

## T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-15.

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel," And Elisha said unto him, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" And he said, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." And Elijah said unto him, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" And he answered, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." And Elijah said unto him, "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." And he said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." And Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." And 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." And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

"He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

From Bethel the road leads to Jericho

We expect Jericho to come before Bethel. But once we have recognized the meaning of Jericho, we will see that the Holy Spirit led Elijah and Elisha in the right order, that we can get to Jericho only after having been in Bethel.

What is the meaning of Jericho? With the conquering of Jericho, Israel had conquered the whole country so to say, because Jericho was on the threshold of the Promised Land, and the battle for Jericho was, in a representative way, a battle for the whole country. Because of the seven nations that inhabited Canaan, Israel had to march around Jericho seven times. When therefore, on the seventh day, after having marched around Jericho seven times, Jericho fell, everything that stood as an enemy against Israel fell. As they had taken Jericho, they were to take everything else.

Canaan is a picture of the heavenly places. The fulness of the country points to our fulness in Christ. We have been "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). But the enemy stands in our way. He wants to hinder us from taking possession of our riches. God had assured Israel: "I have given you the land" (Deut. 8:10; 9:23). It therefore belonged to them. It belonged to them on the basis of the Word that God had spoken. And yet it is no contradiction that they had to fight in order to take possession of it, because their battle was, rightly seen, not a human battle. The walls of Jericho fell without fighting. In faith Israel had fought for Jericho. The fall of the wall was a victory of faith.

This should be our position towards the hostile powers of wickedness that want to prevent us from taking possession of our heavenly blessing. If Jericho is a picture of the powers of darkness that we meet in the heavenlies, which stand between us and our blessings in the heavenlies, then we see how needful it is that Bethel comes before Jericho, because the fight against the powers of evil in the heavenly regions cannot be the battle of individuals. Individuals will not overcome the powers of darkness. To overcome them requires the

fellowship of the saints. Through the ages some have thought themselves strong enough to stand up against the powers of darkness alone, and they have suffered badly. This is the reason that the devil finds it so important to isolate us. If he succeeds in this, then he has a chance to overcome us. Therefore he brings so many divisions among the saints.

From Bethel the road leads to Jericho. The church, placed in the heavenlies is charged with the battle, a battle not against flesh and blood, but against the forces of wickedness in the heavenly regions. This is a battle that is fought now. At present the saints are called to attain to the fulness of Christ, to stand, filled with Him, in His victory.

Let us stand together! Let us be one in spirit! Let us be one for the purpose of the battle with which we have been charged, because as long as divisions exist, as long as the flesh can assert itself, it will be difficult to keep the ground.

It is normally assumed that Elijah went to heaven in a chariot of fire. This does not correspond with the facts. In the first verse of the second chapter of 2 Kings we are expressly told that the Lord was going to take him to heaven in a whirlwind. And that is exactly how he went.

But what do we do with the chariots and riders? They have a special and very important meaning. Do we not still see them standing with Elisha in chapter six? Here he is in danger, but knows that chariots and riders surround him. How frightened his servant is in the light of the seriousness of the situation! But when his eyes are opened, he sees the mountain full of chariots and horses.

“And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host with horses and chariots was round about the city. And his servant said unto him, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” And he answered, “Fear not: for they that are with us are more than they that are with them.” And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see.” And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain, was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6:15-17).

In chapter thirteen we find Elisha on his deathbed. The king who approaches him, however, senses a power surrounding the one dying. Therefore he exclaims: “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!” (verse 14). They still surround him, because they are God’s gift to His servant. They represent the power in which Elisha dared to stand up against the powers of darkness. Chariots and horsemen mean victory. As the powers of darkness were targeted against God’s servant, God had surrounded him with chariots and horsemen which caused the defeat of the powers of darkness.

We know that Elisha represents the assembly in the power of His resurrection. He is connected to his master whom he saw ascending to heaven, from whom he received a double portion to do greater works than him. The same with the church. The Lord has said: “Greater works than these shall he (you) do; because I go unto the Father” (John 14:12). With the coming of the Holy Spirit the chariots of Israel and its horsemen have, metaphorically speaking, returned. That means that the victory has come to us. We stand in victory over the enemy. Even if we are still in the battle, we know that the victory has already been won. Therefore we do not fight to win; we fight in victory, because we stand in victory. Our fight is nothing else but a holding fast in trust to Him Who has said: “I have given you the land,” and whose Word confirms to us that He has blessed us with all blessings in the heavenlies.

We hear no sound of battle at Jericho. We see no use of fleshly powers. Jericho is encircled, persistently, full of faith, and then in the motion the trumpets announce the victory. Is not all our trying hard a sign that we still doubt that the victory has been given to us, that we think we still have to obtain it? It is all a matter of faith, a matter of trust, our holding fast to His Word. John says: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

Let us consider something important. At the end of the road lies the Jordan. That is both the end of Elijah’s life and the beginning of the public ministry of Elisha. Because of this the Jordan receives a special meaning for both of them. Before Elijah can ascend, he has to cross the Jordan. The Jordan must first be overcome. Elijah took his mantle and folded it. Figuratively speaking he gathers together all power and with this gathering of his powers he divides the Jordan. Figuratively he overcomes death. Elijah breaks through that which divides the heavenly from the earthly. He breaks the enormous obstacle that can only be broken in the power of the life of God: death. Elijah has to break the power of death before he can enter heavenly fulness. The crossing of the Jordan was, figuratively speaking, the victory over death. All this points to our Lord Jesus Christ. All this takes

us to the Letter to the Ephesians: “He has made us alive together with Him, and raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenlies” (Eph. 2:5,6). And further: “...that ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion” (Eph. 1:19-21).

