

# Table of Contents

[Chapter 1 - The Way to Heavenly Fulness](#Chapter_1___The_Way_to_Heavenly)

[Chapter 2 - The Exemplification of this Zeal in](#Chapter_2___The_Exemplification)

[Chapter 3 - The Last Journey of Elijah with](#Chapter_3___The_Last_Journey_of)





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2

# The Zeal of the Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Contents

[Chapter 1 - The Way to Heavenly Fulness](#Chapter_1___The_Way_to_Heavenly)

[Chapter 2 - The Exemplification of this Zeal in the Life of Elijah](#Chapter_2___The_Exemplification)

[Chapter 3 - The Last Journey of Elijah with Elisha](#Chapter_3___The_Last_Journey_of)

3

# Chapter 1 - The Way to Heavenly Fulness

Reading: 1 Kings 19:9-10; 2 Kings 19:29-31; Isaiah 59:17; John 2:14-17

The word we see to be common to those passages strikes the keynote for our present meditation, The Zeal of the Lord, or The Way to Heavenly Fulness. Heavenly fulness in a very real and special way is set before us in the life of Elisha. This fact will impress us every time we read that life, or anything in connection with it. From beginning to end, wherever Elisha is seen to come into a situation, the result is fulness, living fulness, fulness of life. That fulness is heavenly fulness because it came out from heaven, had its rise in heaven. It was when Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, and his mantle fell upon Elisha, that Elisha’s real life and ministry commenced. So that it was a heavenly fulness, and it is of this that his life speaks to us.

Elisha, then, was the outcome and fulness of Elijah. Elijah laid the foundation and provided the ground for Elisha’s ministry, and in spiritual things Elijah indicates, therefore, the way, the basis, the foundation of heavenly fulness. Elisha required Elijah. In a very real sense he sprang out of Elijah. But Elijah also needed Elisha. He needed that which would be the increased expression of his own life. Here you have part and counterpart. Here you have the ground or foundation, and the superstructure. Here you have the seed, and fruit, and fullgrown tree. You need to know the nature of the seed, to know exactly what it is you are planting or sowing, and it is likewise important to recognize what Elijah stands for, in order that you may get the Elisha result. It is very nice to take up what is presented to us of heavenly fulness in Elisha, and be drawn out to that, and to say: Well, we desire with all our hearts to have the heavenly fulness, the resurrection life, the power of His resurrection as brought out by Elisha; but it is quite impossible for us to enter to that, to know anything about the heavenly fulness, unless we stand upon the Elijah ground which provides for it.

The Starting Place Of Heavenly Fulness

We therefore look to Elijah, to see the starting place, the foundation, the basis of heavenly fulness. Before we go on in our consideration of Elijah in this particular connection—and there is no doubt whatever that that is the meaning of the life of these two viewed as one life; seed and fruit; foundation and building; root and branch—there are one or two preliminary words of a general character to be said, though they are of great importance.

God has a fixed starting place. God never changes that starting place, nor does He move from it. The importance of recognizing that to be so is that everything in the matter of progress is determined by the starting place. The starting place governs all the later life. That means that if we take up things at a point beyond God’s starting place, we shall have that much to go back upon and to undo, or we shall otherwise be limited as to the measure of Divine fulness forever after.

I am sure that strikes you as being of some significance, for there are undoubtedly a great many who take up things of the Lord a long way beyond God’s starting point, and therefore a great deal of time is occupied by the Lord in taking them backward rather than forward, in undoing a great deal of history. They do not immediately move on from the point at which they sought to begin, but we find them being humbled, undone, and their movement for a long time seems rather backward than forward, rather down than up. The explanation is that they have taken things up elsewhere than at God’s starting point.

4

On the other hand, where there is not the yielding to that work of God, that work of the Spirit which seeks to bring back by undoing, but rather a forcing on, a taking of things up at a point other than at God’s starting point, if there is an unwillingness to be brought right back to God’s basis, and a pressing on and determined taking up of work on the part of such, there remains to the end a limitation. This would explain many difficulties and problems which arise.

There are many who refuse the work of the Cross in its deepest meaning, who will not have it, who have yet taken up the things of God, and the work of God, without that deep work of the Cross in their lives, the need of which they refuse to acknowledge or to recognize. They seek to force their way onward, and to forge ahead with the work of God. They build. What they build may reach great dimensions, and according to the standards of men may appear to be something successful, something big, something full of activity and energy, but when you come to measure it with the golden reed, that is according to the Lord’s estimate of its spiritual value, it is very limited, very thin, very superficial, and represents but very little of the fulness of Christ in the lives of those concerned. These builders are full of activity, but they are babes in spiritual intelligence and understanding. The trouble is that things have been taken up somewhere beyond God's starting point, and there has not been a yielding to the Spirit to bring back to that point, and therefore there is a remaining limitation to the end, and tragically enough forever.

These are alternatives which arise from recognizing the fact that God has a fixed starting point which He never changes, and from which He never moves. It is necessary, on the one hand, to come to His starting point. Right at the beginning is the best time to come there, but if by reason of lack of knowledge, understanding, proper teaching, or because of our ignorance, we have been drawn into things without knowing of God’s starting point, then in His faithfulness to Himself, and in His faithfulness to us, but always with the highest and fullest interests in view, God will take in hand to bring us back, to undo, if we will let Him. On the other hand, unwillingness and unyieldedness leave the other alternative open, which is to go on, but to be forever in limitation, which God never willed for us.

Two Practical Issues

Now there is another thing to remember in this connection and it is that, while God’s starting place is unalterable, on our side there are two things of a practical character in relation to it.

(a) An Acceptance of God’s Position

Firstly, there must be an acceptance of all the implications of the fact in one definite act of faith and consecration. You and I will never know at any one time all the implications. We shall never be able to see all that God means in laying down this law of a fixed starting place. Everything, from the Divine standpoint, is bound up with that, and takes its rise from that, but we shall only realize this as we go on. It is for us to take the attitude of faith and consecration toward all the implications of it, though we do not fully know what they are. In one definite act we have to come to the place where we say: Now Lord, what You mean by bringing me to Your starting place, and all that is bound up with that, I stand into by faith. It is one definite act of commitment, acceptance, and consecration.

Many people have a very insufficient conception of the meaning of consecration. So often it is thought to be just a handing over of the life to God, a giving of oneself to the Lord in complete surrender. Well, of course, it is that, but there is far more in such an act of consecration than is generally recognized. Complete consecration means that we are going to allow the Lord to do all that He means by consecration, and not merely what we may think it to mean. When the Lord gets both

5

His hands upon a life, as it were, and that life is completely in His hands, the Lord does extraordinary things with, and in, that life; strange things; deep things; many things which were not looked for, not expected; things which are very unpleasant to the flesh and very mysterious, which the natural mind can never reconcile with the wisdom of God, nor with the love of God. That is all a part of consecration. Consecration means that we are henceforth in the Lord’s hands for Him to do what He sees is necessary. It is rather the surrender of an inner life, an inner being to God, than the mere superficial idea of just putting your life into the hands of God, with the thought that now God is going to use you mightily. There is something very much more in consecration than that, and from the standpoint of God, Who knows us, knows the requirements, knows what is necessary, there are many implications bound up with coming to God’s starting place.

