

THE MINISTRY OF ELIJAH

In God's dealings with Elijah, we see the ways and the principles by which a servant of the Lord is made an effectual servant in relation to the purpose of God.

The first thing related to any such instrument is the sovereignty of God. There is never any adequate natural explanation for the choice and appointment by God of his servants. When all has been said, we have to recognize that God's choice of his instruments is always a sovereign choice and not because there is anything naturally in the instrument to warrant his choosing that instrument and selecting it from others. He acts sovereignly in choosing and appointing for his purpose.

Although this may be true, yet the instrument must be controlled and disciplined continually by the hand of God. Otherwise, that servant of the Lord or that instrument will be found following in the direction of his or her own soul, following his or her own judgments, being influenced by his or her own feelings. God is dealing with his servant all the time and bringing him or her all the way along, under his hand, so that he or she never becomes something in himself or herself but has everything in the Lord and only in the Lord.

Knowledge of the thought of God is not sufficient. There has to be a dealing with us in relation to that divine thought, and that dealing with us is usually in a way that is altogether beyond our understanding. When he is dealing with us in relation to divine purpose, as his servants, his dealings with us go far beyond our understanding. We are taken out of the realm where we do not understand what the Lord is doing with us and why the Lord takes certain courses with us. We are out of our depth. We are altogether baffled. We are compelled – that is, if we are going on with God – to believe that God knows what he is doing. We have got to move with him according to whatever light we may have. We have got to believe that these dealings with us, so far beyond our understanding, are somehow related to that purpose for which we are called and that the explanation waits some distance ahead. We will find it when we get there.

God does not explain himself when he takes a step with us. Without any intimation from the Lord, we find ourselves in a difficult situation, which altogether confounds us, puts us beyond the power of explaining that experience. And God takes us through without any explanation whatever until we are free, until the purpose for which that experience was given is reached. Then we have the explanation.

The point is, even an instrument, sovereignly taken up by God in relation to his purpose, while knowing his main thought as to his purpose, still needs to be kept every moment, at every step, under God's hand, to be disciplined in relation to that thought, to be governed entirely by God.

Elijah was brought to that very point where, although he knew that God had laid hold of him, and although he knew what God's intention was, he could not by his own initiative and by his own energy, freely go on to fulfill his mission. He could not move more than one step at a time, and even so that step had to be definitely governed by God. He could only take that step under the Divine direction. The Lord does not turn even his greatest servants loose with an idea. He does not liberate his most mightily used instruments to take a free course, even though they may know what

God is after.

Some of the reasons for that are clear. Elijah's ministry was one of divine authority. A ministry of divine authority was needed to deal with a spiritual situation back of the condition in which the people were found. Elijah, therefore, must fulfill a ministry of divine authority. There is a position, and there is an authority by reason of that divine authority.

That ministry of authority was born in secret preparation before it came out in public. There is a secret history with God. All such ministry of divine authority has its beginning hidden from the public eye. It has its roots in a secret history with God. That kind of ministry, born out of that secret history with God, needs very special government by God to preserve its safety, to safeguard it from all those forces that can destroy it. That is why Elijah, having such a ministry, needed to be governed in every step by God. There must be specific movement, God dictating every step. So God preserves that authority as he produces it, that is, by a hidden life. Such a life and such a ministry must not be exposed; otherwise it will be destroyed.

The Jordan, in Scripture, stands for the death of the self-life. In the major sense, the Lord's servants have been to Jordan; that is, the self-life has been set aside. But they have to keep near Jordan, and Jordan has to govern them at every step. The most paralyzing thing to a ministry of divine authority is "yourself." The self-life of a servant of God is a great peril to the human spirit.

God has to take a special precaution against the self-life of his own servant, not the sinful life in its old sense, but the self-life: I...exalted! What is that? That is the exaltation of the ego, the self. What dangers are in that "I" and how truly it stands in peril of getting into an exalted place, a place of power, a place of influence, a place of authority. It is in this sense that the Lord has to say, "Hide yourself." Or, get to the place of cutting off, of separation.

God would guard against any servant of his taking up a divine purpose and a divine commission in himself or herself, taking it up in his or her own energy. That will destroy it, and there must be a hiding, a very real hiding. Whether it be geographical or not, the word of the Lord to all his servants would always be, "Hide yourself!"

Connected with that, as a part of it, the servant of the Lord must be found always in the place where he or she is pliable, where the Lord can get a ready and immediate response. The servant has no program. Therefore, there is nothing to upset. He or she has no set course. Therefore, the Lord has nothing to break. He or she is moving with God, or staying with God, just as the Lord directs. He or she must be mobile in the hands of the Lord, that is, capable of being moved at any time, in any way, without feeling that everything is being broken up and torn to pieces.

We have to be ready in spirit for the Lord to do anything that he likes and never to feel that there is any contradiction when the Lord, having directed us in one way, now directs us in another. It is a matter of being in the hands of the Lord, without a mind of our own made up, though the way be hidden from our own reasoning, from our own will, from our own feelings, hidden from all our soul-life so that the Lord has a clear way with us. Dependence on the Lord is a governing and an abiding law of true spiritual power.

Unless we are adjustable, we shall miss a great deal. Elijah was adjustable, and so God could lead him on. The Lord allowed the brook to dry up and commanded a widow woman to sustain him. The woman was a widow with one son, and the son died. It happened while Elijah was there, being looked after by this woman, and he was there in obedience to the Lord. Now in the line of obedience to and faith in the Lord, the Lord allowed this catastrophe to come into the very home to which he had been sent. There is a terrible contradiction here!

All sorts of questions can arise when you get in a position like that. You can begin to go back on your guidance, begin to raise questions as to whether, after all, you were led or whether you made a mistake in your guidance. Do that and you only get more and more into the mire. What is this about?

God had a revelation for Elijah beyond anything that he had yet received. He was going to bring him into something more than he had yet known. He was going to show his servant that he is the God of resurrection, and that has to be wrought, in a deep way, into the very being of his servant through trial, through perplexity, through bewilderment.

The servant of God must go through things like this in his or her own heart. The discipline of Zarepath was relative to the whole ministry of the prophet. Zerepath means testing and refining, and it was indeed a refining fire. But Elijah came out, and everybody else concerned came out, into a new place in resurrection.

May the Lord write these things in our hearts and show us how they still remain as spiritual values connected with the reaching of God's end, the fulfilling of his purpose.

--excerpted and edited by Patrick J. Hession from a message by T. Austin-Sparks