him for a moment to lose sight of the fact that He was sent of God. He carried with Him, throughout His entire course, the holy, soul-sustaining assurance expressed in the synagogue of Nazareth, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor,” etc. (Luke 4: 18). Here was the basis of His ministry as Son of man. It was “in the power of the Spirit,” and hence He ever felt Himself to be the minister of God, and as such raised quite above the influence of those with whom He had to do. “My doctrine is not Mine,” said He, “but His that sent Me.” He could truly say, “The Lord God of Israel, before whom I stand:” He was ever “the Lord’s messenger,” speaking “in the Lord’s message unto the people” (Hag. 1: 13).

And should not all who fill the place of servants or messengers of the Lord, seek to know more of this holy elevation of mind above men and circumstances? Should they not aim at being less under the power of human thoughts and feelings? What have we to do with the thoughts of men about us? Nothing. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether they will accept, or whether they will reject; whether we shall be highly esteemed for our work’s sake, or made of no reputation — still let it be our aim, our constant aim, to “approve ourselves as the ministers of God.”

But observe further, the power and authority with which our prophet speaks, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word." He felt such perfect assurance in the fact that he was standing in the Lord's presence, and speaking the Lord's words, yea, that he was thoroughly identified with Him, that he could say, "according to my word."

Such was the privilege of the Lord's messenger, when delivering the Lord's message. Such are the wondrous results of secret prayer. "Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." May it prove a powerful incentive to all those who desire to act for God in this day of weakness! We want to be more in the presence of God, in the real sense of our need; if we felt our need more, we should have more of the spirit of prayer. And it is the spirit of prayer we want — that spirit which puts God in His own proper place of giver, and us into our proper place of receivers.

But how often are we deceived by the mere form of prayer — with the formal utterance of words which have no reality in them! There are many who make a kind of god of prayer — many who let their very prayers get between their souls and the God of prayer. This is a great snare. We should always take care that our prayers are the natural outflow of the Spirit within us, and not of the mere superstitious performance of what we think ought to be done.

[I would offer a few words here on the subject of united prayer among Christians, an exercise which seems so sadly neglected by us at a time when it is so specially needed. It will be generally found that collective life and energy. service and testimony, will be in proportion to the measure of collective waiting upon God. Where there are not public prayer-meetings. there is sure to be a lack of service and testimony; the interests of the Church of God are not realized, and, as a consequence. the things of earth occupy a place of undue prominence in the minds of Christians. If we felt our collective weakness, there would be a collective utterance of that weakness, and, moreover, a renewal of our collective strength. Now I think it will be found that all important movements among the people of God have been the result of united heartfelt prayer. And surely we may say it is natural that it should be so. We are not to expect that God will pour forth His reviving grace on those who rest satisfied with their deadness and coldness. The word is, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." If we will not open our mouths, how can they be filled? If we are satisfied with what we have, how can we expect to get more? Let it be, therefore, the aim of the Christian reader to stir up his fellow-Christians around him to seek the Lord in united prayer, and, he may be assured of it, the happy results evils speedily be seen.]

## Part 2

### THE PROPHET IN RETIREMENT

Hardly had our prophet delivered his testimony when he was again called away from public observation into retirement and solitude. "And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan."

These words are full of deep instruction. Elijah had taken a very prominent place in the presence of Israel, and though his having done so was the result of previous retirement and exercise of soul in the presence of God, yet did the faithful One for whom he was acting see it needful to have him away again into privacy, that so he might not only occupy a high place in the presence of his brethren, but also a low place in the presence of God. All this is full of teaching for us. We must be kept low. Flesh must be crushed. Our time of training in secret, must far exceed our time of acting in public. Elijah stood, as it were, for a brief moment, in public testimony, and that too, after having been alone with God, and he must at once be led away into seclusion for three years and a half.

Oh! how little can man be trusted — how badly can we bear to be set in a place of honour! How soon we forget ourselves and God! We shall see presently, how much our honoured prophet needed to be thus kept in retirement. The Lord knew his temperament and tendencies, and dealt with him accordingly. It is truly humiliating to think how little we can be trusted in the way of public testimony for Christ; we are so full of self; we vainly imagine that we are something, and that God will do much by us hence it is that we need, like our prophet, to be told to "hide ourselves," to get away from public view, that we may learn, in the holy calmness of our Father's presence, our own proper nothingness.

And the spiritual mind can at once see the importance of all this. It would never do to be always before the eye of man; no creature could stand it: the Son of God Himself constantly sought the solitary place, apart from the din and bustle of the city, where He might enjoy a quiet retreat for prayer, and of secret communion with God. "Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives." "Rising up a great while before day, He departed into a solitary place and there prayed."

But it was not because He needed to hide Himself, for His entire path on earth was, blessed be His name, a hiding of self. The spirit of His ministry is brought out in these words, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." Would that all the Lord's servants knew more of this! We all want to hide self more — much more than we do.

The devil acts so on our poor silly hearts; our thoughts so revolve round ourselves; yea, we so often make our very service, and the truth of God, a pedestal on which to show forth our own glory. No marvel, therefore, that we are not much used: how could the Lord make use of agents who will not give Him the glory? How can the Lord use Israel, when Israel is ever prone to vaunt himself? Let us then pray to be made more truly humble, more self-abased, more willing to be looked upon as "a dead dog, or a flea," or "the off-scouring of all things," or nothing at all, for the name of our gracious Master.

In His lonely retreat by the brook Cherith, Elijah was called to sojourn many days; not, however, without a precious promise from the Lord God of Israel in reference to his needed provision, for he went accompanied by the gracious assurance, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." The Lord would take care of His dear servant while hidden from public view. and minister to his

, even though it should be by the instrumentality of ravens. What a strange provision! What a continual exercise of faith was there involved in being called to look out for the daily visits of birds that would naturally desire to devour the prophet's meal! But was it upon the ravens that Elijah lived? Surely not. His soul reposed in the precious words, "I have commanded." It was God, and not the ravens, for him. He had the God of Israel with him in his hiding place — he lived by faith. And how truly blessed for the spirit thus to cling, in unaffected simplicity, to the promise of God! How happy to be lifted above the power of circumstances, in the apprehension of God's presence and care! Elijah was hiding himself from man, while God was showing Himself to Elijah. This will ever be so. Let us only set self aside, and we may be assured that God will reveal Himself in power to our souls. If Elijah had persisted in occupying a prominent and a public place, he would have been left unprovided for. He must be hidden, for the streams of divine provision and refreshment only flowed for him in the place of retirement and self-abasement. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." If the prophet were anywhere else but "there" he would have gotten nothing at all from God. What teaching for us in all this! Why are our souls so lean and barren? Why do we so little drink of the streams of divinely provided refreshment? Because we are not hiding self sufficiently. We cannot expect that God will strengthen and refresh us for the purpose of earthly display. He will strengthen us for Himself. If we could but realize more that we are "not our own," we should enjoy more spiritual power. But there is also much meaning in the little word "there." Elijah should be "there" and nowhere else, in order to enjoy God's supplies; and just so is it with the believer now; he must know where God would have him to be, and there abide. We have no right to choose our place, for the Lord "orders the bounds of our habitation," and happy for us is it to know this, and submit to His wise and gracious ordering. It was at the brook Cherith, and there alone, that the ravens were commanded to convey bread and flesh to the prophet; he might wish to sojourn elsewhere, but, if he had done so he should have provided for himself: how much happier to allow God to provide for him! So Elijah felt, and therefore he went to Cherith, for the Lord had "commanded the ravens to feed him there." The divinely appointed provision is alone to be had in the divinely appointed place.

Thus was Elijah conveyed from solitude to solitude. He had come from the mountains of Gilead, with a message from the Lord God of Israel to Israel's king, and having delivered that message, he was again conducted, by the hand of God, into unbroken solitude, there to have his spirit exercised, and his strength renewed in the presence of God.

And who would be without those sweet and holy lessons learnt in secret? Who would lack the training of a Father's hand? Who would not long to be led away from beneath the eye of man, and above the influence of things earthly and natural, into the pure light of the Divine Presence, where self and all around are viewed and estimated according to the judgement of the sanctuary? In a word, who would not desire to be alone with God? — alone, not as a merely sentimental expression, but really, practically, and experimentally alone; alone like Moses at the mount of God; alone, like Aaron in the holiest of all; alone, like our prophet at the brook Cherith; alone, like John in the island of Patmos; and above all, alone, like Jesus on the mount.

And here, let us inquire what it is to be alone with God. It is to have self and the world set aside; to have the spirit impressed with thoughts of God and His perfections and excellencies; to allow all His goodness to pass before us; to see Him as the great Actor for us, and in us; to get above flesh and its reasonings, earth and its ways, Satan and his accusations; and, above all, to feel that we have been introduced into this holy solitude, simply and exclusively through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are some of the results of our being alone with God. But, in truth, it is a term which one can hardly explain to another, for each spiritually-minded saint will have his own feelings on the subject, and will best understand what it means in his own case. This, at least, we may well crave, to be truly found in the secret of our Father's presence; to be done with the weariness and wretchedness of endeavouring to maintain our character, and to know the joy, the liberty, the peace, and unaffected simplicity of the sanctuary, where God in all His varied attributes and perfections rises before our souls and fills us with bliss ineffable.

To find my place within the veil,

To know that God is mine

Are springs of joy that will not fail,

Unspeakable, divine.

But, though Elijah was thus happily alone by the brook Cherith, he was not exempt from the deep exercise of soul consequent upon a life of faith. The ravens, it is true, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, and Cherith flowed on in its tranquil and uninterrupted course, so that the prophet's bread was given him, and his water was sure, and thus, as far as he was personally concerned, he might forget that the rod of judgement was stretched out over the land. But faith must be put to the test. The man of faith cannot be allowed to settle on his lees; he must be emptied from vessel to vessel; the child of God must pass from form to form in the school of Christ, and having mastered, through grace, the difficulties of one, he must be called to grapple with those of another. It was, therefore, needful that the soul of the prophet should be tried in order that it might be seen whether he was depending upon Cherith, or upon the Lord God of Israel; hence, "it came to pass, after awhile, that the brook dried up." We are ever in danger, through the infirmity of our flesh, of having our faith propped up by circumstances, and when these are favourable, we think our faith is strong, and vice versa. But faith never looks at circumstances; it looks straight to God — it has to do exclusively with Him and His promises. Thus it was with Elijah; it mattered little to him whether Cherith continued to flow or not; he could say:

In vain the creature streams are dry,

I have a fountain still.