You and I have to recognize that, and in one act of faith hand ourselves over to all the implications which are clear before His eye, and not only to what we may see of them at the moment. We find that as we go on, and things which we never thought of, never imagined, never anticipated, begin to arise in our experience, and we come to crises, to something in the nature of an impasse with the Lord, where we have a controversy over the Lord’s ways with us and come face to face with the Lord in a challenging attitude, the Lord will wait until we soften toward Him, and then He will say to us: But this was in the original reckoning! This is nothing new! This is not something that has just come in by the way! This was all in the original reckoning, and you told Me I could do just exactly what I liked! Are you prepared to stand on your original ground? This is what consecration and surrender means, and you accepted it for all that it meant. Are you going to stand there now?

Many of you know what is meant, although you have not had it presented in this way to your minds. You know that every fresh crisis only takes you back to your original position with the Lord. It at once recalls you to the place where you started, where you gave yourself to the Lord for all His way and will. Now you are saying: But I did not think it meant this! But the Lord did mean this, and He has thought a great deal more than we have ever yet conceived. God’s starting place has to be accepted in all its implications in one act of faith in Him.

(b) A Progressive Outworking

Secondly, there is the other side of this. There will be a progressive working out of the implications. God does not bring us in experience in one complete act into all those implications. They are all settled in Him, all perfected in Christ, but in us the implications will be worked out progressively. This, however, will only be on the ground that we have given the Lord full permission to work them out, and given Him an open way. Then He will work out progressively the implications of God’s starting place.

For different people that will mean different things. For some it will mean going back a bit, being taken back over the road traversed in order to get back to God’s starting place, to the end that they might have a greater fulness of the Lord and be released from the present limitation. That necessitates humility of spirit. It means that we shall have to let go a great deal of our assumed spiritual position; that we shall have to have our ideas about things very greatly changed. We have the generally accepted ideas, and conceptions, and definitions of spiritual things and work, the work of the Lord, ministry, and all such things, and now that system of thought and ideas is going to be ruled out, and we are going back to the beginning to discover that ministry is not the professional sort of thing that we had imagined it to be. Ministry from God’s standpoint is simply the outworking of what God has been doing inwardly, the fruit of spiritual history. Our ideas have to be entirely transformed, turned upside down, and we have to come back to God’s standard. Some of us know what all this implies. For years we had a certain idea of what ministry was, and then we had to come

6

to the place where we started all over again with God’s idea of ministry; but it has been worth while. We regard ourselves as such fools now for having thought that what we formerly cherished was God’s idea of ministry. Oh, blessed be God, He has met us at a point and caused us to traverse the past backward and come right to the beginning of ministry all over again on a different level, from a different standpoint, with a different idea. What a different ministry!

We use ministry as an illustration of what we mean in the application of this law. When we get into the hands of the Lord we recognize that He has a starting place, and He never leaves His position or His ground to come to find us where we are and to take us up for His service at that point, but we always have to come back to His starting place. It is one tremendous act, one deep act with God, one acceptance, perhaps in an agony—for it may well be we would never come to the point of acceptance save through an agony, the agony, maybe, of despair over our own spiritual lives, or despair as to our own present service, work, ministry—and we come to the place where there is an end, and where a new beginning has to be. We are confronted with the challenge as to whether we are going to let the Lord order everything according to His mind, and as we accept God’s starting point in one full-orbed acceptance, though we may have been in things for many years, all kinds of changes now begin to come about: changes of ideas, changes of conceptions, changes of mind, changes of manner, changes of activity. Things are changed, but they are changed from limitation to fulness, from earthly bondage to heavenly liberty; we have found God’s starting place to heavenly fulness.

Let us remember, then, that God has a starting place. He will not leave it to come to any self-chosen point of ours, but He will require that we come to His, and that we accept by faith all that that means, and then allow Him to work the principle out and yield ourselves to it as it works out progressively.

The Divine Treasure In The Earthen Vessel

Now we are able to come to Elijah as representing God’s starting point for heavenly fulness, and we will consider for a moment or two the man himself. Read through the life of Elijah again. It is one of the fullest lives, yet so far as narratives are concerned packed into the shortest compass. You are surprised, when you remember the significance of Elijah, the tremendous place that he occupies, how quickly his story is told. You are through the story in almost a few verses. Yet what a life! As you read it through, one thing that should impress you is the amount there is in it that speaks of human weakness and dependence. That is rather changing the point of view, for when we think of Elijah we always think of power, of wrath, of something terrific; we almost feel that we are in the presence of an earthquake. Yet if you read the story again you will be impressed with how much there is that indicates weakness and dependence.

Take the name of this man—Elijah! It means “Jehovah my strength.” That brings you at once to an utter position. Jehovah my strength! You can almost hear an echo of the words in the case of the Apostle Paul when he said: “...I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God.... ” Jehovah my strength!

Then as you touch his life at different points, you see hallmarks of weakness and dependence. Go with him to the brook Cherith. “Get thee hence, and turn thee 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.” What a position for a mighty man of God, a position of weakness, of dependence. The very fact that God commanded ravens to feed him showed how dependent he was upon God, because ravens are not given to feeding other people, it is not their disposition; it requires some sovereign act of God to make a raven look after someone else. If there is one outstanding characteristic about a raven it is “myself first!” So the very power of God was

7

necessary there to transcend this course of nature, and it was doubly so in that any creature should be the means of sustaining this prophet, this man of God.

Then the Lord let the brook dry up, and on its drying up He said: “Arise, get thee to Zarephath... I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” A widow woman! And when Elijah arrived at Zarephath what a state of things he found. The woman was on her last morsel, in a state of weakness, and her resources exhausted. What dependence upon God! What a state of weakness in himself!

Or pass on to that later point in his career, to the incident at Horeb, in which there occur the words for which we have such a liking, “...a still small voice” (the sound of gentle stillness). Elijah came to Horeb and entered into a cave. The Lord passed by, and there was a mighty earthquake, thunder and lightning, and a whirlwind, so that the very mount must have rocked and the rocks well-nigh split. There was a terrific sense of power, force, energy, and might. But God was not in the earthquake, God was not in the whirlwind. There followed a sound of gentle stillness, a still small voice, and God was in that. There was tumult in Elijah, resultant from Jezebel’s threat and Elijah’s fear. That tumult in Elijah seemed to be shouting for some mighty manifestation of power which should defeat Jezebel, cheat Jezebel of her object and save the Lord’s servant from her clutches. He was seeking escape from the clutches of Jezebel, from her threat, and what he needed, he felt, was some mighty exercise of power to deliver him. But the Lord was not in the earthquake, the Lord was not in the whirlwind, He was in the still small voice, the sound of gentle stillness. But what came out of the sound of gentle stillness? “Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” What was the outcome? Ahab was overthrown, and Jezebel was destroyed. All that came out of a sound of gentle stillness. The weakness of God is greater than men. Very eloquently God was saying, This whole thing is in My hand. Who is Jezebel? Who is Ahab? My little finger is more than their combined might! A sound of gentle stillness can produce something that will bring Ahab’s career to a very speedy end and Jezebel to a very humiliating one. It is a mighty lesson. It does not require God to come in an earthquake and a whirlwind to deal with a situation like that. Elijah, what are you doing here? Have you forgotten what your name is? Have you forgotten that in your weakness I have again and again made My strength perfect? My weakness is greater than all the combined force of the enemy. Elijah’s life is gathered up from the standpoint of the man himself in one great reality, namely, that it is God, not the man. God’s weakness associated with a man is more than all the strength of men against that man.

