



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net

Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any charges, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

Knowing Christ in the Power of Resurrection

by T. Austin-Sparks

Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

A Survey

The Link between Elisha and Elijah

The second book of Kings has very largely to do with the life and ministry of Elisha, the prophet. And Elisha undoubtedly brings before us the Old Testament illustration and type of the church living and working in the power of resurrection. We are familiar with the point at which the ministry of Elijah gives place to that of Elisha. When the Lord took up Elijah in a chariot of fire to heaven, Elisha's connection with that rapture, that ascension, was a matter of his being on the spot and seeing his master taken up, and having fulfilled in him the request that he should receive a double portion of the spirit of Elijah.

Elijah thus very clearly becomes a type of the Lord Jesus ascending, and the Holy Spirit coming upon the church as a double portion of His Spirit, fulfilling His own words: "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). What followed in the case of the Lord Jesus was the church in the fulness of the Spirit, proceeding to work out the ministry of Christ on a larger scale than He in the days of His flesh had been able to accomplish. His own prayer in those days was that the baptism with which He had to be baptised might be accomplished because He had come to scatter fire on the earth, and that scattering could not be until the baptism of the Cross was a realised thing, and He longed for His emancipation from the limitations of the flesh. When that baptism of passion was fulfilled, and He was translated to the glory, the fire was scattered in the earth, and His desire was fulfilled through His church, His limitations were removed.

That has its foreshadowing in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha so that what comes in with Elisha is that which came in with the church - fulness by the Spirit in the power of resurrection. There we begin, with Elisha coming in on resurrection ground for the purpose of showing forth the fulness of the ascended Head. The fact that Elisha does speak of the power of resurrection, and the full meaning of life on that ground, is amply borne out by the outstanding incidents of his life. If you cast your eye over them you will see that it is firstly a matter of changing from death to life; and then secondly it is a matter of changing from limitation to fulness.

We begin with:

The Water of Jericho
(2 Kings 2:19-22)

The new cruse and the salt. So that the fruit was delivered from the bondage of death and corruption, and made living, abiding and full.

The Three Kings in League
(2 Kings 3:1-27)

In a most paralysing situation for want of water, in danger of being delivered into the hands of Moab. Then the digging of the trenches in the valley by faith, and silently, without noise or demonstration, the torrents of water coming down. Then the deliverance from captivity to the enemy, from the hand of the spoiler. It is the power of resurrection life in fulness.

The Widow's Oil
(2 Kings 4:1-7)

The calamity which had overtaken the widow, and her predicament. The vessels, not a few. The fulness of life in the poured forth oil, the limitation of which was not on the Divine side, but on the human side.

The Woman's Son
(2 Kings 4:8-37)

Given, taken, raised from the dead. That speaks for itself as to the power of resurrection, and as to the fulness of life.

The Poisoned Pottage
(2 Kings 4:38-41)

The sons of the prophets, the death in the pot, and the casting in of the meal, so that the death elements were destroyed. Death turned to life, fulness and satisfaction.

Naaman the Syrian
(2 Kings 5)

Naaman the Syrian leper, his washing (if you like, his baptism) in Jordan; all of which speaks for itself to all those who know anything of the meaning of Jordan, from death unto life, the fulness of the power of His resurrection.

The Loose Axe Head
(2 Kings 6:1-7)

The sons of the prophets again, the building of their place for instruction, and the incident of the axe head coming off, falling into the water and sinking; the casting in of the branch of the tree, and the iron floating. Once more the miracle of life triumphant over death, and fulness of satisfaction.

The Feeding of the Multitude
(2 Kings 4:4:42-44)

With a small amount of bread.

The Unseen Horsemen
(2 Kings 6:24-7:20)

In the day of peril and threatened death.

The Arrows
(2 Kings 13:14-19)

Which were the arrows of deliverance.

Elisha's Death
(2 Kings 13:20-21)

And a man brought to life by touching his bones.

So Elisha, from start to finish, is a most conspicuous type of the power of resurrection, and of what that means as fulness of life.

