

The Quiet Hour.

Elijah Taken up Into Heaven.

S.S. LESSON, 2 Kings 2: 1-11. Sept. 11, 1904.

GOLDEN TEXT—He was not; for God took him.—Gen. 5: 24.

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And it came to pass, v. 1. Whatever great event is to happen there is always a time for it. There is no stagnation, no standing still. Events move on, and the thing that seemed so far away is near at hand. There were times when Elijah would have given up his task and laid down the burden, and at such seasons life seemed long. But from the beginning of his course the end was ordained, and the day when he was to leave his earthly life came to pass. Is it not a warning against impatience? Why should we grow restless? for all that is to be will come to pass in God's good time.

Tarry here, I pray thee, v. 2. Out the granite rock there may gush the fountain of waters; all the more refreshing because of the great, cool depths from which it has sprung. Let us never form our whole judgment of a man, until we see his heart touched. Elijah dissuading his young friend from following to behold his separation from him, is another Elijah from the rebuker of kings and the slayer of false prophets. The two sides are not inconsistent, and we need to know them both, really to know the man.

As the Lord liveth, . . . I will not leave thee, v. 2. This is a passage where we must read between the lines. Could we see the look and hear the tones of Elisha that would be all the commentary needed. It is the outpouring of the heart; and we know not which the more to admire, the devotion of the younger man, or the qualities in the older which enkindled such a flame. Certain, at any rate, we may be of this, that Elijah's rule was not of authority, but of love; and as teachers we may learn that our strongest hold on our scholars is not the cleverness of our teaching, but the tenderness of our affection.

Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace, v. 3. When some great crisis is upon us, we have not time for ordinary conversation, and if we had time, we have not interest. Elisha's mind was so taken up with the great loss he was to suffer, and the nation, that he did not wish to discuss it. Surely the lesson is plain, that when some great sorrow is upon a friend, we had better say little or nothing. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to keep silence, and such a time as this is a time for silence.

And they two went on, v. 6. One of the penalties laid upon greatness is that of loneliness. The sons of the prophets might assemble in companies of fifties, but these two men who had been chosen for great work are alone, and one of them is to be taken away. It is good to be greatly used, but it carries its penalty with it. The Elijahs and Elishas are shut out from much of the happiness that their humbler fellows enjoy.

Ask what I shall do for thee, v. 9. All his life had been given to thought and work for others, and the last act was to be of a kind with the rest. It is in doing for others that the choicest happiness comes. And the quality of the prophet's spirit is evident in this question of his. Had he been a lesser man he would have been absorbed in thought of the ascension to which he went forward, to the exclusion of every other per-

sonality. Even so was it with his great Master, of whom it is said, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." It is only great souls which are thus devoid of selfishness: and such greatness is very inspiring to dwell upon.

Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me, v. 9. Unselfish prayers are those most likely of an answer, surely this prayer would be heard. For there was no self-seeking in this request. His master's spirit had been one of toil for the good of the nation, and, in effect Elisha asked that he might be able to bear even greater burdens for the good of his people. It is the prayer of many a brave young heart to day—a double portion of the spirit that seeks no higher honor than to serve men for Christ's sake. The church is safe when such a spirit prevails, and the salvation of the world is nearer.

Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, v. 11. A fitting end to a stormy life. In all the scripture record there are only two who escaped the common way of death: Enoch, who walked with God and "was not," and this stern, strong prophet, who passed his active life in the storm and struggle. It is a strange story for modern ears, and yet how strange is death itself. Who shall say that there is not always for God's dear children, in waiting, though invisible, the heavenly chariot. This much at least is assured—and it robs death of its terror—that to be "absent from the body," is to be "present with the Lord." Those who live for Him now will live with Him then.

The Gospel an Opportunity.

More than anything else, the Gospel is a splendid chance for the completing of life in all that is worthiest. It is the only opportunity for that, and its purpose is that above all. Salvation is not an artificial scheme by which men may be spared the consequences of their mistakes and wrongdoing. It is not a skilful device by which the culprit may escape the penalties of heartless law. It is, rather, a splendid opportunity, put within the reach of every one, for growing up out of his failings and his sins, by opening his life to the spirit of God. It is a great stream of power beating upon the gates of men's lives, to be let in or kept out, as the individual wills.

The career of Christ is a suggestive illustration of this view of the Gospel. He was the great opportunity for all the sick, the maimed, and the troubled who lived when He was on earth. His person seemed to be charged with power to be drawn off at will by suffering. It was a great day for the blind, the lame, the demoniac and the leprous, when Jesus of Nazareth passed by their way. And with this opportunity as with all, there was the possibility of its existing in vain. Undoubtedly there were many who did not come into contact with the Great Healer, who still bore the burden of their pain after He had gone. They did not know. But there may have been some who knew His power, but would not let Him cure. There was a monumental folly, to have health and comfort within their reach and yet refuse to grasp it.

This folly has been repeated through the years. Jesus demonstrated his possession of

other power than that of healing the body. He was ever striving to get those bodies He had strengthened to let Him touch their souls into new purity of life. He was never satisfied until the outward touch of power upon the body led to the inner touch of grace upon the soul. For the divine grace is to the soul what the power was to the body; and Christ's chief mission was to administer this grace. It was a nobler, higher mission than the other. He was a reservoir of spiritual power. Over the lives that let Him touch them in this way came marvelous change of beauty and strength. Such were John and Peter and Mary Magdalen and Paul, and believers of every generation. But many missed the chance, who refused Him power over them. What failures these made of life! the Pharisee, Judas, Pilate, Agrippa. Christ was their chance, and they missed it.

Christ stands before every one as the indispensable opportunity for true manhood. No one can attain the best without Him. For in the Son of Man is power not only to forgive sin, but also to make as many as believe on Him true children of God. And to know of Him, and to have faith that He is the Saviour of the world, and yet to keep that knowledge and that faith from feeding the springs of conduct, to keep them from making life better in any way, is to make Christ to have lived and died and risen in vain. It is the supreme failure of life. To have riches within reach and yet to live on in wretched weakness, these are not so calamitous as for any one to have within him glorious possibilities of lofty spiritual power all undeveloped simply because he will not let Christ touch them, although He stands by waiting to touch them into life.

It is of great interest and assistance to faith to see how the modern view of the world confirms this idea of God pouring forth His life for the perfecting of man. Then no longer push God off, away from His world. Everywhere, to day, science finds an Energy at work that is continually renewing the material universe, and sustaining its operations. The world lives and moves and has its being in God. It is not a finished work rolled off from His hands. But in it His life is still and forever flowing out through all things, in incessant, creative activity. In other words, what science teaches concerning the Creative Force accords in a marvellous manner with what the Gospel teaches of God as a God of salvation. What His power is to the material world His grace is to the world of spiritual intelligence. He makes spiritual life possible by His continual outpouring of grace.

Never, in the history of the world, have men discovered and utilized the great forces that are reservoirs in nature as they are doing to day. The physical life of the race has been revolutionized by the achievements of science. Their machines collect and store elusive force for use. Now the Gospel teaching about the divine grace is a counterpart of what is seen today in the material world. There is a supply of power for the spiritual life of man as well as for his physical life. And the machine (if the word be permissible) by which that grace is revealed and put into practical touch with men's lives is the cross of Christ, is the life of Jesus culminating in the cross as the highest utterance of His spirit. Christ and He crucified, is the power of God unto salvation, unto every one that believeth, just as the sun is the power of God for the light and the life of the world.—Christian Intelligence,