We have perhaps in measure been in the place of Elijah, conscious of the tremendous forces against us, human and diabolical, and have felt the need of some putting forth of mighty power, of God to rise up in an earthquake, in a whirlwind for our deliverance. We have looked for that, and, not seeing it, we have been discouraged, and have thought that the Lord had failed us, and we have begun to tell the Lord all about our devotion and our faithfulness—“I have been very jealous for the Lord....” The Lord has never come to us in a whirlwind, nor in an earthquake. I doubt whether anybody has ever been delivered by an earthquake or whirlwind coming from the Lord, but we have been delivered, we have been set on high, we have been brought out of that tempest of Satanic antagonism again and again, and the Lord has done it in such a quiet way. The Lord has not seen the need for an earthquake to deliver us. His weakness is greater than all other strength. He would teach us that, while we are what we are in ourselves, weak, in dependence upon God, we can be set over all the power of the enemy. It is so good that the Lord put it in the way of Elijah to go and do the things which were going to bring both Ahab and Jezebel to their ignominious end. It was as though the Lord said, All right, Elijah, just go along and anoint Elisha and anoint Jehu, and that is the end of Ahab

8

and Jezebel, and you have no more to fear than that: “...him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.” You see how the Lord is master of the situation, and how He brings His feeble, weak, consciously dependent servant into fellowship with Himself to bring an end to the enemy. There is a lot of history in that.

The Power Is Of God, And Not Of Men

The Lord never covered up the weaknesses of His servants. The Lord has not drawn a veil over that paragraph in the life of Elijah, His beloved servant to whom He refers many times, whom He brings into view at the most critical times, not only in ancient Israel but also in New Testament times. John the Baptist came in the power of Elijah. Then Moses and Elijah appear on the Mount of Transfiguration in connection with that other great crisis, the exodus which the Lord Jesus was about to accomplish at Jerusalem, the greatest crisis in the history of this world. No wonder the people, when they heard what the Lord Jesus was doing, somehow or other mixed up John the Baptist with Elijah in their mentality. Herod himself said that John was risen from the dead. That implied something rather bad for him in his consciousness, for he was much in the same place as Ahab.

However, the Lord has not covered up the weaknesses of His servants, or drawn a veil over such incidents as that where Elijah is seeking for a juniper tree and casting himself down, and complaining to the Lord, and asking for his life to be taken away. It is a painful scene, and yet the Lord brings it out in full, clear relief.

Why does the Lord not hide from others our weaknesses? Why does He not hide those wounds which shame would hide, those things about us that we would like to be kept covered up for pride’s sake? Why does the Lord let them come out? Well, if the Lord uses a man or a woman He is going to take good care that it is always known that the power working through them is not of themselves but of Him, and that if they for a moment get out of touch with Him it is very clearly revealed what they are, and that stands over against what He is. It is shown that these servants of His are not something in themselves, but that He is their strength.

You and I will never get to the place where the Lord will allow us to be something in ourselves. If ever you and I are in danger of getting there the Lord will very soon let us know that our usefulness to Him is altogether a matter of our dependence upon Him. Usefulness to God in a true way is always arrested when we lose the sense of dependence upon Him.

If Elijah stands out as one of the great peaks of usefulness to God, one that you can never miss as you scan the skyline, there is alongside of that this that we read of him, and you cannot shut your eyes to the fact. You feel you have somehow or other come down from great heights to great deeps when you read this passage about the breakdown of Elijah. Surely, in view of his faithfulness to the Lord, it would have been kind of the Lord to have covered that up and not inspired the recording of it! No! Elijah’s name means, “Jehovah my strength.” The incident under the juniper tree proclaims what Elijah is in himself. What is to be seen of value and effect in the life of Elijah is to be ascribed to the Lord in Elijah. So it is with Moses, and so with David, and so with all the others. The Lord has allowed the dark passages in their lives to be recorded just to show that men greatly used of God are only so used because of their dependence upon Him, and such records as these are necessary to us.

So then we are beginning to see the starting place of heavenly fulness. That is the first thing. Perhaps it is going a long way round, and saying a lot to indicate just one thing, but how important that thing is! The starting place of heavenly fulness is our emptiness, our dependence, our weakness. The Lord may have to take us right back there. If we have started at any point beyond dependence, beyond

9

emptiness, beyond weakness it is a painful way back to God’s starting point. But it is not all a backward march, for that very process of emptying is the way to the fulness. It is only making real to us what is already so clear to Him. It is, in a word, the bringing of us to the place where we know that all the fulness is in Him. Our fulness is in Him, but we never appreciate it, never enjoy it, never profit by it, never really enter into it in a living way, until that has been done in us which has made us conscious that it is so, and apart from this it is a bad look out for us.

It is so easy to say that all the fulness is in Him, to view it in an objective way, and to sing about it, but, oh, to come to the place where, knowing in a deep and terrible way how utterly futile we are in ourselves, we suddenly realize, in the presence of that deep poignant consciousness of our weakness, that that is only one side of things, and that the fulness is in Him for us. We need not stop because of our emptiness and weakness, we need not remain at the end, but that rather can be the place of beginning, and we can go on from there. The very emptiness and weakness is the ground upon which to move into a discovery that will ever keep us in a place of worship and wonder.

The Lord speak that word to our hearts.

10

# Chapter 2 - The Exemplification of this Zeal in

the Life of Elijah

Reading: 1 Kings 19:9,10,14; 2 Kings 19:29-31; Isaiah 59:17; John 2:14-17.

The key to the life of Elijah may very well be found in this utterance of his: "I have been very jealous for the Lord..." (1 Kings 19:14). I think those two words explain Elijah"very jealous." That jealousy was related to the Lord having His full place, His full rights in His Own people. That is what Elijah typified, and that undoubtedly is what is meant by the zeal of the Lord. Do you ask what zeal for the Lord means, what it is to be very jealous for in the Lord? It means that a man is absolutely separated from his own interests, from any personal interests, even in the Lord, and completely abandoned to Him that He might have His place and His rights in fulness. It is an utter attachment to the Lord for His interests. That is jealousy for the Lord. You cannot fail to see how Elijah was consumed with that fire of jealousy.

If we take the great Anti-type, the Lord Jesus Himself, Who by His action in the Temple caused these words from the Psalm instantly to leap into the minds of His disciples, "The zeal of Thine house shall eat me up" (John 2:17), we have no difficulty in marking that zeal or jealousy for God in His life in such utterances as these: " ...not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). "Lo, I am come... to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). It is a jealousy that the Father should have His place, and have it wholly, perfectly; that God should come into His rights.