All these are aspects of the comprehensive truth. They all have their own particular message to bring in connection with the one basic truth. We are not going to touch any of them in particular in this survey. They have been reviewed simply for the purpose of getting our minds clear as to what Elisha really stands for, and to give us a further point from which to move forward.

Elisha's Preparation in His Natural Vocation

What we feel is the word for us now is connected with the preliminary stage in Elisha's life, before he moved out into this full expression. There is always a preparatory dealing with us on the part of the Lord.

The first time Elisha comes to our notice is very significant as to what the Lord takes account of when He puts His hand upon a man or a woman to make such a vessel of His fuller testimony. It is found in 1 Kings 19:19-21:

"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing, with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed over unto him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again; for what have I done to thee? And he returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

Here you have some features of a life upon which the Lord looks, or has already looked, with a view to bringing that life into relationship with Himself and His testimony in a way of fulness. The characteristics of Elisha here are such as the Lord looks for in His would-be servants.

What Elijah found was a man who, by reason of his thoroughness in what he does, has a note made in the Divine records which goes down through the ages. He was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. He was putting all his resources into his work. He did not have anything in his ordinary course of life in reserve. Twelve yoke of oxen represent doing things thoroughly; doing what your hands find to do with all your might. Oxen are types of strength in service, and although Elisha was but in his ordinary natural vocation, in that there were no half-hearted measures. He was doing it with a down-rightness that is taken account of.

It may seem to be a very simple thing, but the Lord puts His workers on a probation to watch for that very thing. We may be waiting for the time when we shall be able to serve the Lord with all our might and main, and we may in the waiting time just be serving ourselves a bit along other lines. That can be put in different ways, but you may take it as settled that the Lord will never put you into a ministry of manifesting the power of His resurrection, of being of any special value to Him in His testimony, if He has seen slothfulness in the ordinary walks of life, if He has observed any trace of half-heartedness in other directions. There is an infinite peril associated with waiting for what we call our life-work. The waiting should be of a positive character, and during that time we should be in nothing less than a hundred percent energy in what there is about us to do.

This is a word of warning, and a word that we are constrained to give. It is not the sort of thing we like to say, and yet it is a word which those of us who have had time to observe the preparation of many lives for the work of the Lord, feel is a word made necessary, that the time before the Lord comes and says: "Now the time has come for you to move out into that for which I have prepared you," is a time that is so often marked by a lack of wholehearted abandonment to the ordinary, natural vocation; that the things which we call "natural" are put in a place second to the spiritual, and regarded as of less importance, and therefore call for much less diligence.

We need not increase words, but it is a thing for us all to watch very carefully. The Lord is just watching in the ordinary vocations of life, in the things which we may regard as not by any means of great spiritual value, to see if in those things we are diligent. We must remember that His own words are: "He that is faithful in that which is least, shall be made ruler over much." That is a law. And faithfulness in that which is least is qualification for increase.

On the other side, when the Lord sees a man like Elisha putting all his energy, all his resources into his ordinary vocation, and doing it with all his might, the Lord marks that man or that woman, and the time will come when that life will be drawn into association with the Lord in something of peculiar value to Him.

You see it in the first phase, before any thought or suggestion had come to Elisha of prophetic ministry. It is not as if he were one of the sons of the prophets, who was preparing for his ministry. No suggestion whatever is made that he was going to be a prophet. We do not know that he had any such idea. What we do know is that he was doing farm work, and that he was putting all his might into it, and the Lord took account of it. Before ever there was a thought of what many people would call spiritual work, this man was seen by God as one who would go a long way with Him.

You may say that is reckoning on the natural. Well, the Lord does take men into account as to their spirit, and although a man may be very often mistaken in the method, the Lord looks on the heart. We are thinking of Paul himself. He was certainly very blind and very mistaken in the way that he took, but he took it with all his might, and there was no question that what he did was with every ounce of his being, and we are not to say that the Lord did not take that into account. The Lord would sooner have a man or a woman who is wrong with all their might, than a man or a woman who is never wrong because they are afraid to do anything. The Lord takes account of diligence and devotion and wholeheartedness, in whatever realm it is. When the Lord gets hold of men and women like that, He may have deep and mighty lessons to teach them, but He knows that He has a vessel that will be suitable to Him and will go on with Him.