God was his fountain, his unfailing exhaustless fountain. The brook might yield to the influence of the prevailing drought, but no drought could affect God, and the prophet knew this; he knew that the Word of the Lord was as certain a portion, and as sure a basis in the drying up of Cherith, as it had been during the time of his sojourn upon its banks; and so it was, for "the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

Elijah's faith must still rest upon the same immutable basis. "I have commanded." How truly blessed is this! Circumstances change; human things fail; creature streams are dried up, but God and His Word are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Nor does the prophet seem to have been the least disturbed by this fresh order from on high. No; for, like Israel of old, he had learned to pitch and strike his tent according to the movement of Jehovah's cloud. The camp, of old, was called to watch attentively the wheels of that heavenly chariot which rolled onward toward the land of rest, and here and there halted in the wilderness to find them out a resting-place; and just so was it with Elijah; he would take up his solitary post by the banks of Cherith, or tread his weary way to Zarephath of Zidon in undeviating obedience to "the word of the Lord."

Israel of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own; Jehovah planned and arranged everything for them. He told them when and where they were to move and halt; at various intervals He signified His sovereign pleasure to them by the movement of the cloud above their heads. "Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed" (Num. 9: 22-23).

Such was the happy condition of the Lord's redeemed, while passing from Egypt to Canaan. They never could have their own way, as regards their movements. If an Israelite had refused to move when the cloud moved, or to halt when it halted, he would have been left to starve in the wilderness. The rock and the manna followed them while they followed Jehovah; in other words, food and refreshment were alone to be found in the path of simple obedience. Just so was it with Elijah; he was not permitted to have a will of his own; he could not fix the time of his sojourn at Cherith, nor the time for his removal to Zarephath; "the word of the Lord" settled all for him, and when he obeyed it he found sustenance.

What a lesson for the Christian in all this! The path of obedience is alone the path of happiness. If we were more successful in doing violence to self, our spiritual condition would be far more vigorous and healthy than it is. Nothing so ministers to health and vigour of soul as undeviating obedience; there is strength gained by the very effort to obey. This is true in the case of all, but specially so as regards those who stand in the capacity of ministers of the Lord. Such must walk in obedience if they would be used in ministry.

How could Elijah have said, as he afterwards did, upon mount Carmel, "If the Lord be God, follow Him," if his own private path had exhibited a wilful and rebellious spirit? Impossible. The path of a servant must be the path of obedience, otherwise he ceases to be a servant. The word servant is as inseparably linked with obedience, as is work with workman. "A servant," as another has observed, "must move when the bell rings."

Would that we were all more alive to the sound of our Master's bell, and more ready to run in the direction in which it summons us. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Here is our proper language. Whether the Word of the Lord summons us from our retirement into the midst of our brethren, or from thence into retirement again, may our language ever be, "Speak, Lord for Thy servant heareth." The Word of the Lord, and the attentive ear of a servant, are all we need to carry us safely and happily onward.

Now, this path of obedience is by no means an easy one; it involves the constant abandonment of self, and can only be pursued as the eye is steadily kept on God, and the conscience kept under the action of His truth. True, there is a rich reward in every act of obedience, yet flesh and blood must be set aside, and this is no easy work. Witness the path of our prophet. He was first called to take his place by the brook Cherith, to be fed by ravens! How could flesh and blood understand this?

Then again, when the brook failed, he is called away to a distant city of Zidon, there to be nourished by a destitute widow who seemed to be at the very point of dying of starvation! Here was the command: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."

And what confirmation did Elijah derive from appearances, upon his arrival at this place? None whatever; but everything to fill him with doubts and fears had he been looking at circumstances in the matter. "So he arose, and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

This was the scene that presented itself to the eye of the prophet when he had arrived at his divinely appointed destination. Truly a gloomy and depressing one to flesh and blood. But Elijah conferred not with flesh and blood; his spirit was sustained by the immutable Word of Jehovah; his confidence was based upon the faithfulness of God, and he needed no aid from things around him. The horizon might look dark and heavy to mortal vision, but the eye of faith could pierce the clouds, and see beyond them all "the firm foundation which is laid for faith in Jehovah's excellent word."

How precious, then, is the Word of God! Well might the psalmist say, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever." Precious heritage! Pure, incorruptible, immortal truth! How should we bless our God for having made it our inalienable portion — a portion which, when all sublunary things shall have vanished from view, when the world shall have passed away and the lust thereof, when all flesh shall have been consumed as withered grass, shall prove to the faithful a real, an eternal, an enduring substance. "Thanks

be to God for His unspeakable gift.”

But what were the circumstances which met the prophet's eye upon his approach to Zarephath? A widow and her son starving, two sticks, and a handful of meal! And yet the word was, “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” How trying, how deeply mysterious, was all this!

Elijah, however, staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. He knew that it was the Most High and Almighty God, the possessor of Heaven and earth, that was to meet his necessities; hence, though there had been neither oil nor meal, it would have made no matter to him, for he looked beyond circumstances to the God of circumstances. He saw not the widow, but God. He looked not at the handful of meal, but at the divine command; therefore his spirit was perfectly calm and unruffled in the midst of circumstances which would have crushed the spirit of one walking by sight, and he was able, without a shadow of doubt, to say “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”

Here we have the reply of faith to the language of unbelief. “Thus saith the Lord” settles everything. The moment the spirit apprehends God's promise, there is an end to the reasonings of unbelief. Unbelief puts circumstances between the soul and God; faith puts God between the soul and circumstances. This is a very important difference. May we walk in the power and energy of faith, to the praise of Him whom faith ever honours!

But there is another point in this lovely scene to be particularly noticed: it is the way in which death ever hovers around the spirit of one not walking by faith. “That we may eat it and die” is the language of the widow. Death and unbelief are inseparably linked together. The spirit can only be conducted along the path of life by the energy of faith: hence if faith be not in energy, there is no life, no power, no elevation.

Thus was it with this poor widow: her hope of life was based upon the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil: beyond these she saw no springs of life, no hope of continuance. Her soul knew not as yet the real blessedness of communion with the living God to whom alone belong the issues from death. She was not yet able against hope to believe in hope. Alas, what a poor, frail, tottering thing is that hope which rests only on a cruse of oil and a barrel of meal! How scanty must be those expectations which only rest on the creature!

And are we not all but too prone to lean upon something quite as mean and paltry in God's view as a handful of meal? Truly we are; and it must be so where God is not apprehended by the soul. To faith it is either God or nothing. A handful of meal will afford, in the hand of God and to the view of faith, as efficient materials as the cattle upon a thousand hills. “We have here but five loaves and two small fishes; but what are these amongst so many?” This is the language of the human heart; but faith never says what are these amongst so many? but what is God among so many? Unbelief says we are not able; faith says, but God is well able.

And would it not be well, ere we turn from this interesting point in our subject, to apply these principles to the poor, conscience-smitten sinner? How often is such an one found clinging to some vain resource for the pardon of his sins, rather than to the accomplished work of Christ upon the cross, which has forever satisfied the claims of divine justice, and ought therefore, surely, to satisfy the cravings of his guilty conscience.

“I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.” Such is the language of one who had not as yet learned to look beyond all human aid, straight to Jesus. “I have no man,” says the poor, guilty, unbelieving sinner: but I have Jesus, says the believer; and he may add, Thus saith the Lord, The cleansing efficacy of the blood shall not fail, nor its preciousness diminish, until the time that the Lord shall have safely housed His ransomed forever in His own heavenly mansions.

Hence, if these pages should meet the eye of any poor, halting, trembling, fearful sinner, I would invite him to take comfort from the precious truth that God has, in His infinite grace, set the cross of Jesus between him and his sins, if only he will believe the divine testimony. The great difference between a believer and an unbeliever is this: the former has Christ between him and his sins; the latter has his sins between him and Christ.

Now, with the former, Christ is the all-engrossing object: he looks not at the enormity of his sin, but at the value of the blood and the preciousness of the person of Christ: he knows that God is not now on the judgement-seat, but on the mercy-seat: if He were on the former, His thoughts would be simply occupied about the question of sin, but being on the latter, His thoughts are, blessed be His name, as purely occupied about the blood. Oh for more simple and abiding communion with the mind of Heaven, and more complete abstraction from the things and thoughts of earth! The Lord grant more of both to all His saints!

It has been already observed that the man of faith must be emptied from vessel to vessel; each successive scene and stage of the believer's life is but his entrance upon a new form in the school of Christ, where he has to learn some fresh and, of course, more difficult lesson.

But, it may be asked, what more trying circumstances had Elijah to grapple with at Zarephath than at Cherith? Was it not better to be cast upon human sympathies than to have ravens as his channel of supply? And further, was it not more pleasing to the spirit to be domesticated with human beings than to dwell in the loneliness and solitude of the brook Cherith? All this might have been so, no doubt; yet solitude has its sweets, and association its trials. There are selfish interests which work amongst men, and hinder that refined and exquisite enjoyment which human society ought to yield, and which it will yield, when humanity stands forth in its divinely-imparted perfections.

Our prophet heard no such words as "me and my son" when he took up his abode by the brook. There was there no selfish interest acting as a barrier to his sustenance and enjoyment. No, but the moment he passed from his retirement into human society, then he was called to feel that the human heart does not like to have its own objects in the least interfered with; he was called to enter into the deep meaning of the words "me and my son," which unfold the hidden springs of selfishness, which actuate humanity in its fallen condition.