The Link Between Elijah And John The Baptist

We referred in our previous meditation to the link between Elijah and John the Baptist. At the end of the Book of Malachi, in the last few verses of his prophecies, it is foretold that, before the great and terrible day of the Lord, Elijah would be sent. When you open the New Testament you find the disciples referring to that prophecy and asking the Lord Jesus about it, seeing that He claimed to be the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord Who had come. With that in mind, they were in reality voicing their own perplexity: The prophets said Elijah would come first, but we have not yet seen Elijah! The Lord Jesus pointed them to John the Baptist and said that this was Elijah, that Elijah had come and they had done to him what they would. When you go back to the prophecies concerning John the Baptist, you find this among the things foretold: "And he shall go before His face in the spirit and power of Elijah..." (Luke 1:17). In thinking upon that second chapter of the Gospel by Luke, in which occurs the account of the birth of the Lord Jesus, and the birth of John the Baptist, you can hardly fail to be impressed with the way these two are brought together in the chapter. It is a most remarkable thing. We are shown Zacharias fulfilling his course in the temple, the angel appearing to him, and all that the angel spake as to the birth of John. Then there is a breaking off, and the record of the angel appearing to Mary is given, and the annunciation. This is followed by the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country, and the two coming together in that way. It was said that John the Baptist should go before the face of the Lord, and that he would do so in the power and spirit of Elijah. You look for the inner meaning and significance of this, and you remember Elijah and what he stood for. Elijah is an abiding example of a consuming jealousy for the rights of God. Now that spirit is transferred to John the Baptist, and he runs before, clears the way, announces the coming of Christ in the spirit of Elijah. He is bringing in the rights of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is, in effect, in purpose, bringing God into His place in the Person of His Son. John the

11

Baptist closes the great succession of the prophets (he is the greatest of the prophets in one sense) by handing the Lord Jesus into the place of God's full rights, and pointing to Him, and saying to all who beheld, "Behold, the Lamb of God...." That was to say, in effect, This is the One in Whom God secures His rights; here is God coming into His place. Are you prepared for Him to rule in your life? That was the issue from that time onward.

That is the zeal of the Lord, and that is the wayas becomes instantly patentto heavenly fulness. When we speak of heavenly fulness we cannot dissociate it from the Lord Jesus. In Him all the fulness dwells, but the question is, How are we coming into that fulness which is in Christ, and of which we saw the life of Elisha to be typical? It is by the Elijah way; by that way wherein God has His full place and all His rights secured to Him. You can see this throughout Elijah's life.

Again, passing in review some of the salient points of his life, you see that his jealousy for the Lord marked every step of the way. The introduction of Elijah is very sudden and abrupt. You are simply told that Elijah the Tishbite confronted Ahab one day and said: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Thus suddenly, coming from we know not where, appearing on the scene and making his declaration, we meet for the first time this man who stands for the rights of God.

The Zeal Of The Lord As Seen In

(a) Elijah's Dependence

(b) Elijah's Prayer

There are one or two things about that very introduction which bear out this fact. "As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before Whom I stand...." Those last four words speak volumes. The next point is "...there shall not be dew nor rain...." But later we are brought into the secret place and shown what lay behind such words: "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months" (James 5:17). You are allowed to see into the prayer chamber of Elijah; to see what was behind this great declaration which closed the heavens.

Now look at that man praying. Listen, if you can, to his prayer. When you have heard him at prayer, what do you come away with as the impression of his prayer life? It will certainly not be that Elijah was asking for blessing for himself, or wandering all round the world at will in prayer and giving the Lord a lot of information. No! The one thing that will be left with you as you have heard Elijah pray is this: How that man is stretched out for the interests of God! How that man is bent upon God having His place in the affairs of men and in His Own people. He is pouring himself out that God might have His rights. It is not Elijah's good, Elijah's blessing, but God's satisfaction that he is after. That was engaging him, and because he was so bent on that he was brought into active co-operation, fellowship, oneness with God toward that end.

Then a thing was done which to us might sound like a questionable thing. Standing with God in an utter way it was possible for him to make the declaration we have noted. If you want to stand with God, and have God standing with you, if you want to know that intimacy of fellowship in which the two are as one, so that you can say, "As the Lord... liveth, before Whom I stand...", this is the way, to be abandoned utterly, at all personal cost, to this one end of the Lord having His place in fulness in His Own people. Because that was the object of his being, because he was burning with jealousy for God's rights, it was possible for Elijah to say, "As the Lord... liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Blessing shall be suspended, because blessing is only making these people to go on in something less than God intended. I say, that might

12

sound a very questionable line of procedure. But you know the good is very often the enemy of the best, and because there is a measure of blessing people sometimes become blind by that very thing to the full thought of God.

Whether the conditions of our own day demand the same kind of prayer it is not our intention to discuss, but the point is this, that Elijah came to God's position, that utterness for the Lord justifies anything, that for the Lord to have His place in utter fulness, and all His rights in His Own people, is of greater importance than all other blessings He may grant them. The Lord is justified in bringing His people even into a state of spiritual starvation in order to get His fulness in them, and they will justify Him in the long run when they come to heavenly fulness along the line of a closed heaven.

So the very introduction of Elijah speaks with tremendous forcefulness about what he stands for, jealousy for God's full rights.

(c) Elijah's Self-effacement

As soon as Elijah had made his announcement, the Lord said to him, "Get thee hence... and hide thyself by the brook Cherith...." And he went and hid himself, being fed by ravens and drinking of the water of the brook. Here is a man who, in working together with God (he is co-operating with God to the end that God may come into His place in fulness), finds that his very jealousy for God requires sometimes that he himself stands back, keeps quiet, waits, while God works. It is a difficult thing to do, to wait and wait, and not put your hand on things, not show yourself, but keep holding on with God in secret. Oh, we must be so busy, we must be doing something, be always on the go, or else we imagine that nothing is being done, or that God is not doing anything. We think that if we are not doing anything, then God is not doing anything. That is our attitude, and very often the real work of God is spoiled by our interference, by our trying to do it for Him, and by our being so busy in His things. There is a time when God's greatest interests are best reached by our getting away and being quiet, and holding on to Him in the secret place.

Then when the brook dried up, the Lord said, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath... behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." He went to Zarephath and found the woman, and called to her, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink... and... 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 the barrel, and a little oil in the 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. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not... make me thereof a little cake first...." Make me first! Make me first! It sounds selfish, almost cruel, but what does Elijah stand for if not for the recognition of God's true place. He is as God. God's representative in this situation, and so he makes this claim. The woman was obedient in faith. What happened? She did not die, neither did her son, but she had heavenly fulness when she put God first. That is the way to heavenly fulness. Elijah stood for God's rights and said: God must be first. Whenever that is recognized and acknowledged, it is found to be the very way of enlargement, the way to new discoveries.

The rest of the story is well known. For the woman there was enlargement indeed. Her son dies, and all seems to speak of loss, but in resurrection life he was given back and possessed on resurrection ground; a miracle, the incoming of heavenly fulness in the place of what before was merely earthly.

(d) Elijah's Spirit Of Obedience

Then take another scene in the life of Elijah, namely, his last journey in company with Elisha, the

13

record of which we have in 2 Kings 2. Elijah said to Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel." Elisha refused to remain and they went to Bethel. Again Elijah said, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." Elisha again refused to be dismissed and they two went to Jericho. Then the same acts are repeated in the last step. Now in all that you have a further mark of Elijah's abandonment to the Lord's interests. He comes before us in the terms of a servant of the Lord under orders: "...the Lord hath sent me...", "...the Lord hath sent me...", "...the Lord hath sent me...." He is moving on steadily by a progressive, spiritual advance. He is moving on by his abandonment to the Lord's will, the Lord's command, the Lord's orders as to a servant.

The point is that as a result of his obedience and perfect response of heart to every repeated, consecutive, progressive command of the Lord he eventually reached heavenly fulness. "The Lord hath sent me...." Well, he will take that part of the journey. The Lord has said nothing beyond that, but He has made it clear that for the present so-and-so is His will. When that is accomplished the Lord says again, Now the next step is so-and-so. Nothing is given beyond that, but when that step is taken then the Lord is able to reveal the next step, and once revealed, in the obedience of a true servant, it is immediately followed. Each step leads to something else. Each step of obedience makes fuller revelation and deeper meaning possible. Each response to the Lord leads into a greater fulness of the Lord. Thus, in that way of instant obedience to the will of the Lord as it is revealed bit by bit, step by step, course by course, Elijah at last reaches the point where he is caught up by a whirlwind into heaven, he reaches heavenly fulness.