That is a simple word, almost in the nature of a homily, but it is an important one, and we must never expect the Lord to say: "Come up higher," until in the place where we are we have given ourselves to the very last measure. We rejoice that there are men and women like Elisha, who just put themselves into the menial things, the ordinary things, the things which men would not call specifically spiritual service, until the Lord says that is enough. This is preparation, and remember the Lord is taking account!

Everything of the Spirit

The next thing in the case of Elisha is, after that intimation, that he was called. Elijah threw his mantle over him; then it looked as though Elisha drew back; it looked as though he might be numbered with certain in the New Testament who said: "Suffer me first to go and bid farewell to those who are at home"; "Suffer me first to go and bury my father"; and so on. But there is this fact, that something deeper had been registered in Elisha, which did not allow him to do the thing that he had contemplated doing. We do not read of any farewells in the way that he suggested them to Elijah; but what we do read is that he went and got rid of all that which was behind. He burned his bridges, cleared up things straight away, distributed the proceeds, and went after Elijah. Again the marks of thoroughness.

Here is a man who is not saying: "Well, in case things go wrong, and I do not get on very well in my new sphere of work, I had better keep these oxen alive so that I can come back to this!" The thing has gone to his heart; he knows the hour has struck; he knows God has touched him; deep down in his being there is something which now has made him a prisoner, and he finds no release; so he simply clears up everything and goes in the way of that inward call.

The point is mainly this, that it was not Elijah's call that did it. On the strength of Elijah's word alone Elisha could look back; that is, he could contemplate going and having a valedictory; but there was something deeper than Elijah's word and Elijah's call. Something had come through from God into his inner being, and that put away all that was merely sentimental or earthly, and made him do a thorough work of breaking, and going out for the Lord. It is important for us to hear something

deeper than the voice of man when we move into the work of the Lord. We can have something more than the outward appeal. We can have many appeals, strong urges in meetings arranged for that purpose, to appeal for workers. We can have the appeal from the outside. We can have the urge. We can even have people tell us that we ought to, that God really has called us. But that is never enough. What we must know is that God has spoken more deeply than any kind of outward appeal. We must know that God has done something, and there is no question for us whatever of keeping in reserve the old relationships, the old associations, the old interests. That deeper challenge has settled everything, and the only thing we can do is to make a complete break and go out with the Lord.

Again, this is very elementary, but it is very important. A great many go out on the strength of an appeal or an urge of man, and that is always a very dangerous thing. And it is very dangerous for us to put our hands upon people and tell them what they ought to do, what God would have them do, what and where their call is. Let us seek to keep our hands off people altogether as to their life, and leave them with the Lord. Run a thousand miles from them rather than try in any way to shape their life course for them. If God does not speak, we shall only make havoc of lives by trying to influence them. And we must never be influenced, on the other hand, by anything but the Word of the Lord in our heart. Someone may speak, and through that someone there may strike home, like a shaft, the word of the Lord; but we must have that extra element before there can be certainty. When we have that, we know it; God has spoken, and everything is changed.

It is interesting that we hear nothing more of Elisha from that day until the day when Elijah finishes his ministry. It is fitting that it should be so. In 2 Kings 2 Elisha comes in in connection with the translation of his master, Elijah. There are three things in that chapter which are factors in this preliminary stage in the preparation of this vessel of the testimony.

1. The Test of Faith and Perseverance

The first thing is Elisha's test of faith and perseverance after he has received the knowledge of a call. You notice in this a familiar story, how Elijah, on the one hand, seemed to be trying to shake off Elisha: "Tarry ye here... Tarry ye here... Tarry ye here...". To every such urge of Elijah, Elisha rejoined: "As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." On the other hand the sons of the prophets in every place that they visited said: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?", seeking to discourage, to deter him. There is no element of encouragement about this repetition. Elisha says: "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace; it makes no difference to me, I am going to follow on to the end, I am going to see this thing through; it may be the Lord's will to take him away, but I am going to be there when it happens." And so, whatever the meaning of Elijah's repeated effort to get him to stay may have been, he could not influence this man one bit, he could not shake him off. Elisha was exercising faith, with a persistence and endurance which is the outstanding feature of this chapter.