But it will doubtless be observed that it was natural for the widow's heart to entertain thoughts of herself and her son in preference to any one else, and surely it was natural; it is what nature ever does. Harken to the following words of a genuine child of nature: "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" (1 Sam. 25: 11)

Nature will ever seek its own first; nor does it come within the compass of this perishing world so to fill the human soul as to make it overflow for the benefit of others. It is the province of God alone to do this. It is utterly in vain to try to expand the heart of man by any instrumentality save the abundant grace of God. This it is which will cause him to open wide the door of his affections to every needy applicant. Human benevolence may do much where abundant resources prevent the possibility of personal privation, but grace alone will enable a man to trample personal interests under foot to meet the claims of another. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." This is the world's principle, and nothing can make us unlearn it but the knowledge of the fact that God has done well for us, and, moreover, that it is our best interest to let Him continue to do so unto the end.

Now it was the knowledge of this divine principle that enabled our prophet to say, "Make me thereof a little cake first and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son." Elijah was, in his address, simply putting in the divine claim upon the widow's resources; and, as we know, the result of a true and ready response to that claim will be a rich harvest of blessing to the soul. There was, however, a demand upon the widow's faith in all this. she was called to act a trying and difficult part, in the energy of faith in a divine promise, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

And is it not thus with every believer? Undoubtedly it is; we must act in faith. The promise of God must ever constitute the great moving principle in the soul of the Christian. There would have been no room for the exercise of faith on the part of the widow had the barrel been full; but when it was exhausted, when she was reduced to her last handful, to be told to give of that handful to a stranger first, was surely a large demand, to which nothing but faith could have enabled her to respond.

But the Lord often deals with His people as He dealt with His disciples in the matter of feeding the multitude. "This He said to prove them, for He Himself knew what He would do." He frequently tells us to take a step involving considerable trial, and in the very act of taking it we not only see the reason of it, but also get strength to proceed. In fact, all the divine claims upon us for action are based upon the principle involved in the command to the children of Israel of old, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Whither were they to go? Through the sea. Strange path! Yet behind this trying command we see grace providing the ability to execute it in the word to Moses, "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14: 16). Faith enables a man, being called, to go out not knowing whither he goes.

But there is more than the mere principle of obedience to be learned from this truly interesting scene between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: we learn, also, that nothing but the superior power of divine grace can lift the human mind above the freezing atmosphere of selfishness in which fallen man lives, and moves, and has his being. The effulgence of God's benevolence shining in upon the soul disperses those mists in which the world is enveloped, and enables a man to think and act upon higher and nobler principles than those which actuate the moving mass around him. This poor widow had left her house influenced by no higher motive than self-interest and self-preservation, and having no more brilliant object before her mind than death.

And is it in any wise different with multitudes around us? Yea, is it a whit better in the case of any unregenerate man on earth? Not a whit. The most illustrious, the most intellectual, the most learned — in a word, every man upon whose spirit the light of divine grace has never shone, will be found, in God's estimation, like this poor widow, influenced by motives of self-interest and self-preservation, and having no brighter prospect before him than death.

The truth of God, however, speedily alters the aspect of things. In the case of the widow it acted most powerfully: it sent her back to her house occupied about and interested for another, and with her soul filled with cheering thoughts of life. And so will it ever be. Let but the soul get into communion with the truth and grace of God, and it is at once delivered from this present evil world, it is turned aside out of the current which is rapidly hurrying millions away upon its surface. It becomes actuated by heavenly motives, and animated by heavenly objects.

Grace teaches a man to live and act for others. The more our souls taste the sweetness of redeeming love, the more earnest will be our desire to serve others. Oh that we all felt more deeply and abidingly the constraining power of the love of Christ, in this day of lamentable coldness and indifference! Would to God we could all live and act in the remembrance that we are not our own, but bought with a price!

The widow of Zarephath was taught this truth. The Lord not only put His claim to the handful of meal and the cruse of oil, but also laid His hand upon her son — the cherished object of her affections. Death visits the house in which the Lord's prophet, in company with the widow and her son, were feeding together on the precious fruits of divine benevolence. "It came to pass, after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him."

Now this son, as we know, had, in common with herself, stood in her way in the matter of her ready response to the divine claim as put forward by Elijah; hence there is solemn instruction for the saint in the death of this child. So surely as we allow any object, whether it be parent or child, husband or wife, brother or sister, to obstruct us in our path of simple obedience and devotedness to Christ, we may rest assured that object will be removed. This widow had given her son a higher place in her thoughts than the Lord's prophet, and the son was taken from her that she might learn that it was not merely, "the handful of meal" that should be held in subjection to the Lord and in readiness for Him, but also her dearest earthly object.

It needs no small measure of the spirit of Christ to hold everything in mere stewardship for God. We are so prone to look upon things as ours, instead of remembering that all we have, and all we are, belongs to the Lord, and should ever be given up at His call. Nor is this a mere matter of rightful obedience; it is for our lasting benefit and happiness.

The widow responded to God's claim on her handful of meal; and what follows? She and her house are sustained for years! Again the Lord lays His hand upon her son; and what follows? Her son is raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, thus teaching her that the Lord could not only sustain life, but impart it. Resurrection-power is brought to bear upon her circumstances, and she receives her son now, as she had received her supplies before, directly from the hand of the Lord God of Israel.

How happy to be a dependent upon such bounty! How happy to go to our barrel of meal, or our cruse of oil, and find it daily replenished by our Father's generous hand! How happy to hold the dearest object of our affections in the power of resurrection ties! Such are the privileges of the weakest believer in Jesus.

Before, however, I turn from this branch of our subject, I would observe that the effect which the divine visitation produced upon this widow was to awaken a solemn inquiry in her conscience as to her sin. "Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?" When the Lord comes near to us, there will always be observed a divine quickness and sensitiveness of conscience which are most earnestly to be sought after.

One may often pass on from day to day in the ordinary routine of life, in the enjoyment, too, of a replenished barrel and cruse, without much deep exercise of conscience before God. The latter will only be found where there is really close walking with God, or some special visitation of His hand. Had the Lord merely met the poor widow's need from day to day, there might never have been a question of "sin" raised in her mind; but when death entered, conscience began to work, for death is the wages of sin.

There is a twofold action in all the divine dealings with us, namely, an action of truth, and an action of grace. The former discovers the evil, the latter puts it away; that unfolds what man is, this what God is; that brings out into the light the hidden workings of evil in the heart of man, this brings out, in contrast, the rich and exhaustless springs of grace in the heart of God. Now, both are needful: truth, for the maintenance of God's glory; grace, for the establishment of our blessing; that, for the vindication of the divine character and attributes, this for the perfect repose of the sinner's heart and conscience.

How blessed to know that both "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The divine dealings with the widow of Zarephath would not have been complete had they not elicited from her the confession contained in the last verse of our chapter, "By this I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." She had learnt grace in the marvellous supply of her need; she learnt truth in the death of her son.

And if we were only more spiritually sensitive and quick-sighted, we should at all times perceive these two features in our Father's mode of dealing with us. We are the constant recipients of His grace, and again and again we get examples of His truth in the dealings of His hand which are more particularly designed to bring out the evil from the hidden chambers of the heart, in order that we may judge and put it away. While we see our barrel and cruse replenished, conscience is apt to slumber, but when Jehovah knocks at the door of our hearts by some chastening dispensation, forthwith it wakes up and enters with vigour upon the seasonable work of self-judgement.

Now, while we cannot too strongly deprecate that form of self-examination which frequently genders doubt as to the fact of the soul's acceptance, yet we must remember that self must be judged or we shall break down altogether. The believer is not told to examine himself with any such idea as that the examination may issue in the discovery that he is not in the faith. This idea is often based upon an unsound interpretation of 2 Cor. 13: 5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," etc.

Now, the idea in the mind of the apostle was the very reverse of what is sought to be deduced from his words, as may at once be seen by a little attention to the context. It would seem that the assembly at Corinth had given a place amongst them to certain false apostles who presumed to call in question the ministry of the Apostle Paul, thus rendering it necessary for the latter to enter upon a defence of his apostleship, which he does, first, by a reference to his general course of service and testimony; and secondly, by a touching appeal to the Corinthian saints. "Since," says he, "ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me . . . examine yourselves."

The most powerful and, to them at least affecting proof of the divine authority of his ; apostleship was to be deduced from the fact that they were in the faith. It cannot therefore for a moment be supposed that he would have told them to examine themselves in order to prove his heavenly mission if that examination were to issue in the discovery, that they were not in the faith at all: on the contrary, it was because he had a well-grounded assurance that they were "sanctified in Christ Jesus," that he could confidently appeal to them as an evidence that his mission was from above.

There is, however, considerable difference between what is called "self-examination" and self-judgement; not so much in the abstract things themselves as in the ideas which we attach to them. It is a most blessed exercise to judge nature — honestly, solemnly and rigidly to judge that evil nature which we carry about with us, and which ever clogs and hinders us in running the race set before us.

The Lord grant us all more spiritual power to exercise this judgement continually. But then we must take great care that our examination of self does not savour of mistrusting God. It is upon the ground of God's grace and faithfulness that I judge myself if God be not God, there is an end of everything.

But there was also a voice in this visitation for Elijah. He had presented himself to the widow in the character of a man of God, and he therefore needed to establish his claims to that character. This Jehovah graciously did for him by the resurrection of the child. "By this I know," said she, "that thou art a man of God." It was resurrection that vindicated his claim upon her confidence.

There must be the exhibition of a measure of resurrection power in the life of the man of God ere his claim to that character can be fully established. This power will show itself in the form of victory over self in all its odious workings. The believer is risen with Christ — he is made a partaker of the divine nature, but he is still in the world, and bears about with him a body of humiliation; and if he does not deny himself, he will soon find his character as a man of God called in question.

