

The Translation

by F.B. Meyer

Elijah's translation is a symbol of the spiritual world and the afterlife, demonstrating the power and glory of God.

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:11-12, Psalm 68:17, 2 Corinthians 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Topics: "Faith", "The Nature of Death"

Description

F.B. Meyer reflects on the profound moment of Elijah's translation to heaven, emphasizing the significance of faith and divine intervention in overcoming obstacles, as illustrated by Elijah parting the Jordan River. He highlights the appropriateness of Elijah's departure amidst familiar landscapes, symbolizing his life's journey and the divine approval of his ministry. Meyer draws lessons on the nature of death as a transition to eternal life, urging believers to trust in God's greater plans beyond their understanding. He encourages the faithful to live with readiness for their own eventual translation, likening it to Elijah's experience and the promise of being caught up to meet the Lord. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the glory awaiting those who are faithful, as exemplified by the chariots of God prepared for each departing spirit.

Transcript

We have reached at length one of the most sublime scenes of Old Testament story. We should have been glad to learn the most minute particulars concerning it; but the historian contents himself with the simplest statements. Just one or two broad, strong outlines, and all is told that we may know. The veil of distance, or the elevation of the hills, was enough to hide the receding figures of the prophets from the eager gaze of the group that watched them from the neighborhood of Jericho. And the dazzling glory of the celestial cortege made the only spectator unable to scrutinize it too narrowly. What a wonder, then, if the narrative is given in one brief verse! "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" (2 Kings 2:11).

But there was one symptom at least, of the coming wonder, which was clearly witnessed by more than the solitary companion who had so faithfully and tenaciously kept by Elijah's side. The two friends halted for a moment before the broad waters of the Jordan, which threatened to bar their onward steps, and then Elijah's spirit was thrilled with the old omnipotent faith such as had so often enabled him to overcome the working of natural laws, by the introduction of the laws of that higher sphere which only answer the summons of a mighty faith.

True, he took off his well-worn mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters. But that, at the best, was only an outward and significant sign. At that same moment his spirit was grappling the power of the Infinite God and was bringing it to bear on the hurrying stream. He knew that the Lord had sent him thither, and that his road lay further into the country on the other side. He saw no means of pursuing the God-marked path. He was sure that, since his way led through the waters, God was prepared to make it possible and easy for him to tread it. And he therefore dared to strike the waters, believing that divine power was working in every stroke; and the waters parted hither and thither, leaving a clear passage, through which they went.

Child of God, your path seems sometimes to lie right through a flowing Jordan. There is no alternative but that you should go straight on. Forward moves the cloud. Forward points the signpost of circumstance. Forward bids the inward prompting. But how, when Jordan rolls in front? Now is the time for faith! Where God's finger points, there God's hand will make the way. Believe that it shall be so! Advance in unfaltering faith! Step down the shelving bank, and the waters of difficulty shall part before you; and you shall find a pathway where to human vision there was none. So through parting Jordans you shall march to your reward.

THE FITNESS OF THIS TRANSLATION

There was fitness in the place, Not the smiling plain of Esdraelon, with its cornfields and vineyards and {161} dotted hamlets, speaking of the toils and homes of men. Not the desert of Sinai, so closely allied with the memory of his fatal fall. Not the schools of Gilgal, Bethel, or Jericho. None of these would furnish a fit setting for his farewell to his earthly ministry. But, away from all these; amid the scenery familiar to his early life; in view of localities forever associated with the most memorable events of his nation's history; surrounded by the lonely grandeur of some rocky gorge -- there God chose to send His chariot to fetch him home.

There was fitness in the method. He had himself been as the whirlwind, that falls suddenly on the unsuspecting world, and sweeps all before it in its impetuous course, leaving devastation and ruin in its track. It was meet that a whirlwind-man should be swept to heaven in the very element of his life. His character was well depicted in the panorama of the desert, with its shivering wind and its glowing fire. And nothing could be more appropriate than that the stormy energy of his career should be set forth in the rush of the whirlwind; and the intensity of his spirit by the fire that flashed in the harnessed seraphim. What a contrast to the gently upward motion of the ascending Savior!

There was fitness in the exclamation with which Elisha bade him farewell. He cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 2:12). Doubtless, amid that sudden flash of glory he hardly knew what he said. Yet he closely hit the truth. That man, whom he had come to love as a father, had indeed been as an armed chariot of defense to Israel. By his faith and prayers and deeds, he had often warded off evil and danger with more certain success than could have been effected by an armed troop. Alas that such people are rare! But in our time we have known them; {162} and when they have been suddenly swept from our side, we have felt as if the Church had been deprived of one main source of security and help.

THE REASONS FOR THIS TRANSLATION

One of the chief reasons was, no doubt, TO WITNESS TO HIS TIMES. The men of his day were plunged in sensuality and had little thought of the hereafter. At the very best, the Jews had but vague notions of the

other life; and those notions were probably still further darkened by the obscuring influences of idolatry and sin. But here a convincing evidence was given that there was a spiritual world into which the righteous entered and that, when the body sank in death, the spirit did not share its fate but entered into a state of being in which its noblest instincts found their befitting environment and home -- fire to fire, spirit to spirit, the man of God to God.

