

The Exemplification of This Zeal in the Life of Elisha

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a zeal for the Lord, a jealousy for God's full rights and place in His own people, in order to experience heavenly fullness and spiritual growth.

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:9

Topics: "Spiritual Fullness", "Zeal for God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the zeal of Elijah as a profound commitment to God's rights and interests, illustrating how this jealousy for the Lord is essential for spiritual fullness. He draws parallels between Elijah and Jesus, highlighting their shared dedication to ensuring God has His rightful place. The sermon explores how Elijah's life exemplifies dependence on God, fervent prayer, self-effacement, and obedience, all leading to a deeper relationship with the Lord. Sparks also connects Elijah's spirit to John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ, reinforcing the theme of prioritizing God's interests above personal desires. Ultimately, the message calls for believers to fully surrender to God, ensuring His place in every aspect of their lives to experience true spiritual abundance.

Transcript

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 zealous for 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 fullness. 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. 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 bringing God into His place in the Person of His Son. John the 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 way - as becomes instantly patent - to heavenly fullness. When we speak of heavenly fullness we cannot dissociate it from the Lord Jesus. In Him all the fullness dwells, but the question is how we are coming into that fullness 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.

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 and oneness with God toward that end.

Then something was done which to us might appear questionable. 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...", then the way is to be abandoned utterly, at all personal cost, to this one end of the Lord having His place in fullness 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. That might seem 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 fullness, 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 fullness in them, and they will justify Him in the long run when they come to heavenly fullness 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 fullness), 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 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 thy 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 a few 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 fullness when she put God first. That is the way to heavenly fullness. 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 fullness 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 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. 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 fullness. "The Lord hath sent me..." Therefore, 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 fullness 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 fullness.

Do you want to know the way to heavenly fullness? 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. How that leads to ever growing fullness, to the heavenly fullness 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 analyse 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 pretence, 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 onto His ground. So you see that Elijah right through his life embodies this principle of jealousy for the 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 favourite 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, paralysed by an unsettled issue. Oh, how an unsettled issue does paralyse the life. Have a controversy with the Lord, an unsettled issue with the Lord, and your whole life is lamed, is paralysed. 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, then let us be settled. But until that is done you are crippled, you are paralysed, 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 paralysed. It will always be so until the issue is settled and God has His place in fullness 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. If life can make itself manifest here it is indeed God Who is at work in resurrection power. The issue is fullness 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 licked up the water. The issue is clear, is it not? The way to heavenly fullness 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 fullness.

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 answered those questions. 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 honoured. 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 fullness. Elisha, whose life is typical of heavenly fullness, sprang out of such a background, and, like Elijah, was rooted on this foundation. We too shall come into the heavenly fullness 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.

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