1 Kings - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 4 (1856), Elijah and Ahab.

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1 Kings 18:17, &c.

THE time now came for the servant of the Lord publicly to testify for God. He had proved Jehovah's faithfulness and grace in a secret life of faith at Cherith, and honored the living and true God when no human eye was upon him. In the family circle at Zarephath he again proved the same faithfulness and grace in another course of action, and distinguished himself by his life and walk of faith and love—he walked "as seeing Him who is invisible." In his intercourse with Obadiah, he faithfully made it appear whose he was, and whom he served. All the temptation and discipline which this man of God experienced fitted him for more extensive service, and he was now called to honor God in a very prominent and public capacity.

Without doubt, this gradual leading of the Spirit, from deep secret exercise and service to public testimony, is recorded "for our learning," and is a divine principle that may well be heeded by us; and though it serve to humble us, it will not be without profit, if it cast us more upon God for strength and grace to honor Him in what we call small matters, and circumstances of retirement, and thus qualify us for public testimony. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," is a principle taught by our Lord Himself; and we also find the apostle Paul insisting upon practical godliness in family and household responsibilities as an indispensable qualification for pastor ship in the Church of God. (1 Tim. 3:5.)

But, to turn again to the ancient Scriptures, we also find in the history of Gideon the same remarkable threefold character of experience and service recorded by the Spirit of God. We see that his acquaintance with God in the accepted sacrifice, and the Divine assurance that followed, "Peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die," constrain him to build an altar, and worship the Lord God of Israel. (Judges 6:21-24.) In this we see, as in the history of Elijah, his soul-exercises alone with God. Next, we find Gideon engaged in faithfully serving God in his own family—his father's house—and, according to the commandment of the Lord, he "cuts down the grove," sacrifices his "father's young bullock," overturns and destroys that which was contrary to the truth of the living God, and builds an altar to the God of Israel. (vss. 5:25, 27.) The 31St verse shows us how remarkably the Lord honored his testimony. After these things, having repeatedly and in various ways, through much temptation, proved the faithfulness and grace of God, he goes forth, according to Divine appointment, to honor the God of Israel before an innumerable host of the enemies of the people of the Lord.

And do we not perceive the same principle, in all its perfectness, in the path of the Lord Himself? The first thirty years of the blessed Lord in the days of His flesh were spent in glorifying God, more especially in secret and social duties. "I was cast upon Thee from the womb, Thou art My God from My mother's belly, Thou didst make Me hope when I was upon My mother's breasts," &c. were the utterances of the heart of the holy child Jesus. While the inspired account of His going down to Nazareth with His mother and Joseph, and being subject to them, together with His holy and gentle reproof, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" plainly show us how infinitely He glorified God, both in secret and in family associations, before He came forth as God's public witness to Israel. It is happy thus to trace those features in the path of Him who hath "left us an example that we should follow His steps." We never find the Lord Jesus seeking the esteem of men. Wherever He was, and whatever the circumstances, His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work." "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant ... . He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." May this mind be in us!

In considering the history of Elijah, we cannot but observe that the blessed Lord seems remarkably shadowed forth by this tried and honored servant. We see him not only as a solitary witness for God, but it may be said that he came unto his own, and his own received him not. He was also counted one "that troubleth Israel:" he testified of it that the works thereof were evil. Moreover, the history of Elijah, prior to his coming forth in public testimony, is left in comparative obscurity; an occasional intimation of his faith and dependence on God, his circumstances and service in the family circle, his passing through an experience of death and resurrection, and his temptation on meeting Obadiah, being the principal points touched on before he comes forth in the deeply solemn testimony, in the face of all Israel, to which he was called. We may notice farther, that his public testimony did not close until he had offered to God an acceptable sacrifice, which was followed by judgment on some, but with blessing to others who beheld the sacrifice, and testified, saying, "The Lord He is God; The Lord He is God." We afterward find the offerer of the sacrifice on the top of the mount interceding for his people, which in due time is followed with an abundant shower of blessing from heaven. The scene closes with the prophet coming forth again, running in triumph before the royal chariot. All this testifies of Jesus to our souls.

The condition of Israel at the time of Elijah's testimony was very awful. "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.) Religion still had a place and abounded—there were four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal; but it was not the true religion. Some measure of truth might be associated with it, but the wisdom of the creature had displaced the counsel of "the only wise God." The king and people rejected the commandments of the Lord, that they might keep their own tradition. A mixture of truth and error kept them in this God-dishonoring position of halting "between two opinions." The whole lump was well nigh leavened with the idolatry of the age. It has always been Satan's craft to frustrate the truth by mixing what is untrue with it, and thus deceive and blind. In the garden of Eden he admitted the truth, that if our first parents ate of the forbidden tree they would he as gods; but he deceived the woman by appending to it the malicious lie, "Ye shall not surely die." In a later day he stole the comfort and power of the grace of Christ from the Galatian saints, not by presenting in its stead something grossly evil; no, in this way the snare would be apparent; but by subverting its simplicity and truth. By adding "circumcision," an old ordinance of God, to the finished work of Jesus, he seduced them from the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and entangled them again with a yoke of bondage. By thus mixing up truth and error he imbued their minds with "another gospel," that, were even an angel from heaven to preach, he might justly "be accursed." And we know that in

Ahab's day there was a certain acknowledgment of the God of Israel while they bowed down to Baal, as there had formerly been a dancing round the golden calf while professedly keeping a feast to Jehovah. This reads us a serious lesson, and may serve to exhort us to hold fast the faithful word of the Lord, and to bid us beware of being corrupted from the simplicity of Christ by philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men.