It would, however, be but a miserable object merely to seek self-vindication. The prophet had a higher and nobler aim, namely, to establish the truth of the Word of the Lord in his mouth. This is the proper object of the man of God. His own character and reputation should be matters of small moment with him, save as they stand connected with the Word of the Lord in his mouth. It was simply for the purpose of maintaining the divine origin of the gospel which he preached that the Apostle Paul entered upon the defence of his apostleship in his Epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. It mattered little to him what they thought of Paul, but it mattered much what they thought of Paul's gospel. Hence, for their sakes, he was anxious to prove that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

How important, then, was it for the prophet to have such a testimony to the divine origin of his ministry before entering upon the scenes in which he is seen moving in 1 Kings 18! He gained thus much at least by his retirement at Zarephath; and surely it was not a little. His spirit was blessedly confirmed; he received a divine seal to his ministry; he approved himself to the conscience of one with whom he had sojourned for a long period, and was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the happy assurance that he was a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

[I may just add a word here on the subject of self-vindication. It is truly sorrowful when the servant of God is obliged to vindicate himself; it shows there must be something wrong either in himself or in those who have rendered it needful for him thus to act. When, however, such a course becomes necessary, there is one grand object to be kept clearly before the mind, namely, the glory of Christ, and the purity of the truth committed to his trust. It too frequently happens that when any charge is brought either against our ministry or our personal character, the pride of our hearts is drawn out, and we are quick to stand up in self-defence. Now, we should remember that, apart from our connection with Christ and His saints, we are but vile atoms of the dust, utterly unworthy of a thought or word; it should therefore be far from our thoughts to seek the establishment of our own reputation. We have been constituted the depositaries, to a certain extent, of the reputation of Christ; and provided we preserve that unsullied, we need not be careful about self. The Lord grant us all grace to walk in the abiding consciousness of our high dignities and holy responsibilities as the "epistle of Christ, known and read of all men"!]

We have now arrived at the close of a very important stage of Elijah's history, embracing a period of three years and a half, during which he was hidden from the view of Israel. We have been occupied simply with the consideration of those principles of truth which lie on the surface of Elijah's personal history. But may we not draw instruction from his course viewed in a mystic sense? I believe we may. The reference of Christ Himself to the prophet's mission to the Gentile widow may justly lead us to see therein the blessed foreshadowing of the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church of God.

"But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow" (Luke 4:25-6). The Lord Jesus had presented Himself to Israel as the prophet of God, but found no response; the daughter of Zion refused to hear the voice of her Lord. "The gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" were answered by the carnal inquiry, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He therefore finds relief for His spirit, in the view of Israel's scorn and rejection, in the happy reflection that there were objects beyond Jewish bounds to whom the divine grace of which He was the channel could flow out in all its richness and purity.

The grace of God is such that if it be stopped by the pride, unbelief, or hardness of heart of some, it will only flow more copiously to others, and so, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength. And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49: 5-6).

The precious truth of the call of the Gentiles is largely taught in Scripture, both by type and precept, and it might be serviceable at another time to enter fully upon the consideration of it in its various ramifications; but my object, in this paper, is rather to consider the life and ministry of our prophet in a simple and practical way, with the hope that the Lord would be graciously pleased to acknowledge such simple reflections for the comfort and edification of His people of every name and denomination.

Part 3

#### THE HOUSE OF AHAB

We must now leave our prophet, for a season, and turn our attention to the sad condition of things in Israel during the time that he was hidden with God. Terrible indeed must be the condition of things on earth when "the heaven is shut up."

Sterile and dreary must be the aspect of this lower world when Heaven withholds its refreshing showers, and specially of that land which was to "drink water of the rain of heaven." Egypt might not have regarded much the shutting up of Heaven, seeing she had never been wont to look thither for her supplies. She had her resources in herself. "My river is mine own," was her independent language.

But such was not the case with the Lord's land — "the land of hills and valleys." If Heaven yielded not its supplies, all was parched and sterile. Israel could not say, "My river is mine own." No; they were ever taught to look up; their eyes were always to be upon the Lord, as the Lord's eyes were ever upon them. Hence, when anything arose to hinder the intercourse between Heaven and earth, the land of Canaan was made to feel it with painful intensity.

Thus it was "in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land." Israel was made to feel the dreadful consequences of departure from their only source of real blessing. "There was sore famine in Samaria, and Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

Israel had sinned, and Israel must feel the rod of Jehovah's righteous anger. What a humbling picture of God's ancient people, to see their king going forth to look for grass! What a contrast between all this and the rich abundance and glory of Solomon's day! But God had been grossly dishonoured, and His truth rejected. Jezebel had sent forth the pestilential influence of her principles by the instrumentality of her wicked prophets — Baal's altar had superseded the altar of God; hence the Heaven above was iron, and the earth beneath brass; the physical aspect of things was but the expression of Israel's hardness of heart and low moral condition.

Now there is not so much as a word about God in Ahab's directions to his servants — not a syllable about the sin that had called down the heavy displeasure and judgement of God upon the land. No; the word is, "Go unto all fountains and brooks." Such was Ahab's thought, his poor grovelling thought; his heart turned not, in true humility, to Jehovah; he cried not to Him in the hour of his need; hence his word is, "peradventure we may find grass." God is shut out, and self is the all-engrossing object. Provided he could find grass, he cared not about finding God

He could have enjoyed himself in the midst of Jezebel's idolatrous prophets, had not the horrors of famine driven him forth: and then, instead of searching out the cause of the famine, in true self-judgement and humility, and seeking for pardon and restoration at the hand of God, he goes forth, in impenitent selfishness, to look for grass. Alas! he had sold himself to work wickedness; he had become the slave of Jezebel; his palace had become a cage of every unclean bird; Baal's prophets, like so many vultures, hovered around his throne, and from thence spread the leaven of idolatry over the whole land.

Oh, it is a truly awful thing to allow the heart to depart from the Lord. One cannot tell where it may end. Ahab was an Israelite, but he had allowed himself to be ensnared by a false religious system, at the head of which was Jezebel his wife; he had made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and was driven headlong into the most abandoned wickedness. There is no one so bad as the man who turns aside from the ways of God. Such an one is sure to plunge into more profound depths of wickedness than even the ordinary victims of sin and Satan. The devil seems to take special delight in making such an one an instrument in carrying out his malignant designs against the truth of God.

If you have ever been taught to value the ways of truth and holiness, if you have ever taken delight in God and His ways, be watchful; "keep thy heart with all diligence;" beware of false religious influence; you are moving through a scene in which the very atmosphere you breathe is noxious, and destructive of spiritual life. The enemy has with hellish sagacity — a sagacity sharpened by well-nigh six thousand years' acquaintance with the constitution of the human mind — laid his snares on all sides of you, and nothing but permanent communion with your heavenly Father will avail to preserve your soul. Remember Ahab, and pray continually to be kept from temptation.

The following passage of Scripture may well be used, in connection with Ahab, as a solemn and seasonable warning: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited" (Jer. 17: 5-6).

Such was the wretched Ahab — wretched though favoured with a diadem and a sceptre. He cared neither for God nor his people. In his sayings and doings, on the melancholy occasion to which we are referring, we find as little about Israel as about God. There is not one word about the people that had been committed to his care, and who ought, after God, to have been his great object. His earthly mind seems to have been unable to reach beyond "the horses and mules." Such were the objects of Ahab's anxious solicitude in the day of Israel's direful calamity.

Alas, what a contrast between all this low and grovelling selfishness and the noble spirit of the man after God's own heart, who, when the land was trembling beneath the heavy stroke of Jehovah's chastening rod, could say, "Is it not I that have commanded the people to be numbered: even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let Thy hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued" (1 Chr. 21: 17).

Here was the true spirit of a king. David, in the spirit of his blessed Master, would expose his own bosom to the stroke, in order that the sheep might escape; he would "stand between them and the foe"; he would turn the sceptre into a shepherd's crook; he thought not of his "horses and mules"; yea, he thought not of himself or his father's house, but of the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Happy, ineffably happy, will it be for Israel's scattered tribes to find themselves again under the tender care of the true David.

It might be profitable to follow out a little more fully the history of Ahab; to dwell upon his unprincipled treatment of the righteous Naboth; of the alluring influence exerted by him over the mind of the good king Jehoshaphat, and of many other circumstances in his

unhappy reign; but all this would lead us too far from our subject. We shall therefore advert for a few moments to the character of an important member of Ahab's household, and then return to Elijah.

Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, was one who, in the secret of his own spirit, feared the Lord, but who was planted in a most unhallowed atmosphere. The house of the wicked Ahab, and his still more wicked consort, must have been a painful school for the righteous soul of Obadiah; and so he found it. He was hindered in service and testimony. What he did for the Lord was done by stealth. He was afraid to act openly and decidedly; yet he did quite enough to show what he would have done had he been planted in a more congenial soil, and cherished by a more healthful atmosphere. "He took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." This was a most precious token of devotedness of heart to the Lord — a blessed triumph of divine principle over the most untoward circumstances.

Thus it was with Jonathan in the house of Saul. He, too, was sadly hindered in his service to God and to Israel. He should have stood forth in more entire separation from the evil in which his father lived, and moved; his place at Saul's table should have been vacant as well as David's: the cave of Adullam would have been his proper place, where, in holy companionship with the rejected David and his despised band of followers, he might have found a wider and more suited range in which to manifest his affectionate devotedness to God and His anointed.

Human expediency, however, might, and doubtless would, have recommended Jonathan to remain in Saul's house, and Obadiah to remain in Ahab's house, as being "the sphere in which Providence had placed them"; but expediency is not faith, nor will it aid a man in his path of service, whatever it may be. Faith will ever lead a man to break through the freezing rules of human expediency, in order that it may express itself in a way not to be mistaken.

Jonathan felt constrained at times to leave the table of Saul in order that he might embrace David: but he should have abandoned it altogether; he should have cast in his lot entirely with David; he ought not to have rested satisfied with speaking for his brother, he should have identified himself with him. But he did not do so, and therefore he fell on Mount Gilboa, by the hand of the uncircumcised. Thus, in his life he was harassed and hindered by the unrighteous principle of rule which Saul had set up to entangle and bind the consciences of the faithful, and in his death he was ingloriously mingled with the uncircumcised.

Just so it was with Obadiah. It was his lot to stand in connection with the man who occupied the lowest step of that ladder of apostasy whereby the kings of Israel had descended from original principles. Hence he was obliged to act stealthily for God and His servants; he was afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; he lacked boldness and energy to stand out in decided testimony against all abominations; he had no room for the development of his renewed energies or affections; his soul was withered by the noxious vapours around him, and he could therefore exert but little influence on his day and generation.

Hence, while Elijah was boldly confronting Ahab, and openly serving the Lord, Obadiah was openly serving Ahab, and stealthily serving the Lord. While Elijah was breathing the holy atmosphere of Jehovah's presence, Obadiah was breathing the polluted atmosphere of Ahab's wicked court. While Elijah was receiving his daily supplies from the hand of the God of Israel, Obadiah was ranging the country in search of grass for Ahab's horses.

