

THE GOD OF ELIJAH

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, June 6th, 1869

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“The Lord God of Elijah.” 2 Kings 2:14

IT is indeed true that Elijah had power with God and with men, and prevailed, as all of the same faith shall, and come also to the same happy end. Yet this same Elijah was compassed with the same infirmities as are the rest of us; he was by nature what we all are, and that difference put upon him was by the grace and Spirit of the blessed God. Hence, James, to encourage the poor and needy, the trembling and fearful, in prayer to God, said that Elias was a man subject to, not merely the subject of, but subject to, like passions, as described in the 7th of Romans, a law in the members, powers in the members, bringing the soul into captivity, so, that we can neither believe, nor pray, nor serve the Lord as we would; nevertheless he was righteous by faith, and therefore, being righteous by faith, and understanding the infinite value of those things, he was earnest in them. And so, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much;” but then he must be a righteous man, that is, a believing man. Thousands have lived that were righteous before they knew they were the publican was a righteous man when he prayed, because he was a believing man, though that justification was not as yet manifested to him. And Elijah prayed that the bottles of heaven might be stayed, and there was no rain, as you are aware, for three years and six months; and again, he prayed, and the heavens gave their rain, and the earth yielded her fruit. Elijah is thus a representation to us of how the Lord will deal with his people in all ages. You all know there is very much to encourage us in the history of Elijah. What Christian has not run through the events of his life, and seen the Lord there, as representing to us what he will do, and how he will interpose on behalf of those that have the same faith, and that are walking in the same steps, and that as long as he has one upon the earth to love and to care for. Elisha understood this matter, he looked at it; and when he found Elijah was to be taken from him, then came the question, “Ask what I shall do for you.” Elisha thought, and looked about, but he does not seem for a moment to have hesitated. Ah, he made the best request that any man under the heavens could make “that a double portion of your spirit he given unto me.” Ah, let me have even stronger faith, stronger love, and if it is the Lord's will, a greater knowledge; let me have an abundant portion of the same divine grace, the same truth, the same spirit, the same power. Oh, how different this from the man that said, “Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, take your ease, and be merry;” but alas, how terrible the disappointment! “You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you; then who's shall these things be?” But Elisha saw that the truths held in the spirit by Elijah were lasting as eternity; he saw that Elijah was formed for God and formed for eternity. And did the Lord grant

Elisha's request? He did; but put him to a kind of test, Elijah said, "If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so; but if not, it shall not be so." It seems a little like Naomi advising Ruth and Orpah to go back, and the one went back, and therefore was not partaker of the spirit of Naomi, but the other went forward, and therefore became more largely a partaker of the spirit of faith. So, Elisha here would not leave Elijah, but abode by him to the last moment, just the same as all the people of God shall be by the truth. And then when Elisha comes to Jordan, he smites the waters, and says, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Now this dividing of the Jordan is to represent this blessed truth that while, on the one hand, we shall meet with many hindrances, many impediments, and it may seem almost impossible to go on our way any further, yes, we may sink so low that our faith and our hope may seem perished from the Lord; yet, as the Lord made a way for Elisha, so that he went on, just so he will with us. It is true, of course, the Holy Spirit inspired Elisha to smite the waters, and to seek their parting hither and thither; the Israelites had divine authority for expecting a division of the waters, and their safe transit across into the promised land; Elijah had divine authority for commanding the river to be divided, and so had Elisha. Now if you and I were travelling in the East, and came to Jordan, and ordered such a thing, we should look as wise as Canute did when he commanded the waves of the sea to go back, because we have no divine authority for it. Therefore, it is that whatever we have not divine authority for we cannot succeed in, but what we have divine authority for we can succeed in. We must therefore take these things figuratively, as pledges and assurances that the Lord will always deal with us as the matter shall require; so that if our eyes are opened, and we really see things in the light of God, we shall often see the movements of his providence and his mercy to be as miraculous as the dividing of the Jordan, or the many other things which the Lord wrought in that day.