A similar testimony was given to the men of his time by the rapture of Enoch before the Flood, and by the ascension of our Lord from the brow of Olivet. Where did these three wondrous journeys end, unless there was a bourn which was their befitting terminus and goal? And as the tidings spread, thrilling all listeners with mysterious awe, and as they heard that no sign of the rapt ones could be discovered by the most diligent search, would there not break upon them the conviction that they likewise would have to take that wondrous journey into the unseen, soaring beyond all worlds or sinking into the bottomless pit?

Another reason was evidently the desire on the part of God TO GIVE A STRIKING SANCTION TO HIS SERVANT'S WORDS. How easy was it for the men of that time to evade the force of Elijah's ministry, by asserting that he was an {163} enthusiast, an alarmist, a firebrand! It would be convenient for them to think that his denunciations and threats began and ended with himself -- the workings of a distempered brain. And if he had passed away in decrepit old age, they would have been still further encouraged in their impious conjecturings. How would they have known that he spoke the truth of God? But the mouths of blasphemers and gainsayers were stopped when God put such a conspicuous seal upon His servant's ministry. It was as if Jehovah had stepped out of the unseen to vindicate him and to affirm that he was His chosen ambassador, and that the word in his lips was true. The translation was to the lifework of Elijah what the resurrection was to that of Jesus -- it was God's irrefragable testimony to the world.

As a servant, Elijah had failed in one fatal moment; and by that moment's failure had missed a splendid chance: but for all that, the general tenor of his ministry was such as God could approve; and concerning it He could bear His sanctioning testimony to men. It may sometimes happen that our Father will greatly honor His servants in the eyes of men, while He will be very strict in His private dealings with them in reference to certain failures in duty of which only He and they are aware.

THE LESSONS OF THIS TRANSLATION FOR OURSELVES

LET US TAKE CARE NOT TO DICTATE TO GOD. This was the man who lay down upon the ground and asked to die. If he had had his will, he would have had the desert sands for his shroud and the desert winds for his requiem. How good it was of God to refuse him the answer he craved! Was it not better to pass away, missed and beloved, {164} in the chariot which his Father had sent for him, and with which Ahab's, though he had run before it, could bear no comparison?

This is no doubt one reason why our prayers go unanswered. We know not what we ask. We ask for things which we would not dream of, if we only knew the infinite superiority of the lot which our Father has planned out for us. We shall have to bless Him forever, more for the prayers He refused than for those He granted. When next your request is denied, reflect that it may be because God is preparing something for you as much better than your request as the translation of Elijah was better than his own petition for himself.

LET US LEARN WHAT DEATH IS. It is simply a transfer: not a state, but an act; not a condition, but a passage. We pass through a doorway, we cross a bridge of smiles, we flash from the dark into the light. There is no interval of unconsciousness, no parenthesis of suspended animation. "Absent from the body,"

we are instantly "present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Oh, do not think of death as the jailer of a prison in which he is collecting the saints against some final order for their liberty. It is nothing of the sort. It is but the grim disguise of one of the angels of God's presence-chamber, specially commissioned to bring faithful souls into the audience-room of the King. As by the single act of birth we entered into this lower life, so by the single act -- which men call death, but which the angels call birth (for Christ is the Firstborn from among the dead) -- we pass into the real life. The fact that Elijah appeared on the transfiguration mount in holy converse with Moses and Christ proves that the blessed dead are really the living ones; sentient, active, intensely in earnest; and they entered that life in a single moment, the moment of death. Would it not {165} be truer to speak of them not as the dead, but as those who have died and are alive forever? It must be remembered, however, that while it is far better for the emancipated soul and spirit to be with Christ, present with the Lord, the blessedness will not be complete until the resurrection of the body, which will then have put on incorruption and immortality.

LET US SEE HERE A TYPE OF THE RAPTURE OF THE SAINTS. We do not know what change passed over the mortal body of the ascending prophet. This is all we know, that "mortality is swallowed up of life" (2 Corinthians 5:4). There was wrought on him a change like that which took place in the grave of Joseph, when the crucified body of Jesus became transformed into the risen body -- which was largely independent of the laws of nature, but which was so like the body which He had worn for thirty-three years that it was readily and universally recognized. Corruption put on incorruption. The mortal put on immortality. The body of humiliation was exchanged for the body of glory.

Such a change, unless Christ tarry longer than the term of our natural life, shall be the portion of many who read these lines -- "caught up... to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). It becomes us then to walk as Elijah did, with alert and watchful spirit; talking only on themes that would not be inconsistent with an instantaneous flash into the presence of God. Thus, whenever our Father's carriage comes for us, and wherever it overtakes us -- whether in the storm at sea, or in the railway accident; in the tumult of a catastrophe, or in the gradual decay of prolonged illness -- may we be prepared to step in, and sweep through the gates, washed in the blood of the Lamb!

Was it not some reference to this august event that {166} was in the mind of the great Welsh preacher, Christmas Evans, who, when dying, majestically waved his hand to the bystanders and looked upward with a smile and uttered these last words, "Drive on!" "The chariots of God are twenty thousand" (Psalm 68:17). May we not suppose that one awaits each departing spirit, standing ready at hand to convey it into the presence of the King, to whom be glory for ever and ever!

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