Elijah's testimony was to the faithfulness of God and the truth of His word, and against their apostacy; so that when the king accosted him with, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" his reply was, "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 followed Baalim." (vss. 17, 18.)

Such was the bold and true witness of this man of faith; and I would ask, Is not the rejection of the authority of Scripture always a sure mark of departure from God Himself? Most assuredly it is. I do not say but that the Scripture may be read and ostensibly acknowledged, but its authority can only be received into the hearts and consciences of those whose aim is to live for the glory of the Lord. Among such the word of the Lord has always been highly valued. Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat thaw and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." (Jer. 15:16.) Job declared, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." (Job 23:12.) David asks. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" and replies, "by taking heed thereto according to Thy word." (Psa. 119:9.) He also said, "By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." (Psa. 17:4.) And again, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." (Psa. 119:11.) And we know of the Lord Jesus, that "His delight was in the law of the Lord: and in His law did He meditate day and night." (Psa. 1:2.)

As God has been forsaken so has His word been set aside in all ages. Departure from God's word was Jeremiah's frequent testimony against the nation of Israel. He could delight in God's word; but "they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one after the imagination of their evil heart." (ch. 11:8.) The prophet tells us, that "they hearkened not to the words of God, or to His law, but rejected it" (ch. 6:19); that "the word of the Lord was unto them a reproach, they had no delight in it" (ch. 6:10); and that "the prophets prophesied falsely, and the people loved to have it so." (ch. 5:31.) And with this was connected the solemn declaration of the Lord, "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (ch. 2:13.)

While we thus see that departure from the authority of the word of God is connected with forsaking God Himself, we also find that returning to the commandments of the Lord is always found to be the path of blessing. When David first attempted to bring up the Ark of the Lord it was connected with signal failure and sorrow; he conferred with flesh and blood-consulted his captains, &c.; but when he acted according to the word of the Lord, wherein it was written that "none ought to carry the Ark of God but the Levites," it was attended with abundant joy and comfort. (1 Chr. 13.-15.; see also Num. 4:2-15; Deut. 10:8, and 31:9.) When the king Jehoshaphat was in great difficulty and distress because of the numerous host that was against him (2 Chr. 20), his refuge was in God; and in prayer he reminded God of His own promise (vs. 9); and published to Judah and Jerusalem the certainty of blessing to those who honored God's word, saying, "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper." (vs. 20.) We know what victory and blessing followed. When Hezekiah came to the throne, he discovered that the Passover had not been kept for a long time in such sort as it was written; he therefore sent posts throughout all Israel and Judah to command them to turn to the Lord and to keep His word; and in keeping His commandments they found great reward: it was such a time of gladness and joy as had not been known in Jerusalem since the time of Solomon. (2 Chr. 30.) The great revival afterward in the days of Josiah, originated in their finding a book of the law in the house of the Lord, which the king read in the ears of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (2 Chr. 34., 35.) And the time of blessing after the return of the children of Israel from their captivity, was also particularly associated with Ezra's having "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." (Ezra 7:10.) Lastly, we may refer to the testimony of our blessed Lord Himself, when He said, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition;" and remark also how frequently He referred to the authority of the holy Scriptures, and the importance of practically fulfilling them. We know also what blessing there was in the apostles' days, when "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."

In these days of man's increasing greatness, when principles of infidelity are rapidly accumulating, it will be needful for us, beloved, often to consider our ways, and to be very jealous for the word of the Lord. If God be pleased to make His holy Scripture refreshing and savory to our spirits, and to conic with power to our consciences, we may well welcome it as His abounding mercy. The word of the prophet Amos on this subject is very solemn: "Behold the days come saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall weeder from sea to sea, and from the north even unto the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." (Amos 8:11, 12.) May we, beloved, well ponder these solemn admonitions, and let them animate us to serve our Saviour-God only, to acknowledge the authority of the word of God only, the teaching of the Spirit of God only, and to glory unceasingly in salvation by grace only.

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 2 (1854), Elijah at the Brook.

James 5:17; 1 Kings 17:1-9.

LITTLE is recorded of the history of Elijah prior to his public service, beyond that he "was a man subject to his passions as we are," and one who "prayed earnestly" (James 5:17). Whether he was rich or poor, old or young, before his life of faith, matters little: we only really begin to live when we have died unto sin, and are alive unto God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; and this, too, dates the commencement of our true riches.