Time would fail me, of course, to attempt to set before you this morning the whole of that representation of the blessed God, as the God of salvation, which we have in the life and destiny of Elijah. There are therefore three things I will aim at. First, *how the Lord makes way for the coming in of his salvation*. Secondly, *the sacrificial character of that salvation*. Thirdly, *the blessing that followed upon that sacrificial salvation*.

First, *how the Lord makes way for the coming in of his salvation*. Now Elijah prayed that there might not be any rain, and his object was to convince the people of the vanity of false gods, to bring them away from all error, and to convince them that the God of Israel alone could be the remedy; so that by this drought and this famine there was a way made for the coming in of that atonement, and that blessing which you read followed that atonement. Now these things are easily spiritualized; we can easily understand them as they apply to us spiritually and practically; though the first part of my discourse must necessarily be very close and searching; because this drought and famine represent that experience that makes way for the coming in of God's salvation. We will, then, suppose that this drought and famine commenced, as it were, gradually; it would be some time, as a matter of course, before they felt the full force of it. Just so when the Lord intends the salvation of a soul, he creates in that soul a discontent with its present condition, and that soul begins to say, Well, I have been concerned about this world, for we must understand the draught and the famine spiritually; such an one will say, What have I for eternity? Is God on my side? Do I know anything of spiritual things? Have I ever really cared for my soul; have I ever really prayed to God? And then he finds out spiritually that he is in a state of drought and destitution; in a word, to speak as plainly as I can, he is in trouble about his soul. What will become of my soul? What shall it profit me if I gain the whole world and lose my own soul? What can I give in exchange for

my soul? I am afraid I have no right hope in God, no right confidence in God; I am afraid I have been wrong. He comes thus into tribulation, and he feels himself the subject spiritually of a drought. he says to himself, What has the love of God ever been to me? What has the salvation and the true service of God ever been to me? Why, nothing. He becomes miserable, and his sins appear, and by degrees he gets on to say, Well, I have but one inheritance to call my own, and that is a dreadful one, my sin. I see now what a poor creature I am; for this drought and famine represent the drying up of all the supposed righteousness, holiness, strength, and wisdom of the creature. You may conceive how rapidly, in the entire absence of rain, the burning sun there would scorch everything and give everything a deadly, barren, and desolate appearance. Just so where there is conviction of sin; you are brought somewhat under the scorching threatening's of God's word; at one time you thought you had some holiness, you find out now that your heart is barren and that your soul is as a desert, and for the first time in your life you feel the solitude and somewhat of the wretchedness of being without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world. It is this that prepares the way for the coming in of God's mercy and salvation. Oh, if I were to throw in, I was going to say, a few parenthetical remarks here, whatever you do, look well to your downward experience; for be assured of this, if you do not receive God's truth as a matter of necessity, as sure as you are here this morning you will someday part with it, and you will be lost at last; if you do not receive the testimony of Christ as a matter of necessity, feeling that you are that unholy, unrighteous, helpless, destitute, poor creature, that nothing else can in any way meet your necessity, unless you thus receive him, you will certainly someday part with him; in fact, I would go on to say that none can rightly receive him unless this poverty is felt. I look back at the time when I found out by grace what a poor piece of stubble, what a poor autumnal leaf I was; and when I found this out, and came to consider, I heard from the pulpit, I read it before, but it never struck me with any particular power, but when the minister took it for his text, his sermon I cannot say entered very much into my experience, but the words seemed to astound me as if I had never heard them before, but they were of that character, and being the words of the apostle Paul, that seemed to carry some encouragement with them, I mean where he said, "O wretched man that I am." That precisely described what my feelings were, just what and where I was. And why was he wretched? He tells us that in his flesh dwelt no good thing, and according to what he was as a sinner he was wretched; according to the demands of the law of God upon him he was wretched, and according to his helplessness he was wretched. Oh, this tribulation is what we want in the day in which we live. I would to God I could see more of it in the professing world; I wish I could see more of it among ministers and among people in general, more of this downward experience. The advantages of it are wonderful. Oh, how it softens our brazen brow, how it breaks the neck of our pride; how it teaches us to esteem others better than ourselves; how it shuts our mouths from boasting, and reproaching others. We feel we have enough to do at home, enough in our own hearts daily to send us to everlasting perdition. Let us take a consciousness of this with us, we shall then have a stone to throw at no one; but each will wonder that he should be spared to have any hope whatever in God's salvation. Here then, let the minister pray as Elijah did, that the Lord would bring the people under a sight and sense of their destitution, helplessness, and wretchedness, hereby to make way for the coming in of his salvation. You will see how this downward experience, connected with what we presently have to advance, destroyed all their confidences in false gods in the time of Elijah; and so, it is this downward experience that destroys our confidence in error. Now I was among the Wesleyans. Well, I respect the Wesleyans, but I can say as in the sight of God that I left them because I felt my need of a better gospel than they preached; and I should not have left them on that ground unless I could have found a better gospel, for they told me there was not a better;

