

CHAPTER VI

The Lord God of Elijah!

"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" (II Kings 2: 14).

"Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" This was the cry which fell from the lips of the prophet Elisha immediately after the translation of his predecessor, Elijah. Was he equal to the task that lay ahead? A great weight of responsibility had fallen upon him. How could he, a poor, insignificant stripling, follow in the succession of the mighty Elijah? Who had not heard of the mighty exploits of this man of God? Elisha was in a desperate situation.

Could he follow successfully in the supernatural work of God? Elijah had gone to his reward; would God's power still operate? Elijah's God had answered His servant by food and fire, by drought and rain, by miracles and mercy. He had never failed him, so that he was able to declare with flashing eyes, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand . . ."

The prophet seizes the mantle of his master, and with strong, sturdy steps faces his first immediate test. The theological students were watching him from across the river with critical eyes. Was Elisha a prophet by name only? Did he just have the mantle of the prophet's profession? If I were an artist, how I would love to depict such a glorious Biblical scene! Excitement is in the air, as the servant of the Lord waves the old mantle above his head and cries, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

Will you kindly notice first of all that this was not a cry of unbelief. It is common to use these words during times of declension and departure from the faith, when the Church has lost her prestige and power. Saints wring their hands and beat their breasts and cry out in despair, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Some people, when they ask this question, really mean "Where is Elijah?" — Elijah with the flashing eyes and the voice of thunder; Elijah, the spectacular man of God with the mighty victories. No! Elisha's was not a cry of despair arising from unbelief. Elijah may pass from the scene of his victories, but the God of Elijah still remains and is ever ready to work today. The danger today is that we are trusting in the mantle of Elijah, and not in the God of Elijah.

Again, it was not a cry of idolatry. Elisha did not cry, "Where is God's Elijah" but, "Where is the God of Elijah!" We are living in serious days of evangelical idolatry. As the personality parade passes before carnal eyes, unsanctified believers bow in adoration and worship. Thank God for the inspiration and strength we derive from the lives of the mighty men and women of God, but we refuse to worship them. If all the famous preachers of the world should die tomorrow, God could carry on His work without them. He is still the God Who answers by fire. It is sheer idle folly to cry in despair, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" God buries His workmen but carries on His work. The prophet was not glorying in Elijah's faith, but in Elijah's God. Elijah, by his mighty faith had brought glory to God's holy Name. Thank God for giants of faith in olden times like George Mueller, Grattan Guinness and others. We do not disparage the instruments, but look beyond them to God Himself.

Elijah's was also a cry Victory; the language of audacious faith. He knew Elijah's God was with him, and he marched with conquering strides to his first conquest. Where Elijah finished he began. Glory to God, the waters parted and the

servant of the Lord passed through! There is victory for the man who deliberately faces the problems of the work and takes his stand on the promises of God, and challenges Him to do the miraculous. As my dear friend Lionel B. Fletcher has beautifully said, "It is useless for any man or woman to go into the work of God hoping to win victories with a mantle that has been riddled with holes by the moths of doubt and uncertainty. Such a mantle never yet opened a path for prophet or preacher, although it may have been wielded successfully by some other soul aflame with passion and power."

*High are the cities that dare our assault,
Strong are the barriers that call us to halt!
March we on fearless, and down they must fall,
Vanquished by faith in Him, far above all.*

Elisha was bold enough to claim from God that which ordinary people imagine God would only give to Elijah. Many dear saints go on in feebleness and despair, because they cannot believe that God will give them also spiritual power. This insignificant man of God, conscious of his own weakness, cast himself in utter abandonment upon God, and took the kingdom of heaven by force. Elisha was really saying, "Did Elijah divide this river? No, it was God Himself! Then where is the God of Elijah?" He remembered that the mighty prophet was as human as he, and that it was Jehovah Who wrought the miracles. (James 5: 17).