Do you want to know the way to heavenly fulness? That is the way. It is abandonment to the Lord in unquestioning obedience, the Lord having His place. If the Lord says He wants a thing, then He has a right to what He wants; His rights are bound up with my giving Him that. If the Lord wants me here or there, wants me to do this or that, then the Lord has some interest in that, the Lord is going to secure something by it. It is not a question as to whether it is convenient for me to go to Jericho, or Bethel, or Gilgal today, or how it serves my interests, but solely of the Lord's pleasure. If the Lord has something invested in that, the only consideration for me is that the Lord should have my obedience to get what He is after.

That is jealousy for the Lord: and how that leads to ever growing fulness, to the heavenly fulness at last! The Lord does not ask us to take the whole course in one bound. He graduates His requirements: today so much, tomorrow so much. But as He makes known His will we must remember that He is not doing it, in the first instance, for our good, but for His Own ends, to get His Own rights, and our good is always bound up with the Lord coming into His place.

You may take any spiritual crisis in your life and, if you analyze it, you will prove that to be the principle. When you have come to a place with the Lord, where a crisis has been reached, and in that situation have pleaded with the Lord to do something, asked the Lord, prayed to the Lord for something which would be for your good, am not I right in saying that you have not found the Lord answering in the way you expected. His power has been restrained until you have come to the point where you have said, Nevertheless, not my will but Thine. If this cannot be for Thy glory, I am content, do not grant it; Thy glory is to govern this hour. It is in that way that you have got a clear path through with the Lord. But that principle is wrought into us. It is not a pretense, it has to be a very real working law, by which all self interest is brought to death and the Lord becomes the sole object of our desire. Then we get a clear way through. Is that not true? How often we have been held up on that very thing. We have been praying with our own interests and ends in view, and the Lord has not come in on that ground at all. He has waited until we have changed the position and come on to His ground. So you see that Elijah right through his life embodies this principle of jealousy for the

14

Lord's interests.

The Lord's Need Of A Fixed Heart

Of course Elijah's great manifestation of this was at Carmel. How often Carmel has been taken as a basis of an appeal to the unsaved. The question which Elijah addressed to the people has been made a favorite text for such a purpose: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." That word was never addressed to the unsaved. It was never intended for them. It is only rarely that the unsaved are in the position of two opinions. More often than not they are of no opinion. This is what the prophet really said to the people: How long limp ye from one side to another? He viewed them as lame, and lamed by uncertainty, lamed by indecision, paralyzed by an unsettled issue. Oh, how an unsettled issue does paralyze the life. Have a controversy with the Lord, an unsettled issue with the Lord, and your whole life is lamed, is paralyzed; you are limping first one way and then the other, there is no sense of stability about your way.

So the prophet called for the issue to be settled. How long limp ye from one side to the other? Settle this issue one way or the other. If Jehovah be God, let Him have His place, His full rights; settle it once and for all. If Baal is god, well then let us be settled. But until that is done you are crippled, you are paralyzed, and the whole secret of your being in that weak, indefinite, unstable, uncertain place is that God is not having His full rights; there is a dividedness in your life, a dividedness in your own soul, because other interests and considerations are in view. The dividedness may be in your home life, where you have power, authority and influence, and you are not standing one hundred percent for the Lord's interests there. It may be working in other directions, but wherever it is present the result is that deep down in your being you are not satisfied, you are not at rest. You may be busy, you may be occupied, you may be rushing hither and thither in the Lord's name, but you know that deep down there is a lack, an uncertainty, an unsettled state; your spiritual life is limited and paralyzed. It will always be so until the issue is settled and God has His place in fulness in every part and relationship of your life. It is a question of zeal for the Lord, jealousy for the Lord. So on Carmel that issue was settled. How gloriously it was settled! See the prophets of Baal, and over against them an altar of twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of Israel, of whom the Lord said, "Israel shall be thy name." Israel was the name of a prince with God, a man who came out in full spiritual stature, who triumphed on spiritual grounds, after the flesh was maimed, and lamed, and put aside. Now the twelve stones represented the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, all Israel in full spiritual stature, a spiritual people. That is the issue. Elijah does not even leave out the two-and-a-half tribes. He brings all Israel into this. The issue is to be complete, perfect.

How bent upon such an issue Elijah was we see from his singular preparations in connection with the sacrifice. "And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt offering, and on the wood." And he said, "Do it the second time." And they did it the second time. And he said, "Do it the third time." And they did it the third time" (1 Kings 18:33,34). There is to be no doubt about this issue. He is going to leave no room for question as to the straightforwardness of this thing. It is to be utter death, and utter resurrection, or it is to be nothing. That deluging of the sacrifice with water is bringing everything to death. Now if life can make itself manifest here it is indeed God Who is at work in resurrection power. The issue is fulness of life or nothing at all, because Elijah has seen to it that every other way out has been well quenched. There is no other way out. All prospect, all hope is quenched by those jars of water being poured over everything.

Elijah called upon the Lord and the fire came and burned the sacrifice, consumed the wood and

15

licked up the water. The issue is clear, is it not? The way to heavenly fulness is through God having His place, which means, on our part, an utter death to all that is other than God. When God gets that place, where it is all Himself or nothing at all, then, and only then, do we know Him in the power of His resurrection, do we know heavenly fulness.

We stop there for the time being, with but a re-emphasis of the application to our own hearts. What is zeal for the Lord? What is jealousy for God? Does it consist in the number of engagements, the much business? Is it a matter of our emotion? Is it the sum of those ways in which we express what we would call our devotion to the Lord? We have made answer. The Lord must have His place and His rights in us in an utter way, and in everything with which we are related, so far as it lies in our power, we must see to it that He is thus honored. That is zeal for the Lord. That is what it is to be jealous for God. That was the spirit that consumed the Lord Jesus: "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up."

We must ask the Lord to show us exactly how and where His Word applies to us, and how this is the way to heavenly fulness. Elisha, whose life is typical of heavenly fulness, sprang out of such a background, and, like Elijah, was rooted on this foundation. We too shall come into the heavenly fulness by no other way than that wherein God has unquestioned and undivided place, and all the fruit and all the interests of our life are unto Him.

16

# Chapter 3 - The Last Journey of Elijah with

Elisha

Reading: 2 Kings 2:115.

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." And Elisha said unto him, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" And he said, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." And Elijah said unto him, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" And he answered, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." And Elijah said unto him, "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." And Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." And he said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

In this meditation we have before us Elijah's last journey in company with Elisha, on the eve of Elijah's being raptured to heaven. We have seen that the keynote of Elijah's life is found in the words with which he twice made reply to the Lord: "I have been very jealous for the Lord..." His whole life is packed into what is represented by those words. We have also noted what jealousy for the Lord means, and to what it leads.

Heavenly fulness was reached personally by Elijah when he went up by a whirlwind into heaven, and was the glorious crown of a life poured out for the interests of the Lord, with the one consuming purpose that God should have His full place amongst His people, and have all His rights in them secured to Him. Elijah was the man who set aside all personal interests in order that this object might be attained and the Lord's people might stand as a testimony in the earth and the universe to the fact that God has that in which He enjoys His full rights. To that Elijah gave himself to the full, and that

17

was the fire which burned in his bones, the fire of a great jealousy for God. That issued in his reaching heavenly fulness.