but on reading the 51th of Isaiah, I found a better; and I found not only the 51th of Isaiah, but a great many other scriptures contained the better gospel. Then, to show I was not rash, I got next among those that we call duty faith people. Well, there was a little difference, but not much; I left them from just the same motive, I felt my need of a better gospel. I used to say to some of the Wesleyans. If you are right, I am a lost man, I have now striven as hard as any man could do to get that holiness that you have exhorted me to get, and that sanctification, perfection, and happiness that you have exhorted me to get, and my feelings tell me I am farther off than ever. My heart is a devil of a heart, an atheistical, infidel, rebellious heart; it is just like the troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt; I am further off than ever. Well, they said they didn't know what to make of me, and I replied I didn't know what to make of myself, and so we were all at a loss together. But when the Lord revealed to me his new and everlasting covenant, the eternal settlement of his counsels by the eternal perfection of Christ, oh how gladly did I fall in with it! For that was the first time that I felt there was a possibility of my being saved. I had said there was no possibility, I used to be up at one and two o'clock in the morning reading the Holy Scriptures, and the more I read them the more I was confused, until the Lord stepped in; and when I saw the order of his eternal salvation, that it was all of grace from first to last, then I thought, It is possible that even a sinner like me can be saved; and then the Lord came in and made it certain, so that I could say he had saved me.

Now this downward experience, then, lays us low. For myself. I would give but little for my creed if I hold it as a matter of mere opinion; I would give but little for the great doctrines of grace and the great decisions of the everlasting gospel as far as I am related to them if I hold them as mere articles of faith, as mere opinions. I hold them as my meat, my drink, my life, my heavenly panoply; I hold them as representing to me that order of things by which a sinner is saved. And I am sure that each that knows his own heart, will in a right spirit take to himself the language of the apostle, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." The Lord God of Elijah, then, is a God that thus brings to light what is in our hearts, that everyone shall know his own plague and his own sore. Ah, when I used to be tried, tried I am now, and shall be as long as I live, but not in the way that I was then, because if I am tried now, though I cannot get at the remedy, I know there is a remedy, and I know where the remedy is; but then I did not know there was a remedy; those experiences I had seemed so to bear witness against me, and so to demonstrate that there never was one with such a heart as mine saved, I thought, everything seemed to tell against me. Little did I think that those trying experiences prepared me for the most hearty, sincere, welcome, abiding, and delightful reception of the glorious truths of the everlasting gospel, all embodied in the covenant ordered in all things and sure.

What know we of this spiritual famine, of this spiritual drought. No man, however wise or however outwardly good, can make a religion for another. "You must," personally, "be born again." You must personally know your own plague and your own sore, and judge for yourself independently, as though there was not another person but yourself upon the face of the earth. Such is the teaching of the Lord God of Elijah. He thus dries up all our false confidences, all our self-gratulations, brings us into a state of entire destitution, dried up every particle of hope, and leaves us nothing but himself, and that is leaving us everything; leaves us nothing but himself by which our needs are to be supplied. Now if any of you here this morning have never thus been in trouble, as to whether your confidence is right, the Lord bring you into that trouble, for it's essential to your

eternal welfare; for unless there be the hunger, you will be sent empty away; unless there be the thirst and the poverty, you will be sent empty away. There must be this downward experience. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And then, if other people chide you and dislike you for receiving these eternal testimonies, you must not take any notice of that; they are utterly incapable of judging: the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit, he cannot discern them, they are offensive and foolishness to him; but the spiritual man, the man who is thus brought down so low that all his false confidences are destroyed, he knows from experience what a sinner is, and can understand the mysterious words of Mr. Hart,

"A sinner is a sacred thing."

