

Dependence Upon God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of dependence upon God for spiritual effectiveness and the secret to Elijah's greatness.

Scripture: 1 Kings 17:1

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Spiritual Ministry"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound dependence upon God demonstrated by the prophet Elijah, who, despite the spiritual famine and opposition he faced, remained steadfast in his faith and obedience. Elijah's journey illustrates that true ministry requires suffering and reliance on divine provision, as seen when God commanded ravens to feed him and later directed him to a widow for sustenance. Sparks draws parallels between Elijah's experiences and the current spiritual climate, urging believers to recognize their need for God's power and guidance in their lives. He highlights that prayer is the essence of this dependence, and that God's servants must be stripped of worldly reliance to fully embrace their calling. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a return to a life that is wholly reliant on God for strength and sustenance.

Transcript

Reading: 1 Kings 17:1-7.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, "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." So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land."

In this passage we meet the Prophet Elijah for the first time. We do not know very much about him. We are simply told that he was from among the inhabitants of Tishbeh in Gilead, and that is no recommendation. If only he had come from Jerusalem or from one of the major Judean towns, for what of significance could possibly come out of Tishbeh!

But see, the very first thing he says shows a man in touch with God. "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand...."

Elijah, a man who stands before God: that is the turning point of a sad story. In a few words, let us just look briefly at the situation.

The people had fallen away from God. Ahab had done more than all the kings before him to provoke the Lord. His wife, Jezebel, had introduced the worship of Baal. There were relatively few who remained true to God. Therefore, the ministry of someone like Elijah was in the first place to bring the testimony of the Lord once more in the midst of His people. This meant a fight, a fight involving people, a fight with the powers of darkness. Elijah stood against a flood of those who had fallen away from God. This is the reason that the first word we hear from him is of such significance. What he does he can only do because he does it for God. And because he does it for God, he must do it, cost what it may.

Is it necessary to point out that the times in which we live are very similar to those of that time? Therefore in these days the Lord needs an instrument to once again raise up a testimony to His life. We face a spiritual famine. Even if there is a lot of religiosity, spiritual life can hardly be found. The greater will be the falling away from God.

The Lord is looking for a testimony. He is looking for a prophetic ministry. The Lord is looking for a ministry that is in touch with heaven, a ministry that is more than preaching, that is a testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit of the new life that God has given us in Christ.

Anyone recognizing a call to such a ministry dares not avoid the fight. Anyone who bears testimony cannot allow him or herself to be frightened by the powers of darkness. There are those who understand this, those who for the Lord's sake have found themselves in a fight that is far too big for them to tackle in their own strength. Nevertheless, they stand. They do not just stand; they triumph. They know that they are unconquerable because the Lord is with them. The battle is the Lord's.

According to the word of Elijah, and this demonstrates his attitude towards God, we would expect anything else but the instruction: "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith." How is it that a man who stands before God should hide himself away? Is that not a contradiction? And then, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there... and he drank of the brook."

Let us say the following. Should we wish to represent anything for God, then for the sake of the people and with the people of God we must suffer, so that the purposes of God can be carried out.

We see this also with Paul. He was a personal embodiment of all that the church means in the present dispensation. For this reason he goes through a lifelong experience in order to be a representation of all that the church should be in this time. In his last letter, he writes: "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). He saw the breaking up of the church on earth. Without the heavenly vision, he would have to say: Everything is falling apart. Everything that I have fought for all my life is collapsing. But instead, he rejoices. He had seen that the church is not earthly, but heavenly; and that she exists in an indestructible unity in Christ and holds together in Him. Paul went through more suffering than anyone else. That is why he lives today more than ever before.

In the end, God lets Elijah know that He still has seven thousand, who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Elijah believed he was alone. The seven thousand were a remnant. They were a testimony

of faithfulness in a day of declension. But God's purpose was not just to rescue His testimony. He wanted to bring it to a yet greater fulness. For this reason Elijah had to go through all this suffering--the same for Paul.

It was a time of famine. Elijah suffered along with the rest, and this has always been the case. Whenever God takes up an instrument for a particular purpose, He lets them live through that which is to be the experience of others. God brings His vessel through all the sufferings that are necessary for bringing His purpose about in others. God has never done anything on this earth without first having realized it in a particular instrument.

The prophets are called 'signs'. We even read of Jesus that He was set as a sign, that is, He must Himself go through all the experiences that are necessary for the purposes of God in connection with Him that are to be realized. With God, no theory is valid. God is reality. And those experiences are reality that God trusts to those whom He sends through particular depths in preparation for a particular ministry.

"As the Lord liveth". We can stand before the Lord, and still be in battle. To stand before the Lord does not mean to be saved from pain. Quite the opposite.

Something else. Ravens brought him bread and meat. And he drank from the water in the brook. But after a certain time the stream dried up. The Lord took care that Elijah had something, but then He took it from him again. What does that mean? God wants to bring His servants to the point where they recognize that every source of help for their lives comes from heaven. Do not ravens themselves like to eat meat? We have to say that it was supernatural for ravens of all birds to have brought meat to Elijah. Every morning and evening. God was behind it. He had sent the ravens. They would not have come on their own. For some time it continued. Elijah could easily have taken it for granted. But then suddenly it stopped. They stopped coming and the brook dried up. What now?

God said to him, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." She was certainly no wealthy widow. We know what he found there. It had come to the point of baking the last cake and then dying. And the Lord had asked this woman to provide for him.

Let us make sure we see the deeper sense that lies hidden in this story.

When the Lord is in the process of restoring His testimony and forming His instrument as the restoration of His testimony demands, then on the one hand, He takes over the complete responsibility for His maintenance; on the other hand, He teaches His instrument not to look for his maintenance in earthly things, but only from God.

For a spiritual testimony, there can be no natural resources. That is the reason why we see Elijah is, right from the start, totally dependent upon God.

In James 5:17 we find a mention of Elijah. "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. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain...."

Elijah knew how to pray. Elijah had learned the secret of prayer. This inner fellowship with God gave him power so that he could step forward and say: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand...."

Have we ever tried to encapsulate the meaning of prayer in one word? It is 'dependency'!

Anyone who has recognized his dependency upon God will pray. Whoever does not pray, does not recognize how dependent he is upon God. Our effectiveness for God depends upon the amount of our dependence upon God, and our prayer life will be the measure of such dependence.

It can be said of Elijah: the whole foundation of his life and service lay in his dependence upon God. God kept him in this attitude. It gave him security and power.

We can say much about Elijah. The Jews thought a lot of him. When they saw Jesus performing tremendous deeds, they thought Elijah had returned. Where was the secret of his greatness to be found, the secret of his powerful and victorious service? What lay behind his destruction of heathen worship, so that the people said again: "The Lord, He is the God!"? It is the absolute dependence upon God. It is that which we see at the brook Cherith, in the house of the widow, and everywhere he went.

Now, that is the starting point for all of God's work in us: nothing from the world, all from God! Before God attempts to accomplish His great deeds through us, we must be brought to this point. In himself, Elijah was just as we are. But he was a powerful prophet, because in and of himself he was nothing. And he was nothing in and of himself because he was conscious of being completely dependent upon God.

Many think too highly of themselves. That makes them unfruitful for God. It hinders their life of prayer. The Lord must bring us low. Those whom God uses most are they who trust Him alone, who are poor in themselves, but consequently rich towards God; those who are in themselves weak, but consequently are strong in the Lord.

May the Lord succeed in preparing instruments, willing for such dependence, so that He is able to restore through them the testimony of His life in a time when nothing is more needful than precisely that: the testimony of His life.

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