The Testimony To Be Established In This World

But, as we have indicated, that testimony was to be carried on in the world, and so Elisha was brought into relationship with Elijah before the latter's translation, and was to be the expression here of what Elijah was in heaven. Elijah had gone into heavenly fulness on the ground of having secured the Lord's rights amongst His people. Thus there was in heaven a man who had reached heavenly fulness on that ground, but there was to be in the earth the expression, not of what Elijah was before he went up, but of what Elijah was after he had gone; an expression here of heavenly fulness on the ground of the Lord having had His rights secured to Him fully and utterly in the midst of His people, as is set forth for us in the Carmel crisis of the life and ministry of Elijah.

Accordingly we find that Elisha was the instrument of that heavenly fulness, and wherever he went, and in connection with everything with which he had to do, heavenly fulness came in. We are not engaged with the life of Elisha at this time, though we make reference to it. We are considering the basis of that heavenly fulness which is but a type and an illustration of what obtains now in this present dispensation. The Lord Jesus is the counterpart or Anti-type of Elijah. He came to secure the rights of God in His universe. He fought the battle for the rights of God, and fought it through to a final issue. As Elijah fought to an issue at the altar of Carmel, so Christ fought this battle out to an issue on the Cross of Calvary, and having thus settled once for all the question of God's rights, having brought that issue to perfection, He went up into heavenly fulness, He was received up into glory.

Further, there was also to be a counterpart of Elisha, and that counterpart is seen, or was intended to be seen, here on earth in the Body of Christ, the Church. The Church is intended to be an expression of heavenly fulness on earth. So many are looking for the day when we shall get to heaven and enjoy heavenly fulness. The Lord's thought is that we should know something of it now, that it should be expressed here on the earth as a testimony to the Man in the glory. That constitutes His present manifestation in this world. That is the Lord's desire. Heavenly fulness can be known in measure, and in large measure, here on this earth, but it can only be known and expressed on the same ground as that upon which Elisha stood, the ground where God has had all His rights secured to Him through His interests being served, and through His people giving Him His full place. In this chapter, therefore, which embraces the period between the end of Elijah's earthly life and the beginning of Elisha's ministry, we are shown in a typical or an illustrative way what is meant when we speak of God having His rights secured, and how this leads to heavenly fulness.

The Path To Fulness

We have summed it all up in one word, "zeal". Elijah had been very jealous for the Lord. It can at once be seen that this same zeal is a mark of Elisha, when we look at 2 Kings 2. "And Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah hath sent me as far as Bethel." And Elisha said, "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they went down to Bethel" (verse 2). At Bethel, Elijah said the same thing to Elisha in relation to Jericho, and Elisha's reply was as before. They went on together therefore to Jericho, and there the same thing occurred again with reference to their proceeding to Jordan.

But we have not yet noted all, for as they went, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken from thee" (verse 9). Elisha, as though he had already calculated and preconsidered

18

the matter, promptly answered, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." To this request Elijah in turn replied, "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee..." (verse 10). So they went through Jordan to the other side. Elijah was then caught up by the whirlwind into heaven, and in order that Elijah should know that he was there, Elisha cried, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (verse 12). I am here! I want you to know that I am here! You tried to shake me off, but I am here! You have tested me as to whether I really meant business; you have tried me, to see if I would go all the way, and I am here! Very clearly do we there see the zeal of the Lord. There is a man who really gave diligence to make his calling and election sure. There was zeal to go on to God's full thought; not merely to go so far and then to stop; not to go but a third of the way, nor two thirds of the way, but the whole way. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Those are the words of a man consumed by the zeal of the Lord. That is a good foundation for ministry, and on that ground Elisha entered into the enlargement, the heavenly fulness.

That is where we begin. We can put it in many ways. We may speak about zeal to go on. We may speak about utterness of devotion. We may speak of meaning business with God. In whatever way we express it, the thing itself is basic to God's heavenly fulness, and it will only be such individuals and such assemblies of God's people as are after this kind that will truly represent here on the earth what Christ is in heaven.

It is not, in the first place, a case of how much we see. We may be incapable of comprehending, apprehending, or understanding all the truth that we hear, all that is brought to us in the way of teaching. If we have thought it to be necessary for us to understand everything before we can come into the Lord's fulness, we have made a mistake, because, in the first instance, it is not how much we see that is basic to heavenly fulness, it is how much we mean. God knows our meaning. God knows how utter we are. God knows exactly the measure of our abandonment to go on, and He takes us up on that ground. It is not the measure of our understanding of truth but the measure of our utterness for God that gives Him the opportunity of taking us on to increasing fulness in Christ.

Let us remember that God is toward us what we are toward Him. "With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward" (Psa. 18:26). If we are utter toward the Lord, the Lord will be utter toward us. If we are half-hearted toward Him, we shall find that the Lord Himself will be limited to our measure. He cannot be other with us; He cannot be more for us. He cannot show more to us, or lead us into more than we are really purposing by His grace to come into.

Thus in the case of Elisha, though it is his later life that represents heavenly fulness, he came to it as being a man who had always meant business with God. Our first glimpse of Elisha, before ever he came into association with Elijah, shows him to be such a man. Elijah was passing by, and he saw Elisha the son of Shaphat ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. Here was a man who had all his resources in the field. He had brought out into action, into operation, all that he had at his command. He was putting everything into his business. Why should the Holy Spirit record that? Surely He is not interested in merely embellishing narratives with interesting details. This man was ploughing, and he was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. The Holy Spirit takes account of what sort of a man he is, and of whether he means business or not. Elisha was found to be such a man, a man of purpose who put all that he had into commission. God met him, and found that to be a suitable avenue for His self-expression in that man's life spiritually in service of another kind. So we first find this man ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and then later in another connection refusing to be turned aside, but persisting right up to the point where he could go no further. He was a man who went as far as he possibly could.

19

Zeal for the Lord, devotion, is a great factor. Elisha's reality was tested. The Lord always puts our declarations to the test. He subjects them to test after test, tries us by what we say, to see if we are really in earnest. Another rebuff comes, another set back, another check, another discouragement, another experience which seems to say that the Lord does not want us. It may be a strange way of putting things, but I believe that the Lord sometimes brings us to the place where we have to take the attitude that we will not be put off by Him. Perhaps you do not understand that language. I can put it in another way. We sometimes have to come to the position where we say, Well, we are going on, whatever the appearances may be; and it may even seem that the Lord is discouraging us and working against us. The enemy may interpret things in that way, and, were we to yield to things as we find them, to the circumstances, to the experiences, we should simply give up and cease to go on. At such times we have to say in cold deliberateness, without anything to encourage, without any inspiration, without anything at all to support us, We are going on! God allows us to come to positions like that, and tests us in that way. When the Lord gets men and women who, despite every kind of discouragement, every lack of encouragement, even from the Lord Himself for the time being, say, Well, in spite of all, we are going on, He has something there that gives Him an opportunity, and such lives will come into His greater fulnesses.

We mark then these things which lead to fulness. It is most interesting to note the inner history of the spiritual life that this story reveals, and the lessons are not difficult to read. When Elisha had been subjected to testing as to his reality, as to whether he were really in earnest, and had shown himself approved, then we are able to see that these occasions of his testing themselves represent the advancing stages of fulness toward final fulness. The very places mentioned in this journey indicate heavenly fulness. We look at them briefly, to get the main thought connected with them.