Truly a most striking contrast! And is there not at this moment many an Obadiah similarly occupied? Is there not many a God-fearing man sharing, in common with the children of this world, its death and misery, and labouring in co-operation with them to avert its impending ruin? Doubtless there is. And is this fit work for such? Should "the mules and horses of an ungodly world engross the thoughts and energies of the Christian instead of the interests of the Church of God? Ah no! it should not be so. The Christian should have a nobler end in view — a higher and more heavenly sphere in which to use his energies. God, and not Ahab, demands and deserves our devotion.

This is a very wide question, and there are few amongst us that may not learn a lesson from it. Let us ask ourselves honestly, as before the Searcher of hearts, what are we doing? What object are we carrying out? What end have we in view? Are we sowing to the flesh? Are we working for merely earthly objects? Have we no higher end in view than self or this present world?

Oh these are searching questions, when rightly put! The tendency of the human heart and affections is ever downward — ever toward earth and the things of earth. The palace of Ahab holds out far more powerful attractions to our fallen nature than the lonely banks of Cherith or the house of the starving widow of Zarephath. But ah, let us think of the end! The end alone is the true criterion by which to judge in such matters. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end " (Ps. 73: 17).

Elijah knew, by being in the sanctuary, that Ahab stood in a slippery place; that his house would speedily crumble in the dust; that all his pomp and glory was about to end in the lonely tomb, and his immortal spirit to be summoned to render its final account. These things the holy man of God thoroughly understood, and he was therefore well content to stand apart from it all. His leathern girdle, his homely fare, his lonely path, were far better, he felt, than all the pleasures of Ahab's court. Such was his judgement, and we shall see, ere we close this paper, that his judgement was sound.

"The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Would that all who love the name of Jesus were more uncompromising and energetic in their testimony for Him! The time is rapidly approaching when we would give worlds that we had been more true and real in our ways here below. We are too lukewarm, too much inclined to make terms with the world and the flesh, too ready to exchange the leathern girdle for the robe in which Ahab and Jezebel are most willing to array us.

May the Lord give all His people grace to testify against this world that the deeds thereof are evil, and to stand apart from its ways, its maxims and principles; in a word, from everything which properly belongs to it. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." Let us

then cast off the works of darkness and stand clothed in the armour of light; let us, as those that are risen with Christ, set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth; having "our citizenship in heaven," let us, with unceasing eagerness, "look for the Saviour from thence, who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

#### Part 4; THE PROPHET ON MOUNT CARMEL

In the opening verse of 1 Kings 18 a new order is issued to our prophet. "And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth." Here Elijah is summoned away from his retirement at Zarephath, to make his appearance in public and stand again before king Ahab. To one occupying the position, and exhibiting the spirit, of a true servant, it matters not what summons he receives. Whether it be "Go hide thyself," or "Go show thyself," he is ready, through grace, to obey. The Lord had been training His servant for three years and a half in secret. At Cherith and Zarephath He had taught him many important lessons; and when the time was come for his showing unto Israel, he was called to leave the desert and appear again as the public witness of Jehovah. Nor did he hesitate. No, not for a moment, however much he might have preferred retirement to the stormy scenes and harassing vicissitudes of public life. Elijah was a servant, and that was enough. He was as ready to confront the angry Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal, as he had been to seclude himself for three years and a half. Truly we may well covet the spirit of a servant — a humble, obedient servant. Such a spirit will carry us through many difficulties; will save us from much contention; will send us along the path of service while others are disputing about it. If only we be willing to obey, and to serve, we shall never lack opportunity, nor be at a loss as to the path we should pursue.

[In every age the servant character is marked by the Holy Ghost as one of special value. It is, in fact, the only thing that will stand in times of general declension. Of this we have numerous examples in Scripture. When the house of Eli was about to fall before the divine judgement, Samuel occupied the position of a servant whose ear was opened to hear. His word was, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." When all Israel had fled from the face of the Philistine champion, the servant character again stood prominently forth. "Thy servant will go and fight," etc. The Lord Jesus Himself had the title of Servant applied to Him by Jehovah, in the words of the prophet, "Behold My Servant," etc. Furthermore, when the Church had failed, and had become "the great house," "the servant of the Lord" was told how he ought to carry himself. And lastly, it is mentioned as one of the special features of the heavenly Jerusalem, that "His servants shall serve Him." The Lord grant us more of this spirit!.]

We have already had occasion to notice the prophet's unhesitating obedience to the Word of the Lord. Such obedience will ever involve the abandonment of self. To be told, for example, to leave one's sweet retreat in order to appear before an angry tyrant who, with his wicked queen, led on to the contest a host of idolatrous prophets, called for no small measure of self-renunciation. But Elijah, through grace, was ready. He felt he was not his own. He was a servant, and as such ever stood with girded loins and open ears to attend his Master's summons, whatever it might be. Blessed attitude! May there be many found therein! Elijah, therefore, goes to meet king Ahab, and we are called to follow him now into one of the most important scenes of his life. Before, however, he comes in contact with Ahab, he crosses the path of Obadiah, and his meeting with him is perfectly characteristic. Obadiah certainly does not meet the prophet with that affectionate cordiality which ought to appear in the bearing of one brother towards another, but rather in the cold formality of one who had been moving much in the world's society. "Art thou that my lord Elijah?"

Now, though all this might have been occasioned by the overawing solemnity of Elijah's appearance and manner, still the thought forces itself upon one that there ought to have been more holy familiarity between two servants of the Lord. Elijah, too, seems to maintain this distance. "I am," said he; "go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." Elijah felt himself to be the depositary of the secret of the Lord, of which secret his brother knew nothing. And how could he? Ahab's house was not the place to obtain an entrance into the divine counsels. Obadiah was out on a mission perfectly in keeping with the place from whence he had come, and with the person who had sent him; and so was Elijah. The former had as his immediate object grass — if peradventure he might find it; and as his ultimate object, the preservation of Ahab's horses and mules; the latter had as his immediate object the announcement of Jehovah's indubitable purpose concerning rain; and as his ultimate object, the bringing back of the nation to its early faith and devotedness. True they were both men of God; and, moreover, it may be said by some that Obadiah was as much in his place as Elijah, seeing he was serving his master. No doubt he was serving his master; but should Ahab have been his master? I believe not. I believe his service to Ahab was not the result of communion with God. True it did not rob him of his name and character as one that feared the Lord greatly, for the Holy Ghost has graciously recorded this concerning him; but truly it was a miserable thing for one that feared the Lord greatly to own as his master the worst of Israel's apostate kings. Elijah would not have done so. We cannot think of him as going forth on such a mission as that which was commanding the energies of his more worldly brother. Elijah would not own Ahab as his master, though he was bound to own him as his King.

There is a great difference between being a subject and one in a position under a monarch. People argue thus: "The powers that be are ordained of God," therefore it is right to hold office under them. But those who argue thus seem to lose sight of the manifest distinction between subject to and co-operating with the powers that be: the former is a sound and scriptural service — an act of positive obedience to God; the latter is an unsound and unscriptural assumption of worldly authority, for the wielding of which we have no direction, and which, moreover, will be found a sad obstruction in the path of the servant of God. We would not enter into judgement upon those who feel they can enlist their energies in the government of this world; but this much we would say — they will find themselves in an extremely awkward position in reference to the service of their heavenly Master. The principles of this world are diametrically opposed to those of God, and it is therefore hard to conceive how a man can be carrying out both at the same time.

Obadiah is a remarkable example of this. Had he been more openly on the Lord's side, he would have had no need to say, "Was it not told my lord what I did?" His hiding the prophets seems, in his estimation, to have been such a remarkable thing that he wondered if all had not heard it. Elijah had no need to ask such a question; it was well known "what he did." His acts of service to God were no

phenomena in his history. And why? Because he was not trammelled by the arrangements of Ahab's house. He was free, and could therefore act for God without reference to the thoughts of Ahab or Jezebel.

In acting thus, however, he had to lie under the charge of troubling Israel. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" The more faithful one is to God and His truth, the more exposed he is to this charge. If all be allowed to sleep "in dead supineness," the god of this world will be well pleased, and his domain untroubled; but only let some faithful one make his appearance, and he is sure to be regarded as a troubler, and an intruder upon peace and good order.

But it is well to have that peace and order broken up which stand connected with the open denial of the Lord's truth and name. The hearts of the earthly-minded may only be occupied with the question, "Is it peace?" utterly regardless as to whether that peace is procured at the expense of truth and holiness. Nature loves ease, and may often be found, even amongst Christians, pleading for peace and quietness, where faithfulness to Christ and His principles would call for plain dealing with unsound doctrine or evil practice.

The tendency of the age is to hold all religious questions in abeyance. The things pertaining to the world and the flesh are of far too much importance, in the estimate of this generation, to have them interfered with for a moment by questions of eternal importance. Elijah, however, thought not so. He seems to have felt that the peaceful slumber of sin must be interrupted at all cost. He beheld the nation wrapped in the deep sleep of idolatry, and he thought it well to be the instrument of raising a storm around them.

So it was, and so it is. The storm of controversy is always preferable to the calm of sin and worldliness. Truly happy is it when there is no need of raising such a storm; but when it is needed — when the enemy would stretch forth over the people of God "the leaden sceptre" of unholy repose — it is a matter of thankfulness to find that there is life enough even to break in upon such repose. Had there been no Elijah in Israel in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, had all been like Obadiah or the seven thousand, Baal and his prophets might have held undisputed sway over the minds of the people.

But God raised up a man who cared not about his own ease; no, nor about the nation's ease, if that ease were to be purchased at the expense of God's honour and Israel's early principles. He feared not, in the strength of the Lord, to face a terrific array of eight hundred and fifty prophets, whose living depended upon the nation's delusion, headed, as they were, by a furious woman who could turn her weak-minded lord whithersoever she would.