That is, to be conscious of our condition as sinners is a sacred thing:

"The Holy Ghost has made him so."

Ah, none but the Lord can bring us into this trouble for our eternal welfare. How great the mercy! And after all, what is this trouble in comparison of the trouble of hell? What is this trouble in comparison of eternal condemnation? What is this trouble in comparison of the trouble of being lost? What is this trouble in comparison of endless anguish, tribulation, and woe? I sometimes wonder that I should serve the Lord so coldly as I do when I look at what the Lord has done in not only bringing me, but hundreds of you also, into this spiritual trouble, and has led us along into a knowledge of the remedy.

Secondly, I notice *the sacrificial character of that salvation*, I will not trouble you with the history about the false prophets, and so on, we will go straight on with that which immediately concerns us, any further than just to observe the mighty difference between the two, a difference I will observe presently. Now, Elijah well knew the Lord Jesus Christ, and Elijah knew both the covenants in which he stood. He knew that he stood in the Jewish covenant, and that therefore he should offer a Jewish sacrifice, to typify the Christian sacrifice; and Elijah knew also that he stood in the Christian, the new covenant. Elijah well know that the Lord made two covenants with Abraham, the one in which all the families of the earth were to be blessed, there is the new covenant; the other, in which he gave him the land of Canaan, there is the Jewish covenant, the old covenant. Therefore, Elijah offers this sacrifice as a Jew, but at the same time typifying the one great Sacrifice. The scriptures are clear upon this. We are charged with absurdly spiritualizing the scriptures, but we cannot be wrong in this, namely, in holding that the Jewish sacrifice is a type of the sacrifice of Christ. Here, then, is the sacrifice. And you must forgive me if I give way to a little sort of something that might appear to some, perhaps, fanciful, but I never could get it out of my mind; it has always been a comfort to me: when this sacrifice was offered, you know connected therewith were the twelve stones and twelve barrels of water, and of course the wood, and there was also the dust. Now let us look at Elijah here in prayer over the matter of this sacrifice; just to show that the Lord will come one of these days suddenly to those of you that are seeking him and will reveal to you the acceptance of Christ on your behalf, and thereby reveal to you your acceptance. On the one hand there were the worshippers of Baal, and they were calling upon Baal five or six hours. You cannot question their sincerity, for they lanced and cut themselves till the blood gushed out, all to excite the pity of Baal. There they were five or six hours going on in this way, until, as you are aware, Elijah, in a very ironical, at the same time solemn manner, mocked