It was a cry of command — Elisha challenged God! He demanded an immediate consciousness of His presence and power, and felt he had every right to do so as God was making demands from him. Also he wanted a definite confirmation of his call. Years before this, Elijah had entered the field where he was ploughing, and cast his mantle around him, adopting him as his spiritual heir. Now Elisha was asking the Almighty

God for a sign that He, too, had adopted him to carry on Elijah's work. *He had a second-hand mantle in his hand, but he wanted a first-hand call in his heart or he would not go on.* He told God in reality that he would not go forward in the work laid down by Elijah, unless he first received a fresh baptism of power. A mighty man of prayer demands things from God, because God demands the impossible from him. He knows that he cannot comply with God's commands unless he first receives a mighty anointing.

At the very commencement of his ministry he put his God to the test. The crossing of the Jordan was the first of the sixteen miracles wrought by Elisha. The river Jordan lay in front of him: he was going to challenge Jehovah immediately. His cry really meant, "I have my master's mantle as an outward symbol to denote that I am his successor, but oh God, I am in desperate need of 'the double portion of the first-born.' Oh God, baptize me with thy Spirit."

Dare we imagine that there was any special power attached to the mantle? Surely it is blasphemy when we laud and magnify the mighty men and women of the past, as if by their own human power they accomplished their exploits. The God of Savanarola, Tauler, Trudel, Peden and Blumhardt still lives today! Where is the God of these men and women? They are dead, but He is not! We have the mantle of these glorified workers, but have we the power of the living God? It seemed audacious of Elisha to think that he could do what Elijah had done. There was only one Elijah. Yes, but there is Elijah's God, and He can as easily work through an Elisha as through an Elijah, if that instrument is fully surrendered to Him. Elijah's mantle could not divide the water, but Elijah's God could — and did! If we have faith in Elijah's God, the mantle will mean something; otherwise, it will only be a mantle of tradition. Tradition hinders rather than helps, unless those in the line of that tradition have the same spirit as the men

who created it. The mighty hands of William Booth, laid upon the head of a Salvation Army officer, would be of no avail, unless God laid His Hands upon the young man's heart. All mantles are valueless without this divine touch. God deliver us from our holding on to mere traditions! What glorious traditions our evangelical faith possesses, but we dare not for one moment lean on past blessings.

The danger today is that we are trusting in the MANTLE of Elijah, and not in the GOD of Elijah. The mantle is all very well as a symbol of the prophet's office, but the Church needs more than a mantle, no matter how much prestige and reverence is attached to it. Elisha did not go around showing the prophet's mantle as a relic of tradition. Said Spurgeon, "If ever I could feel any great reverence for relics. I should like to have Elijah's mantle. Elisha had it; but what was the use of having the mantle of Elijah, unless he could also have his God?"

Here is the prophet's mantle, but where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah? Many in despair wistfully cry, "Oh that Spurgeon were alive! Oh that Andrew Murray were here today!" Hallelujah, we need not despair, because we have their God; the Lord God of hosts is with us still.

Substitutes are tried today in the place of God's power, and they are the curse of the Church. Today, even in evangelical circles, the man who believes in the supernatural power of God is pitied, or labelled as a fanatic. The church that rejects the sign of the supernatural power is soon rejected by God, and He leaves them to their traditions and worn-out mantles.

It was because Elisha believed in the supernatural God that the unbelievable happened. It was because Michael Peden and others believed in the almighty power of God that miracles happened. These miracles can happen again, because God is not dead. No! He lives and waits to be challenged by the audacious faith of His people. "It is not by might, nor by power,

but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." This is the revival we pray and wait for, and it can be experienced now in every place where God's people lay hold upon the promises.

You can do the impossible for God if you will allow God to do the impossible for you. How often we read the autobiographies and biographies of spiritual giants and lay down the books in despair, saying "How impossible!" Instead of inspiring us, sometimes they discourage us. We say, "But we could never be like them." Oh my brother and sister, we must get our eyes off the human personality and on to the living God. We must remember that the source of all their power is the living God Himself, and He has lovingly challenged us, "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knewest not." (Jer. 33: 3). God is only hindered by our lack of faith.

The situation today is desperate. We have the message for a lost and dying world. All the world is a whispering gallery, and the Church is the focal point. If the Church is going to meet the challenge of the hour, she must challenge the living God afresh, and receive a fresh baptism of power. Dare we look up into the face of the Almighty and challenge Him afresh for victory and power as the prophet Elisha did?