All this, surely, called for no small amount of spiritual vigour and energy. It needed deep and powerful convictions of the reality of divine truth, and a very clear insight into Israel's low and degraded condition, to enable a man to leave his quiet retreat at Zarephath and burst into the midst of Baal's votaries, thus to bring upon himself a fierce storm of opposition from every quarter. Elijah might, to speak after the manner of men, have remained in quiet retirement, in undisturbed repose, had he been satisfied to let Baal alone, and to allow the strongholds of idolatry to remain untouched. But this he could not do, and therefore he comes forth and meets the angry Ahab with these solemn and heart-searching words, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast served Baalim."

This was tracing the evil up to its right source. It was departure from God and His holy commandments that had brought all this trouble upon them. Men are ever prone to forget the sin that has occasioned trouble, and think only of the trouble; but true wisdom will ever lead us to look from the trouble to the procuring cause.

Thus, too, when unsound doctrine has insidiously crept in, and gained power over many minds — if some faithful one should feel called to make a firm and decided stand against it, he must count upon being regarded as a troubler, and as being the cause of all the commotion consequent upon such acting; whereas the intelligent and reflecting mind will at once trace the matter, not to the faithful one who has made a stand for truth against error, but to him who may have introduced the error, and to those who have received and entertained it.

True, the defender of truth will need to watch his spirit and temper, lest, while he attacks error in doctrine, he fall into evil in practice. Many who have set out in real sincerity of heart to vindicate some neglected or disputed truth have failed in this particular, and have thus, in a great degree, nullified their valuable testimony; for their sagacious enemy is always ready to act upon the narrow-mindedness and unreasonableness of men by leading them to fasten upon the petty infirmities of temper, and lose sight of the important principle advocated.

But our prophet entered the arena well equipped; he had come from "the secret place of the Most High"; he had been learning, in solitude, those lessons of self-judgement and self-subjugation which could alone qualify him for the momentous scenes on which he was about to enter. Elijah was no angry or stormy controversialist; he had been too much in the secret of the divine presence for that; he had been blessedly solemnized in his spirit ere he was called to confront Baal's host of prophets. Hence he stands before them in all the calm elevation and holy dignity which ever marked his bearing. We see no haste about him, no perturbation, no hesitancy. He was before God, and therefore he was self-possessed and tranquil.

Now it is in such circumstances that a man's spirit is really tested. Nothing but the mighty power of God could have maintained Elijah in his extraordinary position on mount Carmel. "He was a man of like passions with us;" and being the only one of his day who possessed sufficient moral courage and spiritual power to make a public stand for God against the power of idolatry, the enemy might readily suggest to his poor heart, "What a great man you are to stand forth thus as the solitary champion of Israel's ancient faith!" But God held up His dear servant so far. He carried him through this very trying scene, because he was His witness, and His servant.

And so it will ever be. The Lord will ever stand by those that stand by Him. Had Obadiah only made a stand against Ahab and Jezebel, the Lord would have owned him and carried him through, so that instead of being the servant of Ahab, he might have been the yokefellow of Elijah in his great reformation. But this was not the case, and therefore, like Lot of old, "his righteous soul was vexed" by the errors and evils of an idolatrous house.

O dear Christian reader, let us aim at something beyond this! Let us not be chained down to earth by deliberate connection with this world's systems or plans. Heaven is our home; there, too, our hope is; we are not of the world; Jesus has purchased us, and delivered us from it, in order that we might shine as lights and walk as heavenly men while passing onward to our heavenly rest.

However, it was not merely in his deportment and manner that Elijah acquitted himself as a servant of God; he also showed himself to be one taught of God in reference to those principles on which the needed reformation should be based. Personal deportment and manner would avail but little if soundness in the faith were lacking. It would be an easy thing to put on a leathern girdle, and assume a solemn and dignified manner; but nothing save a spiritual apprehension of divine principles will enable any one to exert a reforming influence on the men of his age.

But Elijah possessed all those needed qualifications. Both his appearance and his faith were such as, in an eminent degree, suited a thorough reformer. Conscious, therefore, that he was in possession of a secret which would deliver the spirits of his brethren from the unhallowed thralldom of Baal, he says to Ahab, "Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table."

He is determined to bring Baal and the God of Israel face to face, in the view of the nation. He felt that matters should be brought to a test. His brethren must no longer be left to "halt between two opinions." What strength there is in the prophet's words as he stands before the assembled thousands of Israel! "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."

This was very simple. The prophets of Baal could not gainsay nor resist it. The prophet only asked for decision of character. There could be nothing gained on either side by vacillating ways. "I would ye were either cold or hot." We know from the Lord's own words to Elijah, in the next chapter, that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who, we may suppose, were only waiting for some vigorous hand to plant the standard of truth in order that they might rally round it. No one amongst them would seem to have had power for such a bold step, but they would no doubt rejoice in Elijah's boldness and ability to do so.

This has often been the case in the history of the people of God. In times of greatest darkness there have always been those whose spirits mourned in secret over the widespread evil and apostasy, who longed for the bursting in of spiritual light, and were ready with joy to welcome its earliest beams. God has never left Himself without a witness; and although it is only here and there we can perceive a star of sufficient magnitude and brilliancy to pierce through the clouds of night and enlighten the benighted Church in the wilderness, yet we know, blessed be God, that let the clouds be ever so dark and gloomy, the stars have been there in every age, though their twinkling has been but little seen.

Thus it was in the days of Elias; there were seven thousand such stars whose light was obscured by the thick clouds of idolatry — who would not yield to the darkness themselves, though they lacked power to enlighten others; yet was there but one star of sufficient power and brightness to dispel the mists and create a sphere in which others might shine. This was Elijah the Tishbite, whom we now behold, in heavenly power and light, breaking into the very stronghold of Baal, upsetting Jezebel's table, [False religion has always sought the sunshine of this world's favour, whereas true religion has always been more pure and genuine when the world has frowned upon it. "The prophets of the groves eat at Jezebel's table." "If Jezebel had had no table, she would have had no prophets either; it was her table, and not her souls, they sought.] writing folly upon the whole system of Baal's worship, and in fact, by God's grace, effecting a mighty moral change in the nation — bringing the many thousands of Israel down into the dust in real self-abasement, and mingling the blood of Baal's prophets with the waters of Kishon.

How gracious of the Lord to raise up such a deliverer for His deluded people! And what a death-blow to the prophets of Baal! We may safely assert they never offered a more unwilling sacrifice to their idol than that which our prophet suggested. It was the sure precursor of his downfall, and of theirs also. What a sad aspect they present, "crying and cutting themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out," and crying out, with unavailing earnestness, "O Baal, hear us!" Alas, Baal could not hear nor answer them!

The true prophet, conscious in his inmost soul of the sinful folly of the whole scene, mocks them: they cry more earnestly, and leap with frantic zeal upon the altar; but all in vain. They were now to be unmasked in the view of the nation. Their craft was in imminent danger. Those hands which, through their influence, had so often been lifted up in the diabolical worship of a sinful absurdity, were speedily about to seize them and drag them to their merited fate. Well, therefore, might they cry, "O Baal, hear us!" How solemn, how immutably true, are those words of Jeremiah, "Cursed is the man whose heart departeth from the Lord"! It matters not on whom, or on what, we place our confidence: whether it be a religious system or a religious ordinance, or anything else, it is a departure of the heart from God — a curse follows it, and when the final struggle comes the Baal will be invoked in vain; "there will be neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard."

How awful is the thought of departure from the living God! How dreadful to find, at the end of our history, that we have been leaning upon a broken reed! O, if you have not found solid and abiding peace for your guilty conscience in the atoning blood of Jesus, if you have a single emotion of fear in your heart at the thought of meeting God, let me put the prophet's question to you, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Why do you stand aloof when Jesus calls you to come unto Him and take His yoke upon you? Believe me, the hour is coming when, if you have not fled for refuge to Jesus, a greater than Elijah will mock at your calamity.

Harken to these solemn words: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you" (Prov. 1: 24-27).

Awful words! inconceivably awful! How much more awful the reality! Flee to Jesus. Betake yourself to the open fountain, and there find peace and refuge ere the storm of divine wrath and judgement bursts upon your head. "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door," you are lost, and lost forever. Oh think of this, I implore of you, and let not Satan drag your precious soul into everlasting perdition!

We now turn to another side of the picture. The prophets of Baal were signally defeated. They had leaped, cut themselves, and cried to no purpose. Their whole system had been proved a gross fallacy; the superstructure of error had been trampled to the ground, and it only now remained to rear the magnificent superstructure of truth in the view of those who had been so long enslaved by vanity and lies. "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord."

It is always well to wait patiently, and allow evil and error to find their own level. Time will surely bring the truth to light; and let error array itself ever so carefully in the venerable robes of antiquity, yet will time strip it of these robes, and display it in all its naked deformity. Elijah felt this, and therefore he could stand quietly by and allow all the sands of Baal's glass to run out ere he began to exhibit the pattern of a more excellent way. Now it needs a very real apprehension of divine principles to enable one to adopt this patient course. Had our prophet been shallow-minded, or badly taught, he would have been in much greater haste to display his system and raise a storm of opposition against his antagonists.

But a spirit gifted with true elevation is never in haste, never perturbed; he has found a centre round which to move, and in revolving round that he finds himself carried out of the region of every other influence. Such an one was Elijah, a really elevated, independent, holy man — one who in every scene of his extraordinary career maintained a heavenly dignity which is earnestly to be sought after by all the Lord's servants. When he stood on mount Carmel, beholding the fruitless bodily exercise of Baal's prophets, he presented the appearance of one who was fully conscious of his heavenly mission; and not only in his manner, but also in his principles of acting, he acquitted himself as a prophet of the Lord.

What, then, were those principles on which Elijah acted? They were, in a word, those on which the unity of the nation was based. The first thing he does is to "repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down." This was Israel's centre, and to this every true reformer directed his attention. Those who seek to carry out a one-sided reformation may rest satisfied with merely throwing down that which is false, without proceeding further to establish a sound basis on which to erect a new superstructure: but such reformation will never stand; it will carry with it too much of the old leaven to admit of its being a testimony. The altar of Baal must not only be thrown down, but the altar of the Lord must be set up.

