2 Kings - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 5 (1857), Elisha and the Shunamite.

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2 Kings 4:8-37.

THERE are certain sympathies of the renewed mind which we quickly recognize in each other, The Shunamite was of the distant tribe of Issachar, and not acquainted with Elisha. There were, nevertheless, links of union and understanding between them. “I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.” She understood not only that this was an holy man of God; but she understood his tastes and habits. She received him, a prophet, in the name of a prophet. She does not propose a great thing to her husband, for that would not have suited the “man of God.” This was real hospitality— entertaining a prophet according to the taste of a prophet’s mind. He was a pilgrim in the earth. How blessed it is, in a cold forbidding world like this, to see two together of one mind and understanding according to Christ. This is the communion of saints. Just so the Lord, in the house of Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. It is not the feast that forms the atmosphere of the room, but the love. It was the mind and heart of the woman that entertained Elisha; and, oh, how little we get of it in this world!

We are, then, like this woman, to provide according to the tastes and desires of the renewed mind. Elisha found himself at home (vs. 11); and it is blessed when the saints find themselves at home in each other’s company. We are not careful enough to be imitators of such blessed samples given by the Spirit of God. The question is, have the sympathies of love spread the feast? Thus it was with the family at Bethany. “The house was filled with the odor of the ointment.”

The woman stands before Him (vs. 12). Though she was the mistress, she takes the place of the inferior. Yes, beloved, we want to cultivate the little touches of the Spirit given to us in such a scene as this, where so much of heaven shines forth.

The prophet acknowledges all her hospitality (vs. 13), and desires to recompense her; but as he had not used his interest at court for himself, to be a great one in the earth, so, in like manner, the woman would not be a great one: she says, “I dwell among my own people.” What union is here? Are you, and am I willing thus to occupy ourselves till Jesus come, in that lowly place where we are set, and not desirous to advance one step higher in this world’s ranks; content that the king’s ear, and the captain’s ear, should be closed upon our names?

She never forgets herself (vs. 14). Familiarity may lead to liberty; but here was close intimacy of two hearts that understood each other. It was not an intimacy that allowed nature to take the advantage; nor was it a liberty that would degenerate into anything common or coarse. It is blessed to see Elisha like his Master, of whom he was the shadow, having nothing, depending on the woman for a lodging. Thus was it with Jesus; yet if leprosy, or blindness, or deafness, came before Him, he had power to meet it; so also Elisha. He travels in the greatness of the strength of the Spirit, but he does nothing for himself. He can feed the armies of kings; he can restore the dead; he can heal the leper; he can make the oil to flow;—all this time he reminds us of Jesus, who has women to minister to Him of their substance.

He now speaks to this daughter of Abraham as God did to Abraham, “Thou shalt have a son.” (vss. 14-21.) Here we get into sympathy with the faith of this woman, who was a child of Abraham. When death enters her house, she is prepared. There is no surprise, no amazement; but the calmness of one who knew there was a power and grace that could meet her every necessity, the calmness and the certainty that marks the way of this dear believing child of Abraham. (vs. 21.) Here is no disturbance. She does not deal with the necessity as though there was no power or remedy above it. Beloved, when our faith brings us into the presence of God, this same calmness is ours.

Shall I look at the work of Satan, and take the sentence of death into me, and shall I not look at the work and doing of the Lord Jesus for me? The woman’s conduct was calm; so was that of Abraham in offering up Isaac; he also gets the young man and the ass, and tells them to abide, and he and the lad will go and worship. There was no doubt in his mind as to the certainty of death, but he was calmly talking of life. It is this same spirit which we observe so sweetly in the woman who knew there was relief in the prophet for her. We should cultivate this calmness and composure of soul. We should know that life in Christ is as certain to one who believes, as death through sin is certain. We know that the power of God was enough, and nothing but that power would do.

What a blessed thing, she can say, (vs. 26,) “It is well.” The moment we apply to the power and grace in Jesus, that moment we can talk of life in the midst of death. It is not well if we look to the circumstances, but it is well if we look to the power of God. She presses through ordinances, through new moons and sabbaths, through Gehazi; they will not do, she must come to the feet of the prophet of God. (vs. 27, so again in vs. 30.) Oh, beloved, I do invite every one to linger here a little moment. What a temptation, “take my staff;” but nothing will satisfy the woman short of the presence of the prophet himself. It is this that the Spirit of God desires in us. It is Jesus; Jesus Himself, and nothing else will satisfy the conscience of a renewed soul. It is a precious moment when we are brought to know that,

The soul rightly convicted by the Spirit of God can never rest in any ordinance. Though the prophet’s own lips propose that the staff should be taken, the woman refuses it, just as before she had refused to listen to her husband when he talks of the new moon and sabbaths. This is what Jesus wants. He came that He should Himself be used, and not another. It is HIMSELF. He has not entrusted His power to any delegate, or vicar, or representative. He wants the conscience to say, ‘none but Thou, none but Thou canst do me any good.’

(Ver. 30.) And he arose, and followed her. Jesus only waits, in the history of our conscience, for a moment like this. Ask what you will. Jesus is at the disposal of our necessity, let us tell Him we cannot do without Him, and the Son of God is at our bidding.

(Ver. 31.) I like to see the prophet’s staff no better than a piece of wood. This ordinance is rebuked, it is laughed at. If we stop short of Jesus there is no life. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life.

Verses 33, 34 present a blessed picture, the soul of Elisha breathing life into a dead child.

(Ver. 37.) Mark the calmness and the certainty of the woman. She fell at his feet, and bowed. She has no more doubt that the child is living, than she had before, that it was dead. She does not examine it, or question it. Yes, beloved, the work of Christ is a certain work! She is not amazed with any amazement; her faith is more like Abraham’s than Sarah’s. Amazement does not belong to faith. We shall have forever the wonder of adoration, but not the wonder of amazement. She was a happy mother, it is true, but happier as a child of faith who could carry her necessities up to God, and in calmness and certainty have those necessities met.

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