The Meaning Of Gilgal

You notice, in the first place, that they started from Gilgal. We are not told that they came to Gilgal, but it appears rather that they had their residence there. Then, further, it is stated that Elijah went with Elisha, not that Elisha went with Elijah. It is a good thing to remember that the initiative is with the Lord. From the Lord's side the position as a start is made may be thus expressed: Now, you come with Me! Thereafter it is a following of the Lord, a going on with Him. It is always a means of great strength to be able to point to the fact that it was the Lord Who initiated the work"...He which began a good work in you will perfect it..." (Phil. 1:6), "For it is God Which worketh in you both to will and to work..." (Phil. 2:13). What He works in us we have to work out; there comes the Elisha side, the following.

Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. That was their starting point, and perhaps their place of residence. Maybe you know the meaning of Gilgal. Gilgal has two aspects. Firstly, it stands for the setting aside of the flesh. Turning again to the Book of Joshua, we see that at Gilgal the new generation which had grown up in the wilderness was circumcised. There, in a typical way, the flesh was set aside, in order that they might come into the land and possess its fulness. The very first step toward heavenly fulness is the setting aside of the flesh. This speaks of the separating work of the Cross, the cutting off of the whole body of the flesh, the self-life.

I prefer the use of the term "the self-life," because when we talk about the flesh, many people have no other thought but of all that wicked, evil, base sort of thing that everyone is glad to get rid of, that is recognized by everyone as evil, and cannot be tolerated. Those ideas are associated with the term "the flesh." But what is the flesh? The comprehensive definition of the flesh is the self-life, and if you know all the aspects of the self-life, you know a great deal! Who can comprehend the self-life? It comprises self-will, self-energy, self-glory; there is no end to the catalogue once we attempt to

20

define.

The will of the flesh, which is the will of ourselves as a part of the old creation, stands in the way of heavenly fulness. The more serious aspect of this, in the light of what the Lord is saying to us about His rights and His interests, is that self-life in any form destroys the testimony to what Christ is in heaven. Christ is in heaven because of what He is, because of the utter repudiation of the self-life in every way. He emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death. He repudiated every suggestion to act from His own human life apart from the Father. Every evil offer made to Him, every temptation presented to Him which had in it the thought of serving Himself, His own interests, was immediately quenched. "All these things will I give thee..." said the Devil pointing to the kingdoms of this world (Matt. 4:9). To have heeded the appeal at such a time, and from such a source, would have been a serving of Himself.

On that principle, self, in every form, and shape, and suggestion, was set aside in the interests of the Father. It was not mere asceticism, as of one who was denying himself and being an ascetic on the basis of other worldliness. No! He was positively living unto the interests of His Father"...make not My Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:16). It was then that the disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of Thine house shall eat me up" (verse 17). On the ground of His complete triumph in thus setting aside all that could have been the expression of His own life, as apart from the Father, He is what He is in glory.

That is to have an expression here in the Church which is His Body, and in its individual members. But that testimony to what Christ is in glory is eclipsed, is hidden, is marred, when you or I are actuated by anything of the self-life. It is a searching thought. When we consult ourselves, what we would like or what we would not like, what we want or do not want; when in any matter we refer to our own feelings and consult our own inclinations in the presence of something that is of the Lord the testimony is spoiled in us personally, spoiled in our homes, and in any other direction where we are living with a self-interest of any kind. And it is only as we are brought to the place where we ourselves are ruled out that we perceive in what measure the Lord was seeking to work, whilst we were holding fast the ground in our own interests; consulting our own will, our own preference. In that realm heavenly fulness can never be ours. We shall be as the children of Israel were, limping from one side to the other; crippled, unsettled, restless; never coming to an established position, because this question of the Lord's interests has not been fully settled.

Gilgal is the place where that question is settled. The Cross has cut off the whole body of the flesh. Perhaps we do not know how selfish we are. We can only discover that at the Cross. Most of us have a blind spot about ourselves, but at the Cross we shall discover our own hearts.

Gilgal And The World

But there is another side to Gilgal. It says that at Gilgal the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. What was the reproach of Egypt? If Egypt is the world, in type, what is the reproach of the world? For what are the people of God reproached by the world? The most common thing that the world is ready to pounce upon, and to cast back at any child of God, is inconsistency. The world has a very shrewd idea of what things ought to be. It has a good conception of consistency. It knows when anyone professes to be something, and is not what he professes to be. The world knows. Israel came under reproach for contradiction, inconsistency, denial of their own God, their own testimony. That is very true. They became a reproach; they are a reproach today. Ah, but not Israel only. Is it not true of many, and to some extent of the whole Church? The reproach is that it is not what it claims to be, is not what God meant it to be, nor what God has made possible it should be. It is something other, a

21

contradiction; and that is its reproach. How has this reproach and contradiction come about? Because of the flesh, the personal interests, the personal elements! Look at it where you will, it largely speaks of that. Our inconsistency finds its cause there, that God wants one thing and we want another; that God means one thing and we do not mean that; that God has called us by a certain name and we are not coming up to it. He has called us by the name of His Son and we do not bear that name with honour. We are a reproach simply because of these personal, fleshly elements.

Gilgal must get rid of that, that the reproach should be rolled away, and the glory of the Lord should be seen in the place of the reproach.

We are dealing with very solemn things. It is so easy for us to speak of being very zealous for the Lord, of wanting to be out and out, wholly consecrated. We can use this language so easily, and no doubt if it were put as a personal question, the response would be, Yes, I mean to be out and out for the Lord. How are you giving expression to your zeal for the Lord? Is it by a multitude of religious activities? That is not the root of things. We may be in such activities for our own pleasure, for our own satisfaction. It may greatly gratify us to be in that realm of things. The question is a deeper one than that. It is our jealousy for God that counts. Does our jealousy for God really mean that we are setting ourselves aside, what we want or do not want, what we like or do not like? Do we come into the matter in any connection whatever? Are we found not accepting God's will for us on any point because we have made ourselves believe that it is not God's will? Because we do not like it, do not want it, therefore it is not God's will for us! Let us be honest. To be jealous for God means that we have set aside ourselves altogether to give God a full place. In any situation can we say, Now, Lord, this thing may be the last thing in the world that I want and that I like, but dost Thou want it? Is Thy will in that direction? If so, there is no argument, no controversy, I gladly accept Thy will. That is being zealous for the Lord; that is giving the Lord His rights. Oh, how zeal for the Lord has been misinterpreted and made an external thing. The people who think they are very zealous for the Lord may be the most self-willed with regard to things which are bound up with the Lord's testimony in their lives, in their homes, in their families, in their businesses. To give God a full, clear way, not merely in a resigned manner that says, Oh, well, the Lord can have His way! but in one which comes in with the Lord to cooperate, that is zeal for God. Gilgal brings us there.

The Vital Reality And Meaning Of The House Of God

When Gilgal has set aside the body of the flesh, and rolled away the reproach, and put us on ground consistent with our testimony, and with what Christ is, we can move on. That opens the way for heavenly fulness, and we can then move from Gilgal to Bethel. Gilgal leads to Bethel.