them in their stupidity and in their folly. But let us come to the true God and apply it to ourselves in this way: we are seeking the manifestation of Jesus Christ unto us, and those of you that have realized the manifestation of him once to you, you nevertheless want new tokens of his favor. Now I suppose about two minutes would accomplish all that Elijah had to attend to there. Just look at his prayer. He had in his prayer a four-fold request, and that four-fold request, spiritualizing it, will apply very nicely to us. First, he is careful as to the relation in which he calls upon the Lord. "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel." Now he calls upon the Lord in this relation for two reasons; first, because as I have said, the Lord had made a temporal covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and Elijah was about to offer a temporal sacrifice, and therefore calls upon the Lord in that relation. Then, secondly, Elijah knew that the Lord had made another covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that they should have spiritual descendants, whose number should be as the sands of the seashore, and for multitude like the stars of the sky. He therefore also on this ground, as this sacrifice was a type of Christ, calls upon the Lord in that relation. I do not think that we can reflect too deeply or think too much upon this matter of the ancients calling upon the Lord in that relation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because it is just the same in substance as our calling upon God by Jesus Christ, for Abraham saw Jesus Christ in Melchizedek, and Isaac saw Jesus Christ in the substitutional sacrifice that released him, and Jacob saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the ladder that reached to heaven. So, we have a High Priest to perfect us before God, and that same High Priest is our substitute; that same wonderful person is the way to everlasting glory. So, Elijah calls upon the Lord in this relation, and he makes a four-fold request. The first was that it might be known that who was the Lord God of Israel. "Let it be known this day that you are God in Israel." Ah, how will you apply this to yourself? Like this: Lord, let it be known this day that you are my God; let it be known this day that I am a true Israelite; let it be known this day that my sins were laid on Jesus, and were put away, his death being typified by this sacrifice. And he says, "And that I am your servant;" for it was important the people should be convinced of that, that he was God's servant, because then they would pay the more attention to him. And we find it so ourselves; if we hear a man preach, and some of you know men that do preach, and you hesitate while you are hearing them: Is that man a regenerated man or is he not? and you come away very often unable to decide. You say, If he is a regenerated man, how can he talk such legal stuff? and if he be not a regenerated man, how can he say such good things as he does say sometimes? And so, they are a sort of puzzle, and the best way is to leave them. But Elijah rather wished the people not to halt between two opinions upon this question: "Let it be known that I am your servant." And then, thirdly, "that I have done all these things at your word." This is what he prayed for. And then the fourth request was, "That this people may know that you are the Lord God, and that you have turned their hearts back again." Now this was his prayer. How is all this to be brought about? And you will find if you take your watch out of your pocket and look at it while you are reading this prayer it will take you just about half a minute to read it. How different that from the five or six hours screaming and bawling of the poor creatures that were led captive by Satan to call upon a false god. Here was Elijah, quiet, self-possessed, wise unto salvation, approaching the great God; and see the answer; the fire descended, and what did it do? You may think me a little fanciful, but it is something that I always have rejoiced in; many years ago there seemed to me to be a great beauty in it, namely, that "the fire consumed the burnt sacrifice;" that of course we can understand as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was the burnt offering, and that the fire of God's wrath did, as it were, eat him up. He said in one place, "the zeal of your house has eaten me up;" the fire of God's wrath did, as it were, eat him up, and accepted him, and there the fire ended. But the same fire consumed the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water. I never can divest

myself of the idea that these things have a meaning, and I never can divest myself of the idea that the stones are intended to represent our impenitent state by nature. In our state by nature our hearts are spoken of as stony hearts, harder than the adamant stone, in a state of impenitence; and God has promised to take away the heart of stone; and that unfeeling heart, that heart of stone, that impenitence, that deadly, hard, cruel enmity against God's prophets, God's Christ, and God's truth, that was, as far as the people of God are concerned, all consumed when Christ died. What a force and a majesty was there in this! With what solemn delight must Elijah have looked on to have seen his prayer thus answered! And ah, my hearer, is it not so now? Is not the Lord Jesus Christ now sometimes revealed to you with a power that, as the poet says, you wonder to feel your own hardness depart? What a wonderful change he works when he takes this hardness away!

“Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone,
But a sense of blood-bought pardon
Soon dissolves the heart of stone.”