In what connection is his faith being exercised, and in what connection is his persistence being tested? Well, Elijah is what he needs! It comes within that realm of some being discouraged, being able to be put off, and saying: "These are hard sayings, who can hear them?" "From that time many of His disciples went away, and walked no more with Him." They are discouraged more or less easily, and they go away; and the Lord turns to the twelve and says: "Will ye also go away?" Simon Peter answers: "Lord, to whom shall we go; Thou hast the words of eternal life." The Master is what is needed, and there is no thought of going away, being put off, discouraged, but the thought is to go

on with Him, because He has the essential elements of that life. Elisha knew that Elijah had what he needed for his life, for his ministry; and when Elijah said: "Ask what I shall give thee", Elisha said: "A double portion of thy spirit". Elijah's rejoinder was: "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee". Elisha knew that Elijah had the essential, and so he was not going to be put off or easily discouraged. Although it seemed that Elijah was trying to get rid of him, the other man refused to be got rid of; he was clinging to him for life. And he was being tested as to his faith, and as to his perseverance.

It is a part of Elisha's preparation, and it is a part of the preparation of all true instruments of the Lord. They will go through experiences when they are tested to the very last ounce of endurance, along the line of it seeming to be that even the Lord is trying to shake them off. That is a very crude way of putting it, but so often there is every opportunity - if you want it - to be discouraged, to feel that the Lord does not want you, that after all, although you may have had a sense of call, the Lord is not going through with it. Rather it looks as though you are being put back, and put back again. Can you be discouraged? Can you be shaken off? Can your faith easily give way? If so, you are no use for this. If you are going to be an instrument of the testimony of the power of His resurrection, you are going to have a very great deal that you come up against that will put you out of the fight, if you can be put out. It is very necessary to be established before you start, in some measure that proves that you are not one who is going to be easily put off, easily discouraged.

Elisha goes through the test; on the one hand his own master being the occasion of the testing, and on the other hand, those who were in a spiritual position: sons of the prophets. These were supposed to be the people who had spiritual knowledge, but were anything but encouraging, and were rather being discouraging factors. Very often those who ought to be, by reason of their spiritual position, helpful, are anything but encouraging; they would put us back. All that we are left with is: "The Lord has called me; I know that in my heart. The Lord has led me this way. The Lord has caused me to take this step that I have taken. I have burned my bridges; I have cut all my ties; I have stepped out on the Lord. Now, although I have done that, the Lord is testing me, seeming to give me very little confirmation and encouragement, and the Lord's representatives (officially) are by no means helpful. Nevertheless I stand to it, I am going on with God." A man or a woman who can go on like that is going to count for God. Elisha had nothing whatever to fall back upon but his inward knowledge of the Lord. He went through on that.

It is a very nice thing when we get encouragement from every direction in the way of our conceived call; when the Lord comes along and confirms it in all sort of ways. And then everyone else, and everything else, says: "We are with you; we will stand by you; we are going to support and uphold you." We can get on all right that way. But if the Lord gives us no special, conspicuous providences or sovereign acts; if He hides Himself, so that what we do see is rather discouragement to go on, even from the Lord's side; one of the most difficult things is the hiding of the Lord. He is there. He is with us. He is doing things, and yet there is nothing that our flesh can take hold of; we could never write an account of how wonderfully and marvellously the Lord carried everything through, and left nothing to us at all; it is a matter of faith going on with God, even when the Lord seems to be hiding Himself, and allowing much of discouragement to remain on our horizon. And then no one else could enter into it. Everybody else to whom we might look, and from whom we might expect something, are no use to us at all. All that they have to say is something that is melancholy: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?" Elisha seems to be a little impatient with that. It might have been expressed in this way: "You are a morbid crowd, and I would sooner you kept quiet if you had nothing better to say!" They are not inspiring at all. And that

is very often how we find the people to whom we look for encouragement, They see the difficulties, they see the dark side of things, they tell us what we are running our heads into, the calamities that will overtake us. The question is: will you go on with God? Elisha went on. The statement is: "They two went on". There is something in that which leads to a large place, which means much for the Lord.