It is worthy of notice, that the earnest praying of this dear man of God is the first feature in his history that the blessed Spirit presents to us—"He prayed earnestly that it might not rain." (James 5) He knew what secret intercourse with God was, and he was rewarded openly (Matt. 6:6). He sought the honor of God, and was honored. All Israel seemed carried away by a spirit of idolatry, and it was terrible to Elijah's heart to see no one standing up for the truth of God. Doubtless he knew from the word of the Lord, that it was the will of God to visit such abominations with shutting the heavens that there should be no rain (Deut. 11:16, 17), therefore "he prayed earnestly" that Jehovah would interfere, make known His displeasure, and not allow the adversary to prosper, and the name of the Holy One of Israel to be so blasphemed. The prophet "prayed earnestly that it might not rain," &c. &c., and the prayer of one man prevailed with God, and brought down His

interference with the whole nation. By this secret dealing with God, Elijah was strengthened to go into the presence of the king himself, and boldly testify, in the name of the “Lord God of Israel, before whom,” said he, “I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain,” &c.

And in this solemn mission there was none with him. He had to deliver his sorrowful sentence against revolted Israel alone, in the presence of their wicked and idolatrous king: he had no human helper, no yoke-fellow to take part in his denunciation of judgment. But the word of God was his guide, the presence of the Lord his hiding-place, the joy of the Lord his strength, and the fear of the Lord his safeguard from the fear of man. Truly, he walked with God!

The man of faith and prayer, though without natural resources, must be preserved in time of famine (Psa. 37:19). “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him.” Elijah seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and food, raiment, &c are added unto him. (Matt. 6).

Hence we read, “The word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1 Kings 17:2-4). Who would have supposed that birds of prey, unclean birds, whose natural instinct would have led them to pick out the prophet’s eyes, would be thus employed to minister to the necessities of the Lord’s servant! But so it was, and God often leads us by a way that we know not, makes darkness light before us, and crooked things straight, according to His own word.

The prophet makes no remark on this unexpected command of God: he asks no question, indulges no imaginary nor real difficulty, leans not unto his own understanding, but trusts in the living and true God to fulfill His own gracious promise; and, therefore, he goes forward. He was a man who “prayed earnestly,” and consequently was prepared unto every good work— a vessel meet for the Master’s use. Faith is always obedient to God’s commands; it waits God’s warrant for acting, and that only. Elijah, therefore, went to the exact spot he was commanded; he “did according to the word of the Lord,” and was fed with “bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook;” thus proving, and daily experiencing, the faithfulness of Him who cannot deny Himself. Imagine for a moment the position of this dear man of God—solitary, secluded from all human associations, apparently Unoccupied, yet most truly serving the Lord with all humility of mind, enjoying communion with God, and loaded with His benefits: all this time undergoing trials of faith and patience, while witnessing the resources of the brook becoming less and less every day. The same word of the living and true God, however, that brought him there, sustained him also, and enabled him to wait with patience. It may be said of him, as it was of Abraham, “By faith he went out,” and “by faith he sojourned.” How simple and blessed is the life and walk of faith!

At length the time came when “the brook dried up.” It was a solemn moment for the prophet, all visible means of sustenance were gone, that great blessing of the Lord in the time of drought was expended; but, though the gifts of God may alter, or become exhausted, His resources fail not, His grace is as rich as ever, and His loving kindness in no measure abates. As the running brook had been a blessing, so the “dried up” brook is a blessing also, as teaching the man of God the blessedness of trusting in Jehovah under all circumstances, and of proving the inexhaustible resources of the Fountain of living waters. How needful it is on such occasions as these, when streams, that have ministered blessing, fail and dry up, and gourds of comfort and protection wither, to abide in the unchangeable, unfathomable, love of Jehovah-jireh! What else could have sustained Elijah’s soul at this time? What besides could have preserved him from taking refuge in some broken cistern or carnal stratagem? We find him quiet and unmoved until the word of Him who cared for him was heard, “Arise, get thee to Zarephath,” &c. Oh! how precious it is to trust God, who is so worthy of our confidence!

The Divine purpose in sending Elijah to the brook had, doubtless, now been accomplished; the appointed lessons had there been learned; and the man of faith fitted for a higher class of instruction in the school of God. He had proved the power of earnest prayer, the blessedness of simply obeying the word of the Lord, the favor and faithfulness of God toward those who trust in Him, and therefore he was prepared for another sphere of service, and to have former lessons deepened in his soul, in circumstances where ravens had disappeared, and the brook had “dried up.”

Elijah, however, lost nothing, though the brook “dried up,” for Jehovah was his Shepherd. The solitude was exchanged for opportunities of fellowship, and the rude hiding-place of Cherith for the widow’s house of Zarephath, so that one great blessing was removed to be succeeded by many and greater; and, though it might have been unknown to the prophet at the time why he was to hide himself by the brook, he afterward found that it was God’s provision for his safety from the vengeance of Ahab, who had sought him by sending to every kingdom and nation for him. Oh how great is His goodness which He has laid up for them that fear Him, for them that trust in Him before the sons of men! Let the Lord’s tender care over His servant teach us, beloved, to “be still” in circumstances of adversity, and to trust God where we cannot see Him nor understand His way, in the blessed assurance that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

Those who trust in God may be greatly tempted, and distressed, but will never be confounded.

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