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Pressing On

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 2 Kings 2:9-10; Phil. 3:7-14.

One thing quite evidently in common between Elisha and Paul is that they were both set unwaveringly upon God's fullest purpose and end. I want to say to you at the outset that I am very deeply conscious and deeply moved by the sense of practical interests and values being bound up with even a brief time like this together. I am not trying to give you an address. What I have to say, what is really in my heart, is what I believe to be of the very greatest import and account to you, and perhaps especially to some of you. I believe that we are really dealing with those spiritual principles which are going to be proved by all of us, if we are going on with the Lord, to be principles which underpin our very lives and all that our lives may represent. What I mean is that these things are not just things said here at any given time or from time to time. We are really up against things that are going to find us out sooner or later; they are going to be our doing up or our undoing. I do want to say this very seriously to you. They are of tremendous worth. Some of us have proved these things to be true, real, terribly real, unto our salvation or unto our serious rebuke.

While I cannot take up the many things that are in these portions of the Word, I can in this short time indicate one or two of them which I trust that you will really take to heart. We must, therefore, get to the very centre and core of the matter. In this second chapter of the second book of the Kings, we ask the question as we stand back from it: What is the thing really in view, governing this incident? What is it that is the matter here, the occasion, the object? Why was Elisha so determined not to be set back and turned aside, arrested, but to go on in spite of everything? Why did he set

himself so positively and unshakeably upon this: "I will be there at the end, at any cost I am going to go through with this!"?

Elisha's Sense of Need

In order to arrive at that, you must first of all take the whole history of the times of Elijah and Elisha and, in a word, you will find that they were times of the most serious spiritual weakness in Israel. The weakness of God's people was tragic, was desperate. You only have to pick out one or two of the incidents like Carmel and see that such a thing as Carmel should be necessary, the great event of Elijah and Baal in the life of the elect people of God. To think that such a thing was necessary! It was a time of great spiritual weakness. God had a very poor, imperfect, inadequate representation of Himself here on this earth. It is in that setting that this chapter and this incident stands, and the point of it all is that Elisha was conscious of the spiritual conditions of the times in which he lived, of his own utter inadequacy to meet those conditions and to do anything to register impact upon them, and therefore he must have a great accession of Divine power, spiritual power, set over against prevailing weakness, to counter those existing conditions with a living testimony. That was the thing which was at the heart of this incident - "a double portion of your spirit", power for witness, power for service, power for testimony, power to counter this deplorable state of things so general amongst the Lord's people, or that which was supposed to represent the Lord, which had the Lord's Name connected with it on the earth; power, spiritual power, to register God in the earth. And he pursued and persisted with that object, and at last, when arriving at the point where Elijah put to him the question: "Ask what I shall do for you" - it did not take Elisha a fraction of a minute to give the answer. He had that pent up, waiting. He was after something. Why had he gone all the way? Why had he not accepted this repeated word of the sons of the prophets: "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from your head today? ...Yea, I know it; hold you your peace" (2 Kings 2:3 and 5). Why had he set it aside and refused to be turned back? He had this pent up inside. He was after something. Out of a deep consciousness of need, need not just his own, but need amongst the Lord's people, instantly he replied "Let a double portion of your spirit be upon me. "

Does that touch you? Have you any sense of the deplorable state, speaking quite generally, amongst the Lord's people and the need of power to meet the situation? Are you burdened with this condition? Are you conscious that we cannot meet this... we can do nothing unless something happens... a new accession of spiritual power. We must come into some greater fulness of Christ, not just into power as something to be used, but into Christ's fulness in some greater measure. "Your Spirit". It is what Paul called "the power of His resurrection".

Oh, the pressing on of this man Paul! Oh, how the spirit of Elisha is in him. He is not deterred by anything. "I press on... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection". It seems to me that in the Old Testament "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof" are the symbols of the power of His resurrection, they are the mighty heavenly forces moving heavenward. Chariots and horses, symbols of strength overcoming death and the earth, cleaving the heavens, coming to the Throne. What Elisha was really after, in New Testament terms, was to come into such a union with the Lord as outside of this world, as having gained the victory over the world, as having gone into the glory, such a union with his Lord by His Spirit in a heavenly way, that he could go back and touch this situation more mightily.

I think we see the meaning of that. How necessary it is for us who have come into that union with our Lord as outside of this world, having overcome, to have power over it.

The Way to Fulness Progressive and Marked by Crises

I must come to the application of this. You see from this story and from Paul's counterpart in Phil. 3, the way to that greater fulness of Christ, the way to that heavenly union unto power over the world and things here, the way to that position where we know Him, not perhaps in a final way, but in a much fuller way in the power of His resurrection, is progressive. It is a pathway. Paul says, "I press on." It is a way to be taken. Elisha went with Elijah from Gilgal, and Elijah said unto Elisha "Tarry here... for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. And Elijah said to Elisha, ""Tarry here... for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." And Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. And Elijah said to Elisha, ""Tarry here... for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you", and they two went on, and they came to the Jordan. It is a progress and a process, it is a course marked by a series of crises. This way to greater spiritual fulness and power unto impact upon things here, the spiritual state of things here, is by way of a series of crises, and at any one of these points of crisis, it would have been easy for Elisha to stop and go no further. He could have stopped at Bethel quite easily. He could have argued for stopping and seemed to have had a good reason. The same could have happened at Jericho. At any one of these places he could have stopped.