2. Learning the Secret of Power From on High

Another lesson which Elisha had to learn was that although he was a man of energy, a man who gave himself very thoroughly and fully and used up all his strength naturally in what he did, his power was from on high. What we have said about a man being diligent and in earnest, and putting all his strength into things, does not in any way contradict this, that even such a man has to learn, before he can move into his full spiritual usefulness, that the power for that is not in himself but from on high. The Lord may take account of that man before, but even as it was with Paul with all his zeal, and all his earnestness, he had to come to the place where all his strength was drawn from above and not from himself. Elisha had to learn that it was power from on high, the Spirit sent down, that was the secret of strength. It is only by that that we shall be living testimonies. It is only by that that we shall be vessels of such a testimony as his.

We are not speaking of the general kind of Christian work; we are speaking of the Lord having His fulness of testimony in us, and the fulness of the Lord's testimony is the expression of the power of His resurrection in our very being. And for that there has to be a coming to the place where we know with every ounce of our being that our strength is not in ourselves, but it is in Him Who is above. It is the One Who has gone up to the right hand of God Who is the source of our strength, the spring of our energies; because He lives, we live; by His power, and His power alone, we live and work. It is the Lord in glory Who is our energy. Elisha learned that in type. For all the future it was the Spirit from above, the spirit of his ascended master. We have to learn that in ever-deepening ways.

3. Having His Beginnings in Jordan

Finally, he had to come to the place where all his beginnings were at Jordan. The last step of that journey with Elijah, and the first step of his journey under the Spirit, was at Jordan. He went over with Elijah in death; he came back through Jordan in the power of resurrection. The sons of the prophets, fifty men, were watching, and as they saw him come back across the Jordan they said: "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." His beginnings, shall we say his roots, were in Jordan. We know that there has to be a rooting in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, life having its very beginnings in the death and resurrection of Christ experimentally known. There has to come into the life of such an instrument of God an experience which registers once and for all that this life, in its good and its bad, all its energies even for the work of God, has been brought to an end, so far as that one is concerned. Even in Christian activities and religious interests, and passions for service, that life has been brought to an end, and nothing is possible except in the power of His resurrection. It is one thing to say that; it is one thing to hold that as a teaching, it may be quite another thing to know that and to have that registered in your being every time you seek to move in relation to the Lord; to know that every day of your life, so far as the Lord's interests are concerned, you draw every bit from Him. Everything is in the power of His resurrection; there is nothing else. To have that settled, registered, established once and for all, for all the future, is only possible in the power of His resurrection. That is a deep death, a deep sinking into Jordan, but that makes possible a wonderful

testimony to His risen life. This is the opening of the door to the vast, the ever-growing knowledge of Him in resurrection life.

Calvary closes the door on man by nature, but Calvary opens the door to the man who knows the Lord in the power of His resurrection. Elisha came to the place where all his beginnings were in Jordan, every bit of his future was born in Jordan. You and I have to learn to be vessels of this testimony; those who know Him in resurrection life.

That is preparation. If all who had gone out in the Lord's service had gone out on that basis, a very different story would have been told. We cannot hold ourselves responsible for all who have not, but what we can do is to recognise that this is the truth and, so far as we are concerned, to ask the Lord to make it true in our case. It is a deep death! This is an end, but it is a beginning. What is before us is testimony in what we are - not first what we say - to Him in resurrection life. If that is what is before us, that can only be on the ground that we have ceased in any realm of knowledge and life that is not that, and that is our union with Him in His Cross. This is preparation. This is equipment. This is where the Lord begins with His vessels for the fulness of His testimony.