And then the wood was consumed also. The wood will represent our sins, that would have been fuel for God's wrath, by which to burn our souls to eternity, and yet fuel that could never be consumed, and the fire not quenched, the worm dies not. Ah, wonder of wonders that we who are delivered should be, as I have said, so cold towards a God that has delivered us from so great a death. And the dust I take to be our mortality. Honor, infinite honor to the dear Redeemer's name, that when he died the dust of my mortality was taken away, corruption was taken away, and incorruption put into the place of it; mortality was taken away, and immortality put into its place; weakness was taken away and strength put into its place; the dust of death was taken away, and majestic and eternal life put into its place. “And licked up the water.” Ah, we all have drunk iniquity like water; iniquity having special reference to error; and the water was the last that was consumed; and our errors in doctrine are generally the last part of the mystery of iniquity we get rid of; that sticks to us as long as it possibly can; but the fire licked up the whole; there is the completeness of it. Ah, well might the people (for Elijah gained his point, though their hearts were turned back again only in reformation, I grant it was not regeneration, but it still shadowed forth that which is more vital), well might the people fall on their faces and say, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God;” or, to give the Hebrew there just as it is, “Jehovah, he is the Interposer; Jehovah, he is the Interposer;” the self-existent, the eternal, the infinite God, he is the Interposer. Elijah knew then, and this is what it is for us to know, that God our Father has interposed for us by the gift of his dear Son; that Jesus Christ, to rescue us from danger, has interposed his precious blood; and the Holy Spirit interposes: so that we may say, “Jehovah, he is the Interposer; Jehovah he is the Interposer,” between us and our sins, between us and our foes, between us and our troubles, between us and all our woe. Having, then, such a majestic God as this on our side, can our confidence in him be too strong, can our faith in him be too great? No, it cannot; he is worthy of more confidence and more love than we can ever show towards his blessed name for doing such great things for us.

Now, what can we say to this matter? Because we must die, you know, presently; and, after all, the great concern of life is to know how to die; because if we are right for that, we shall be right for living; if we are prepared to die the death of the righteous, we are sure to live the life of the righteous, the life of faith in the Son of God. Can we say that we know enough of this tribulation,

drought, and destitution to make us prize the incoming of the sacrificial interposition of the eternal perfection of God, and how the Lord, in accepting that sacrifice, has destroyed all our sins? It is a sweet thought that as the accompaniments of the sacrifice were so entirely independent of man, destroyed, so the accompaniments of Christ's sacrifice were our sins, and they were destroyed, they are gone. Ah, if you can live and die in the confidence of this, there is nothing can yield such happiness, such trust in the Lord our God as access to him by that sacrifice where all our sins are destroyed and gone forever.

Thirdly, notice *the blessing that followed upon that sacrificial salvation*. Elijah, by the acceptance of this sacrifice, had great confidence in God. Let us see if we are favored by the grace of God to imitate him at all in this. I will pass by his slaying the prophets, though these same prophets had slain the Lord's prophets, and Jezebel after this would have slain Elijah, but she could not. Elijah had great faith, then, in the Lord when he saw the sacrifice accepted. Now come, there are none of you doubt that Christ was accepted, do you? No, say you, I am sure he was accepted, and I am sure also that all the sins of the people in that acceptance were destroyed; but I am afraid he will not accept me. Now, that depends evidentially upon whether you accept him. If he is acceptable to you, then the Lord has made him so; and if you cannot receive him as your Jesus Christ but can receive him as the only confidence you have, you will not be lost. Mark the great faith of Elijah. He said to Ahab directly, "Get you up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain." There is confidence. Now you know how to take that spiritually. When Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross, and said, "It is finished," that was the sound of abundance of rain; and so on the day of Pentecost God showered down such a blessing that there was not room enough to receive it; it had to go back again to heaven, some of it; for not only their hearts and souls, but the very place where they were sitting, was filled with the glory of God. "It is finished," said his dying breath, and that is the sound of abundance of rain; that is the assurance, the pledge, of abundance of blessings. So that all the blessings that that sacrifice can bring shall be poured down from time to time upon the house of Israel, for the Lord will bless his Zion, and there shall be showers of blessing; "the floors shall be full of wheat, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil, and you shall eat in plenty, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that has dealt wondrously with you; my people shall never be ashamed." There was the assurance of abundance of rain. Do you think it will come, Elijah? So, Elijah went to the top of Carmel, and prayed for it. That shows that a Christian man is not a presumptuous man; while he expects the blessing, he seeks for it; he knows very well that the house of prayer is the place where the Lord gives more blessings than anywhere else; and therefore, he likes to be there. Hence the Christian in his right mind is like David. Where is David gone to, Jonathan? Why, David said, our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother he has commanded me to be there. So, our Brother our Elder Brother, commands us to be in his house.