Dear friends, if the Lord is seeking this same thing by means of a vessel or vessels, that is, to bring the impact of His exaltation over this earth, this world, the registration of His heavenly position, the power of His resurrection to bear upon things here, if He is seeking to do that, and I verily believe He is, such as are chosen by Him, sought of Him to be the vessel, the instrument for that purpose, will go this way and there will be a series of crises in their spiritual experience occasioned by various causes, but the upshot will be that at some point it will be quite easy for you to stop and to drop out of the progress and not go on any farther, quite easy. Indeed, there will seem to be quite a lot which argues that it will be the reasonable thing to do, the only thing to do. We can put in there a whole catalogue of things and we would not exhaust them all: adversities so difficult, so great, that we cannot go on. This is the end, this spells the finish, and we give up. Discouragements, disappointments, and perhaps the most difficult of all, God's mysterious ways such as Elijah seeming to want to get rid of Elisha; and has it not been easy in your experience to interpret God's dealings with you like that? It looks as though the Lord just does not want us, the Lord is ready to give us up. It is all too easy, and it should not be so easy. If the Lord really wanted us and has chosen us, it should not be so easy for us to contemplate giving up and find ourselves at the point of giving up. It seems as if the Lord does not care whether we go on or not. These are the interpretations under stress, the way the mind works. Yes, at any one point, you could give up, you could stop and be out of the race, out of the journey, out of the fight. It is like that, and each time the difficulty seems to be more accentuated. You have gone further, the journey has become greater, the test seems more acute, the situation more difficult, and this is the way to spiritual increase which is to have its repercussions upon conditions on this earth.

The question which is governing the object here is: Will you go on or will you drop out? Will you be there at the point where the Lord sees the test for the time being as having fulfilled its purpose, and He can make of your life something much more powerful, effectual? Not that you will necessarily know it. Let us seek deliverance from the snare bound up with knowing that we are being used, knowing that Divine power is upon us. If you knew the truth about this, it is that men of God have been far more powerfully used in the days when they felt their own greatest uselessness than in the days when they felt that things were happening. So often it is our bad times that are God's good

times. We have felt what a mess we have made of it, we will never speak again! The Lord did something then. The snare of knowing that the power is at work! That is not the point, but for the Lord to be able to do effectually the thing necessary we must be like Elisha, like Paul, and go on, just go on.

This, of course, does necessitate that great initial committal. We must have a very clear-cut decision once and for all. Elisha had it when he slew his twelve yoke of oxen - clear decision. Paul did it when he said, "What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." There was a clear-cut committal.

But we shall find that as we go on from stage to stage, it is necessary for us to reaffirm in new circumstances, under new difficulties and discouragements, yes, the discovery of the iniquity of our own hearts in some terribly overwhelming manner, some action which would put us right out of everything. We must go on on the basis not of what we are, but on the basis of what He is. It is like that from time to time, a reaffirming of the original and initial clear-cut decision, "that I may gain Christ". "These (things) have I counted loss for Christ", not power, not service as such, not to be used of the Lord, but for Christ. Elisha was devoted to Elijah. Paul was devoted to Christ. It is the person. Elisha would not leave Elijah, he clung to him to the end. Do remember that it was with a burden concerning the reproach of the Lord that was here on the earth. Elisha rent his garment and took up that which fell from Elijah. The rending of his garment was indicative. He was unworthy, he was insufficient, he could not in his own clothes fulfil this purpose. He must have the garment of his master. He must be clothed upon with that which represented the heavenly ministry. He found that that did the work.

Of course we ought to dwell upon these various points in the journey, and especially the last one of Jordan where death is met at the full and overcome; he knew his master in the power of resurrection; the power of His resurrection, His ascension life, but we cannot do that so I leave that to you for the time being.

If you are going to be instrumental in registering that heavenly power of the enthroned, exalted Lord upon the spiritual condition here at all, anywhere where you are, you are going to be put to the test from time to time in situations and circumstances where it would be the easiest thing in the world for you to drop out and give it up, for any one of many reasons, as I have said - discouragement, disappointment, and the mysterious ways of God, and many other things. Can I go on or am I, not understanding what the Lord is doing and what the Lord means by it, incapable of explaining it, and in myself totally unable to meet the situation, going to stop, drop out, and not go on any longer? Or am I determined by the grace of God, whatever the situation is, however difficult, adverse, and trying, until the Lord Himself changes it or makes a change, by His grace, to go on, and I will be there in the end? The Lord give us that strength.