Some there are who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would retain an evil system, and rest satisfied with giving it a right name. But no; the only centre of unity which God can recognize is the name of Jesus — simply and exclusively that. The people of God must not be looked at as members of a system, but as members of Christ. God sees them as such, and it should be their business to reckon themselves to be what God tells them they are, and manifestly to take that blessed place.

And we may further remark that Elijah in his actings on mount Carmel does not stop short of the recognition of Israel's unbroken unity. He takes twelve stones, according to the number of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the Lord came, saying "Israel shall be thy name." This was taking high ground — yea, the very highest. Solomon could have taken no higher. To recognize the twelve tribes of Israel at a time when they were divided, and weakened, and degraded, evidenced true communion with the mind of God in reference to His people.

Yet this is what the Spirit will ever suggest. "Our twelve tribes" must never be given up. True they may, through their own weakness and folly, become scattered and divided; yet the God of Israel can only think of them in that unbroken unity which they once exhibited, and which, moreover, they will exhibit again when, having been united by the true David, they shall in holy fellowship tread the courts of the Lord forever.

Now the Prophet Elijah, through the Spirit, saw all this. With the eye of faith, he penetrated the long, dreary time of Israel's humiliating bondage, and beheld them in their visible unity, no longer Judah and Israel, but Israel, for the word is, "Israel shall be thy name." His mind was occupied, not with what Israel was, but with what God had said. This was faith. Unbelief might say, "You are taking too high a stand; it is presumption to talk about twelve tribes when there are but ten; it is folly to speak of unbroken unity when there is nothing but division." Such will ever be the language of unbelief, which can never grasp the thoughts of God, nor see things as He sees them.

But it is the happy privilege of the man of faith to rest his spirit on the immutable testimony of God, which is not to be nullified by man's sinful folly. "Israel shall be thy name." Precious promise! Most precious! Most permanent! Nothing could for a moment interfere with it — neither Rehoboam's childishness nor Jeroboam's cunning policy; no, nor yet Ahab's vileness could hinder Elijah from taking the loftiest position that an Israelite could take, even the position of a worshiper at an altar built of twelve stones, according to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now in Elijah the Tishbite we have an example of the power of faith in the promise of God at a time when everything around him seemed to stand opposed. It enabled him to rise above all the evil and sorrow around him, and to build an altar of twelve stones with as much holy confidence and unclouded assurance as did Joshua when, amid the triumphant hosts of Israel, he erected his trophy on the banks of Jordan.

But I must bring this section to a close, having already extended it further than I had intended. We have seen the principle upon which our prophet desired to carry out the reformation. It was a sound one, and God honoured it. The fire from Heaven at once confounded the prophets of Baal, confirmed the prophet's faith, and delivered the people from their sad condition of halting between two opinions. Elijah's faith had given God room to act; he had made a trench and filled it with water; in other words, he had made the difficulty as great as possible in order that the divine triumph might be complete: and truly it was so.

God will always respond to the appeal of simple faith. "Hear me," said the prophet, "O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again."

This is intelligent prayer. The prophet is engaged solely about God and His people. He does not say, "Hear me, that this people may know that I am a true prophet." No; his only object was to bring the people back to the God of their fathers, and to have the claims of God established in their consciences, in opposition to the claims of Baal. And God darkened and heard; for no sooner had he concluded his prayer than "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God."

Truth triumphs! The prophets are confounded! The prophet, in holy indignation, mingles their blood with the waters of the Kishon, and thus, evil being judged, there remains no further hindrance to the communication of the divine blessing, which Elijah announces to Ahab in these words, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." How do these words convey to us Ahab's true character! "Eat and drink." This was all he knew, or cared to know. He had come forth to look for grass, and nothing more; and the prophet conveyed to him that intelligence which he knew he desired. He could not ask him to come and join him in thanksgiving to God for this glorious triumph over evil, for he knew well he would meet with no response.

And yet they were both Israelites: but one was in communion with God, and the other was the slave of sin; hence, while Ahab found his enjoyment in getting up to "eat and drink," Elijah sought his in retirement with God. Blessed, holy, heavenly enjoyment!

But mark the difference between Elijah's bearing in the presence of man and in the presence of God. He had met Obadiah, a saint in wrong circumstances, with an air of dignity and elevation; he had met Ahab in righteous sternness; he had stood amid the thousands of his deluded and erring brethren with the firmness and grace of a true reformer; and lastly, he had met the wicked prophets of Baal with mocking, and then with the sword of vengeance. Thus had he carried himself in the presence of man.

But how did he meet God? "He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees." Thus he carried himself before God. All this is lovely. Our prophet knew his place both before God and man. In the presence of man he acted in the wisdom of the Spirit, as the case demanded; in the presence of God he prostrated himself in unfeigned and reverent humility. Thus may all the Lord's servants know how to walk in all their complicated relations here below.

We must now accompany our prophet to widely different scenes.

## Part 5

### THE PROPHET ON MOUNT HOREB

There are few who have taken a prominent place in the history of the Church of God whose course has not been marked, in a special manner, by vicissitude: of such, as of "those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters," it may be said, "They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble." They are sometimes seen on the mount, sometimes in the valley; at one time basking in the sunshine, at another beaten by the storm.

Nor is this the case merely with prominent characters; almost every Christian, be his path ever so retired and noiseless, knows something of this vicissitude. Indeed, it would seem as if no one could run the race which is marked out for the man of faith without finding inequalities in his way. The path through the desert must be rough, and it is well that is so; for there is no right-minded person who would not rather be set in a rough than in a "slippery" way. The Lord sees our need of being exercised by roughness and hardness, not only that we may find the rest at the end sweeter, but also that we may be the more effectually trained and fitted for the place we are yet to occupy.

True we shall have no need for trials in the kingdom, but we shall have need of those graces and habits of soul which were formed amid the trials and sorrows of the wilderness. We shall yet be constrained to acknowledge that our path here below was not a whit too rough, but that on the contrary we could not have done without a single exercise of all those that had fallen to our lot. We now see

things indistinctly, and are often unable to see the needs-be for many of our trials and sorrows: moreover our impatient nature may often feel disposed to murmur and rebel; but only let us be patient and we shall be able without hesitation, and with the full assent of every thought and feeling, to say, "He led us forth by a right way, that He might bring us to a city of habitation."

The above train of thought is suggested by the circumstances of our prophet in 1 Kings 19. He seems to have had little anticipation of the terrific storm which was about to burst upon him: he had come from the top of mount Carmel, and in the energy of the Spirit outstripped Ahab in his chariot to the entrance of Jezreel; but there he was destined to receive a check, and that, too, from one who had hitherto kept herself in the background. This was the wicked Jezebel. I say, she had kept herself in the background; but she had not been idle there. She had no doubt influenced her weak-minded lord, and used his power for her wicked ends. She had opened her house and spread a table for the prophets of Baal. These things she had done in furtherance of her master's interests. Jezebel is not to be looked at merely as an individual: she stands before the spiritual mind as the representative of a class — yea, more, as the impersonation of a principle which has from age to age been working in hostility to the truth of God, and which appears in its full maturity in the person of the great whore spoken of in the Apocalypse. The spirit of Jezebel is a persecuting spirit — a spirit that will carry its own point in opposition to everything — an active, energetic, persevering spirit, in which satanic vigour appears very manifestly. Very different is the Ahab spirit. In Ahab we see one who, provided he could attain the gratification of his carnal and worldly desires, cared but little about religion. He troubled himself but little to decide between the claims of Jehovah and those of Baal. To him they were all alike. Now it was such an one that Jezebel could wield according to her mind. She took care to have his desires gratified while she actively and sagaciously used his power in opposition to the truth of God. The Ahabs are always found to be fit instruments for the Jezebels; hence, in the Apocalypse, where all those principles which have been, are now, or are yet to be, at work, are seen in their full maturity, we find the woman riding the beast: that is, corrupt religion wielding the secular power, or the full-grown Jezebel-spirit making use of the full-grown Ahab-spirit.

All this has a solemn voice for the present generation; and those that have ears to hear, let them hear. Men are becoming increasingly heedless as to the interests and destinies of the truth of God in the earth. Christ and Belial are all alike, provided the wheels of the vast machine of utilitarianism be not clogged in their movement. You may hold what principles you please provided you hold them in the background; and thus men of the most conflicting principles can unite and hold those principles in abeyance while with ardour and energy they pursue the phantom of worldliness. Such is the spirit and tendency of the age, and all that is needed is that a Jezebel-spirit should arise and lead men on along the path upon which they have manifestly entered — a path which will most assuredly end in the blackness of darkness forever. Solemn, most solemn thought! Again I say, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." But we have said it was from Jezebel that the prophet Elijah received the check which seems so to have overwhelmed his spirit. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." Observe, "Ahab told Jezebel"; he had neither sufficient interest in the matter to lead him to take an active part himself, nor, even if he had the interest, did he possess sufficient energy. To him, perhaps, the abundance of rain seemed to stand connected with the death of the prophets, and therefore he could quietly stand by and see them put to death. What was Baal to him, or Jehovah either? Nothing. Let Ahab and all of that school get enough to "eat and drink," and all questions of truth and religion will be but lightly regarded. Gross and unmeaning abomination! Miserable, infatuated sensualism! Ye children of this world, whose sentiments are expressed in the words "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," think of Ahab; remember his terrible end — the end of his eating and drinking. What was it? "The dogs licked his blood." And as to his soul — ah, eternity will unfold its destinies!

But in Jezebel we see one who lacked neither interest nor energy. To her the controversy was one of the deepest moment, and she was determined to act with decision. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." Here then the prophet was called to endure the storm of persecution. He had been on mount Carmel, where he had stood against all the prophets of Baal; his course had hitherto been a triumphant one, the result of communion with God; but now his sun seemed, in his view, to be about to go down, and his horizon to become dark and gloomy. "And when he saw that, he arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Elijah's spirit sinks altogether; he looks at everything through the dark cloud in which he was enveloped; all his labour seems, in his view, to have been for nought and in vain, and he has only to lie down and die. His spirit, harassed by what he deemed fruitless efforts to bring the nation back to its faith, longed to enter into rest.