You must remember that the Word of God is written by a non-progressive mind. The mind of God is not a progressive mind. The mind of God is full and final at one instant. It has comprehended everything. There is no room for improving the mind of God. In the mind of God, Bethel is one with Gilgal; that is, the House of God is intimately associated with the Cross. If we go on with God, the Cross leads us immediately to the House of God. The Cross opens the way to the House of God, to Bethel, and the House of God depends for its full meaning upon whether the Cross has done its work. A great many people think that the Church, the House of God, or whatever you may term it, is a doctrine, a part of a system of Christian truth. Have you thought that? Well, let me say that you are wrong. What is the House of God? We may first name a number of things which it is not. The House of God is not a part of a system of Christian truth or teaching. It is not a congregation with religious services. It is not a Christian society with a membership. It is not a religious association for religious purposes. Yet these are the ideas that are in so many minds when we speak of the House of God. People think of it as a place where religious observances are carried on, or as a society set up for

22

religious purposes. The House of God is the spiritual relatedness of believers.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..." (1 Cor. 12:13). That is the House of God, a spiritual relatedness. But it is more. The House of God is the recognized and active relatedness of believers. It is not a nebulous thing. It is not an abstract idea. The spiritual relatedness of believers is very wonderful, but there must be a recognition of it, and that relatedness must be made an active thing. That is the House of God.

Then the House of God represents a greater measure of Christ than is possible to any number of separate individuals. Separate individuals can never come to the Lord's fulness. It will necessitate all the believers for the Lord's fulness to be entered into, but to come to it believers must needs be in a relatedness, and that an active relatedness. That is very practical. Any life that is a free lance, independent, detached, will be limited, even though there may be belief in the spiritual relatedness of all believers. This thing has to become practical, an actual working thing. Fellowship is essential to fulness.

We know that is why the enemy has never ceased trying to scatter the Lord's people; to divide, subdivide, and divide again. He is always after that, because he knows that actual relatedness is the way to the fulness of Christ, the way in which what Christ is in heaven becomes expressed here on the earth. Fellowship, relatedness after a practical sort is an important thing on the earth, and it cannot be repudiated. We cannot, without robbing the Lord of something, pass it off as something which has irreparably broken down and can never again find an expression. Not at all. The Lord has not taken that attitude. That represents surrender to the Devil, the Devil's triumph amongst the Lord's people. Actual relatedness, persistent fellowship is the way of heavenly fulness. That is Bethel, the House of God, the heavenly fellowship of born-anew children of God here on this earth.

You see that a feature of the House of God is fellowship, actual fellowship. Given that, another feature arises and becomes manifest, and that is life. Oh, what life there is in fellowship, the life of the Lord, His risen life, is manifested in fellowship, and that is a feature of the House of God. And is not the House of God, the Body of Christ, intended to be the expression in a corporate way of the fact that Christ is alive, is risen?

Then life leads to light, and in the fellowship of the Lord's people there is a ground for the Lord to communicate the knowledge of Himself, in a way that He cannot do to isolated individuals; that is, if they are isolated by their own fault. We are not talking just now about that geographical isolation which cannot be avoided, but we are dealing with spiritual isolation, separateness. The Lord reveals Himself in the midst of His people in His greater fulnesses.

Thus the House of God is a very practical thing, bringing us on the way to heavenly fulness, and we have to recognize that we are under a great responsibility for what the House of God represents in the matter of spiritual fellowship. There is no Bethel until there has been a Gilgal, the place where the personal is put out and we no longer live unto ourselves but unto one another, unto Christ, for Christ, in order that there may be an increase of Christ.

Faith That Overcomes

From Bethel we move to Jericho. It almost looks as if there is a going backward as we note the order in the Book of Joshua; but we are in the spiritual course of things now, and are going onward. It is onward from Bethel to Jericho, not backward. What is the meaning of Jericho? Jericho stands for the faith which overcomes. When you really come into the spiritual meaning of the Church, the House of

23

God, the Body of Christ, it is not long before you find that you are verily in touch with principalities and powers. It is a costly thing to stand on the ground of the Church, which is His Body. You cannot accept that merely as teaching. If you really accept that in your heart you will meet something before long, and you will find you come to the endless "I," and can only get through by being stripped of everything that is not Christ. When you get on to that ground you find you are in touch with the naked forces of evil, principalities and powers, world rulers of this darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies. That is the realm of the Church, as we know from the Letter to the Ephesians. You have come to Bethel, the Church, and now to Jericho. What is represented by Jericho? Jericho is the faith which overcomes the principalities and powers, and is the outcome of Gilgal and Bethel.

"The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" What is the meaning of this? So many have thought that the chariot had come to fetch Elijah, but it had not; he went up to heaven by a whirlwind. You will find that the chariot of Israel and the horsemen come upon the scene in connection with Elisha. They appeared three times in the life of Elisha. They were the symbols of heavenly supremacy. Whenever the chariot of Israel and the horsemen appeared to Elisha there was victory in view; it was triumph every time. The Lord opened the young man's eyes when the city was besieged. He could only see the earthly forces before his eyes were opened, and then he saw that the mountain was full of chariots, a fact which told of forces superior to those that were besieging and hemming in on the earth. The last view of the chariot was at Elisha's deathbed. The king came in, and there was the question of Assyria and victory. As the king came in to the deathbed of Elisha he cried: "...the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Then you remember the story of the bow and the arrows, and the smiting. Victory was in view.

Jericho is the faith which overcomes in the spiritual realm. You come to that when you come to Bethel; you come to the heavenlies and to the heavenly victory in Christ. Heavenly fulness by faith is represented by Jericho.

If you are contemplating the forces of evil, and wondering what is the secret of victory, let me suggest to you never to launch yourself against the enemy until you have been to Gilgal and come to Bethel, or you will be smashed, you will be broken. Get the flesh out of the way. That is the ground of the enemy to beat you. Get the self-life put away, or else he will have the advantage over you: come to the place where you can say, "...the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). It is only when the Cross has dealt with the self-life that we are in the way of advantage, of ascendency over the enemy. But that is not all. It requires fellowship, it requires the corporate action of the Lord's people to deal with spiritual forces. We have to come to Bethel, the House of God. We shall never, as isolated individuals, bring down the forces of evil. If we try we shall have a bitter experience. We must act on the principle of the Church, which is His Body: "...I will build My church; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Get out of fellowship and the enemy will worst you; come into fellowship and you stand and withstand, and having done all you stand.

The Conquest Of Death

Finally we look at Jordan. This is not going backward, although it may look like it. It is onward still. What is the lesson of Jordan? Jordan stands for victory over death. Is that a step backward? No, it speaks of moving onward. Elijah and Elisha came to Jordan together, and at Jordan, death in type, in representation was overcome; its power was broken, and two men went through. One man went up to glory, triumphant over death, and the other took up that victory and went round quenching death wherever he went. Elisha retraced his steps over this way back to Jericho, encountered death and

24

turned death to life.

We are called to that. That is a fulness of Christ; not just victory over physical death, but victory in physical death it may be; and victory over death itself, whatever its form may be, spiritual or physical. Death is conquered in Christ. That Man in the glory has entered into the fulness which speaks of victory over death; He has vanquished it, He has swallowed up death victoriously. The Apostle writes, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Wherefore? Because He has swallowed up death victoriously. That is for present experience. That is heavenly fulness for the Church now.

You see the issue; heavenly fulness. You see the way; utterness for the Lord. You see what that means; Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, Jordan. The Lord teach us what it means and keep it alive in our hearts.

25