

THE BOY FROM THE COUNTRY... Elisha

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(1 KINGS 19: 19, JOHN 7:39)

One of the most respected citizens in a small town in Yorkshire, England, was both the police officer and the veterinarian. When his wife answered the telephone one evening, a lady asked if her husband were at home. "In what capacity do you need him?" inquired the lady of the house. "Well," came the reply, "I need him both as a vet and as a policeman. I cannot get my bulldog to open his mouth—and there is a burglar inside it!" That simple story explains my task. I have a strange verse. If I can open it, there is treasure inside!

The Call in the Country. . . A Decision to Follow

It was probably a delightful morning when Elisha took his oxen to plow in the field. He could not have known it was to be his last day on the farm; his life was about to be transformed. He was like any other farmer in the area and fervently desired to be successful. Evidently he had partially reached that goal, for he owned his equipment, and twenty-four sturdy oxen. During the morning he saw a stranger approaching, and was astonished when a cloak was thrown over his head and shoulders. Elisha had heard of Elijah the prophet, for the entire nation was aware of the confrontation which had occurred on Mount Carmel, and the anger of Jezebel when she heard of the assassination of her priests. Yet, in all probability, the plowman had no previous contact with the man of God.

It was significant that God's call never went to a student nor teacher in one of the schools of the prophets. Elijah did not solicit the services of a nobleman's son, he went to a farmer. It is also interesting that Elisha was not influenced by Elijah's failure, nor the possibility of financial loss if he accepted a call to the ministry. He slew a yoke of oxen and distributed the meat among neighbors. The plow was destroyed and used as firewood. The other oxen were probably given to his family or friends, and it became evident there was never a possibility he would regret or renounce his commitment. The decision to follow Elijah was the commencement of a remarkable ministry.

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Many years later, another Teacher walked through Palestine. He met fishermen at their boats, a tax-gatherer at his place of business, and other people with ordinary occupations. He never called a college graduate nor professional of any kind. He, so to speak, threw His mantle over poor men whose hands were calloused from earning a living. It was significant that the original apostles never returned to their former occupations during the ministry of their Master. As they commenced their new career, they "burned their bridges behind them." Having placed their hands upon the plow, they never looked back!

The Concern of the Convert... A Desire to Feel!

"Then he (Elisha) arose and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him" (I Kings 19:21). He did not perform miracles, nor accomplish anything sensational, but he was completely dependable. He was always present when Elijah required assistance; nothing could entice him from his place of service. Maybe he prepared meals and provided fellowship, which was always an antidote for loneliness. Yet, the more he served Elijah, the greater became his concern. He knew his master possessed unusual qualities which he did not have. One day when Elijah said: "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee," Elisha responded: "I pray thee, let a

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double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (2 Kings 2:9). Because he was acutely aware of his insufficiency, Elisha yearned to be more like his master.

Centuries later the disciples of Christ reached the same conclusion. They followed Jesus, saw His mighty deeds, and even tried to emulate His example, but their best efforts fell short of what they desired. This became evident when a troubled father sought deliverance for a tormented son (Matt. 17:19). Their problem was accentuated when, like Elijah, the Savior announced His imminent departure. They would be confronted by insurmountable obstacles, and evidently needed a double portion of the Holy Spirit. The Lord said: . . . . he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father... And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may

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abide with you for ever" (John 14:12, 16, italics mine). Elisha was a window through which it was easy to see the church.

The Challenge of the Commission.. . A Direction to Fulfill

Things which are obtained easily are often of no value. Eternal life is a gift from God, but the price to be paid for the fulness of the Holy Spirit demands more than some people are willing to pay. Elijah's response to his servant's petition was clear and concise. He said: `Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so" (2 Kings 2:10). Evidently Elisha had to be faithful to the end, but that presented problems. Elijah had established colleges at Bethel and Jericho where young men were trained for the ministry, and at both these centers attractive proposals were made to Elijah's servant. He could have become a popular teacher, for his knowledge of the great Elijah would have made him a competent professor. He might have become the president of an institution. His services would have been in great demand, and his engagements exceedingly lucrative. The refusal to accept the invitations revealed the resolution of his soul. He had determined to stay with Elijah, and that was exactly what he did.

Many of the people who heard the Savior's final words were not as wise. Paul indicated the risen Christ "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. . ." (1 Cor. 15:6). Probably that referred to the time when the Lord ascended into the presence of His Father. "And being assembled together with them, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me . . . ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. . ." (Acts 1:4 and 8). More than 500 people heard those words, but it remains a mystery why, for reasons unknown, 380 never stayed long enough to enjoy the thrill of Pentecost. What happened to them?

The Conquests of the Consecrated.. . A Description of Faithfulness

Elisha requested a double portion of his master's spirit, and

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it was significant that he performed twice as many miracles as Elijah did. Furthermore, if he may be judged by his deeds, he

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was the most Christlike of all the prophets. For example, after he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he raised the dead (2 Kings 4:19-36 and Luke 7:15); fed hungry people (2 Kings 4:42-44 and Matt. 15:32-39); cleansed a leper (2 Kings 5:10-14 and Matt. 16:9-10); and gave sight to the blind (2 Kings 6:20 and Luke 18:35-43). Finally, life was given through his death (2 Kings 13:20-21 and John 3:16).

It is important to know the prelude to these marvelous experiences. The type suggests the servant "died" with his master. Elijah and Elisha went through Jordan together (Rom. 6:6). When Christ died, our carnal nature was reckoned as crucified with the Redeemer. Yet, that was not enough to guarantee the fulness of divine blessing. After Elisha destroyed his own garments -- that is, after he renounced his self-life, he put on the mantle of Elijah and returned to the same river to cross it alone (Gal. 2:20). Likewise Paul also claimed that he passed through his Jordan -- his Calvary -- daily (see I Cor. 15:31). It was continuous identification with Christ in death which led to the success of the apostle's evangelistic crusades. He and Elisha proved the truth of the Scripture: "... . Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Many years ago, J. Allen Tupper and a friend were being escorted around the interesting barracks at Fort Monroe. The guide pointed to a large gun and exclaimed: "With that gun we could pulverise great stone walls, and kill many enemies thousands of yards away." The friend replied: "That is not so; the gun by itself is useless." "Oh," said the officer, "of course we must first insert the powder and shell, and then the disastrous work will begin." The friend replied: "Even that is not enough. You still need the spark which will send the shell toward its target." The Rev. Tupper said: "We may have big guns in the pulpit, and possess the finest equipment, but unless we have the fire of the Holy Spirit, we shall never shatter the strongholds of Satan, nor bring in the reign of our spiritual King."

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