Now, in all this we perceive the workings of impatience and unbelief. Elijah said nothing about longing to depart when he stood on mount Carmel. No; there all was triumph; there he seemed to be achieving something — he seemed to be of some use, and therefore he thought not of his departure. But the Lord would show His servant not only what he "must do," but also what he "must suffer." The former we like well enough, the latter we are not so well prepared for. And yet the Lord is as much glorified in a patient sufferer as in an active servant. The graces that are developed by one who is enabled to endure protracted suffering are as fragrant in their perfume as all the fruits of active service. This our prophet should have borne in mind. But ah, the heart can well understand and sympathise with him in his gloom and despondency.

There are few of the Lord's servants who have not, at some time or other, eagerly desired to put off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict, particularly at times when all their labour and testimony would seem to be in vain, and when they are disposed to look upon themselves as mere cumberers of the ground. Yet we must wait God's time, and until then seek to pursue our way in patient, uncomplaining service. There is a vast difference between longing to get away from trial and sorrow, and longing to be at home in our Father's house.

No doubt the thought of rest is sweet, ineffably sweet, to the labouring man. It is sweet to think of the time when our own gracious God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, sweet to think of those green pastures and living fountains to which the Lamb will lead His flock throughout the coming ages of glory. In a word, the whole prospect presented to the view of faith is sweet and cheering; yet we have no right to say, "O Lord, take away my life." Nothing but an impatient spirit could ever dictate such language.

How different is the spirit breathed in the following words of the apostle Paul! "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith"(Phil. 1: 23-25).

These words exhibit a truly Christian spirit. The servant of the Church should seek the Church's good, and not his own advantage. If Paul had considered himself, he would not have tarried a moment on earth; but when he considered the Church, he desired to abide and continue for the purpose of furthering its joy and faith. This should have been Elijah's desire too: he should have desired to remain for the benefit of the nation. But here he failed. He had fled into the wilderness under the influence of unbelief, and for the purpose of saving his life, and then desired that his life might be taken away simply to escape from the trials which his position involved.

In all this we may learn a most profitable lesson. Unbelief is sure to drive us from the place of testimony and service. So long as Elijah walked by faith, so long he occupied the place of a servant and a witness; but the moment his faith gave way, he abandoned both and fled into the wilderness. Unbelief ever unfits us for the place of service, and renders us useless. We never can act for God save in the energy of faith. We should remember this at a time like the present, when so many are giving up and turning aside. I suppose we may lay it down as a fixed principle of truth, that whenever a man abandons any distinctive position of testimony, it is from positive unbelief in the truth which led him into it.

Thus, for example, at the present day we see many who at one time took up a very distinct and prominent position from having learnt (as they stated) that great truth, the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. Now, when this truth is really learnt, and held in power, it delivers from man's authority in matters of faith, and leads Christians out of those systems where such authority is acknowledged and defended.

If the Holy Ghost rules in the Church, then man has no right to interfere, no right to decree and institute ceremonies; for in doing so he is most presumptuously interfering with the divine prerogative. If therefore a man sincerely believe this important truth, his belief will certainly influence his conduct so far that he will feel himself called upon to bear testimony against every system in which this truth is practically denied; by separating from it.

It is not a question of what or whom he will attach himself to. No; this is another, and an after, consideration. A man's first business is to "cease to do evil," and after that to "learn to do well."

However, many who once professed to see this truth, and to act upon it, have since lost confidence in it, and as a consequence have retired from their distinct position, and gone back to those systems from which they had emerged. Like Elijah, they have not realized all their expectations; the results which they looked for have not appeared, therefore they have fled from the scene, and doubtless many have felt disposed to say, "It is enough."

Yes, many a heart which once cherished high and fond expectations respecting the Church is now bowed down with sorrow and disappointment. Those who professed to see and act upon the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and other collateral truths, have, to say the least, failed to carry them into practice, and not only failed, but in many instances have made a most humiliating exhibition of themselves; and the enemy has not been backward in making his own use of all this. He has used it especially to discourage the hearts of those who, no doubt, desired to stand in testimony for Christ, but who, seeing the failure of everything like corporate testimony on the earth, have given up in despair.

However, let Christians observe this: it was unbelief that made Elijah fly into the wilderness, and it is unbelief which causes any one to give up that position of testimony into which the truth of the Holy Ghost's presence in the Church would necessarily lead him.

Those who thus retreat prove that it was not with God and His eternal truth, but with man and his circumstances, that they had to do. If God's truth be the basis of our acting, we shall not be affected by man's mutability and failure. Man may, and assuredly will, fail in his very best and purest efforts to carry out the truth of God; but shall man's failure make the truth of God of none effect? "God forbid; yea, let God be true and every man a liar."

If those who profess to hold the blessed doctrine of the unity of the Church should split into parties; if those who hold the doctrine of the Spirit's presence in the Church for the purpose of rule and ministry should nevertheless practically lean upon man's authority; if those who profess to be looking for the personal appearance and reign of the Son of man should be found grasping with eagerness after the things of this present world, shall these things nullify those heavenly principles?

Certainly not. Thank God, truth will be truth to the end. God will be God, though man should prove himself a thousandfold more imperfect than he is. Wherefore, instead of giving up in despair because men have failed to make a right use of God's truth, we should rather hold fast that truth as the only stay of our souls amid universal ruin and shipwreck.

Had Elijah held fast the truth which filled his soul when he stood on mount Carmel, he would never have been found beneath the juniper tree, nor would he have given utterance to such words as "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Yet the Lord can graciously meet his poor servant even asleep under a juniper tree. "He knoweth our frame, He remembers that we are dust," and therefore, instead of granting the petulant request of His harassed and disappointed servant, He rather seeks to feed and strengthen him for further exertion. This is not "the manner of man," but it is, blessed forever be His name, the manner of God, whose ways and thoughts are not as ours. Man would often deal roughly and harshly with his fellow, making no allowance for him, but acting towards him in haste and severity. Not so God. He ever deals in the deepest pity and tenderness. He understood Elijah, and He remembered the stand he had recently made for His name and truth, and therefore He would minister to him in the season of his depression.

"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" (1 Kings 19: 5, 8).

The Lord knows better than we do the demands that may be made on us, and He graciously strengthens us according to His estimate of those demands. The prophet wished to sleep for sorrow, but the Lord wished to strengthen and nerve him for future service. Like the disciples in the garden, who, overwhelmed with deep sorrow at the apparent failure of all their fondly cherished hopes, allowed themselves to sink into profound slumber while their blessed Master would have had them girding up their loins and nerving their arms for the trying scenes on which they were about to enter. But Elijah did eat and drink; and being thus strengthened, he proceeded to mount Horeb. Here again we have to trace the sorrowful actings of an impatient spirit. Elijah seems determined to retire from his place of service and testimony altogether. If he cannot sleep under the juniper tree, he will hide himself in a cave. "He came thither unto a cave, and lodged there." When once a man allows himself to slip aside from the position in which faith would keep him, there is no accounting for the extremes into which he may run. Nothing but abiding faith in the Word of God can maintain any one in the path of service, because faith makes a man satisfied to wait for the end, whereas unbelief, looking only at surrounding circumstances, sinks into complete despondency.

The Christian must make up his mind to meet with nothing but trial and disappointment here. We may often dream of rest and satisfaction in some condition or other here; but it is only a dream. Elijah had no doubt hoped to see a mighty moral change brought about by his instrumentality; and instead of that, his life was threatened. But he ought to have been prepared for this. The man who had fearlessly faced Ahab and all the prophets of Baal ought surely to have been able to bear a message from a woman. Yet no; his faith had given way. When a man's faith gives way, his own shadow will deter him. In contemplating the prophet's position on mount Horeb, one is disposed to ask, Can it be the same man whom we saw so recently standing on mount Carmel, at an altar of twelve stones, and there so blessedly vindicating the God of Israel in the presence of his brethren? Alas! what a powerless creature man is when not sustained by simple faith in the testimony of God! David could, at one time, meet Goliath in the power of faith, and afterwards say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Faith gets above circumstances and looks at God; unbelief loses sight of God, and looks only at circumstances. Unbelief says, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight;" faith says, "We are well able to overcome them." However, the Lord does not leave His servant in the cave; He still follows him, and seeks to bring him again and again back to that post which he had abandoned in his impatience and unbelief. "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" What a reproof! Why did Elijah thus bury himself in a cave? Why had he retreated from the honourable post of testimony? Because of Jezebel's message, and because his ministry had not been as fully owned as he expected. He thought to have reaped a more cheering harvest from all his labour than a threatening message and apparent desertion, and therefore he had sought the retirement of a mountain cave, as a place suited to indulge his feelings. Now, it must be admitted that there was much — very much to wound the prophet's spirit; he had come from his quiet retreat at Zarephath to face the whole nation, headed by Jezebel and a host of wicked priests and prophets. He had confounded the latter, through God's grace; God had sent down fire from Heaven in answer to his prayer; all Israel had seemed to acknowledge the truth as proclaimed by him. All these things must have raised his expectations to no ordinary height; yet, after all, his life is threatened, he sees no one to stand by him, he is enveloped in a thick cloud, he abandons the field of conflict, and hides himself in a cave.

It is much easier to censure another than to act aright, and we must be exceedingly slow in pronouncing judgement upon the actions of so honoured a servant as Elijah the Tishbite. But though we should not deal much in censure, we may, at least, draw instruction and warning from this section of our prophet's history. We may learn a lesson of which we stand very much in need. "What doest thou here?" is a question which might justly be put to many of us from time to time, when, in impatience or unbelief, we leave our proper place of service amongst our brethren, to sleep under a juniper tree, or hide ourselves in a cave.

Are there not many at this moment who, aforesaid, were powerful advocates of the principles connected with the unity and worship of the people of God, to be found either asleep or hidden in caves? that is, they are doing nothing for the furtherance of those truths which they once advocated. This is a truly sorrowful reflection. To such the question, "What doest thou here?" should come with special force. Yes, what are such doing? or rather, what are they not doing in the way of positive mischief to the sheep of Christ? A man who thus retires is not merely harmless, he is noxious; he is really injuring his brethren.

( Amplified Bible; Joyce Meyers; 2006; Faith Words; Scripture; Commentaries; pages 792-794 )

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