This is our position now. Because Christ holds the victory over death in His hands. In Him death has been overcome. “I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:18). This means: “I have all power over death.” This is what must become clear to us through Elijah. His last work here on earth was, figuratively speaking, the overcoming of the power of death. Through the parting of the water he tore up death, so to speak. He went through death as through dry land. After the victory over the power of death, however, he ascended in a whirlwind to glory.

Let us turn to Elisha, and we will see that he is to come into the same position: the position of a death-overcoming life on this earth. Elisha now possesses the mantle of Elijah, in whom we have the symbol that the power of death has been broken. This must become real to him through faith. Elisha is intended to be a witness and a testimony of the power of the resurrection.

Let us not overlook that “the exceeding greatness of His power” is only prepared for those “who believe” and given to them only (Eph. 1:19).

Elisha’s heart was set on receiving a double portion of the spirit of his master. When Elijah heard the request, he hesitated. And his answer is: “Thou hast asked a hard thing.” Oh, faith always asks for the impossible. The true nature of faith consists in always being on the lookout for something that is impossible on natural grounds. From the start Elisha acts on the basis of faith. Everywhere the sons of the prophets had tried to shake his faith. But his heart was steadfast. He knew what he wanted. He did not let go until Elijah said: “If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.” He followed him. He followed his master until the end. And when he saw him ascend, he cried out: “My father, my father...”; in other words: “Here I am, and I expect to receive what you have promised me.”

Do we see what faith is about? Faith looks into the surpassing greatness of His power that is available to us “who believe”.

In this connection let us point to something that is not less important. The Lord wants the power of His Spirit in His people to be seen. If this is to happen, then Gilgal must first have done its work. If not, the danger exists that yet again our self becomes visible and that personal interests come in. When Elijah asked: “Ask what I shall do for thee.” Elisha did not ask for a double portion of his power, but a double portion of his spirit. What are we striving for? For strength and power? Or are we focussed on the Spirit of Jesus Christ not in the first place as the Spirit of power, but simply as the Spirit Himself? Elisha esteemed his master extraordinarily highly. It was his spirit he longed to possess. He wanted to be like him. For this reason God has also sent His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is there, not only to reveal His power, but that Christ is seen in us in His power.

Now the way back starts for Elisha. He stands at the Jordan. With the mantle that fell on him, he strikes the Jordan, as Elijah had done: “Where is the God of Elijah, even He?”— He puts the God of Elijah into the centre of the first situation of death he meets, because even though he has the victory over the powers of death in his hand, death in itself has not yet ceased from existing. But now he profits from the fellowship in spirit with his ascended master.

Let us be reminded that victory over death was the last thing in Elijah’s life. But with Elisha, however, it is the first. And this now becomes the basis for all his further work. The whole history of Elisha is built on the fact that death has been conquered. It is marked with the mystery of the victory over all death. This is also the reason why the church can do greater works than her Lord, because she too stands in His victory over all power of death.

It is interesting to see that Elisha went back the whole way that he had come on with Elijah. From the Jordan he goes to Jericho and finds there a state of death. Nothing ripens to perfection. Everything wilts before fruition. Elisha, however, lets the testimony of victory over death be effective. The salt in a new jar is a symbol of the power of the resurrection in a new vessel. The new vessel is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ as she was manifested on the day of Pentecost. The church is the new vessel, the new jar, and the life in her is the victory over all power of death. Our advancement to heavenly fulness is nothing else but an increase in the power that has overcome death.

## The Victory Over the Powers of Darkness

From Jericho the road leads on to Bethel. Malicious lads mock the ascension of Elijah. They laugh at the possibility of rapture—bears tear them up. This is a warning. It is dangerous to oppose the power of Jesus Christ. We put our life in danger when we stand in the way of the life of Jesus Christ. Bethel is connected to the heavenly, and nobody may dare to touch that which is the Lord's. Ananias and Sapphira were to experience this. Heavenly authority rests on the church of Jesus Christ. When she has taken up her heavenly position, so that the power of the Resurrected becomes effective, then woe to him who dares challenge the authority of God in her.

How terrible it is to reject a heavenly vision, an inner seeing, because something earthly seems more desirable to us. Mighty forces operate on this earth: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The only salvation for us is our connection to our Lord in heaven.

The mockers were judged by the same powers that were operative within them. Figuratively speaking, they are those elements that have not come under the power of the Cross. Whoever gives himself over to them perishes through them.

From Bethel to Gilgal—there is a famine in Gilgal. The sons of the prophets go out to gather herbs. But they do not possess any discernment. When they draw from the pot to eat, they realize that there is death in the pot—Elisha throws meal into the pot. Death has been withstood. They may eat. The meal is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Bread that came from heaven. Christ is our food. In Gilgal it becomes apparent whether Christ is our food, whether we can distinguish between the things of the flesh and those of the Spirit, because Gilgal stands for our crucifixion with Him being effective, so that it may henceforth be said: Christ is our life!