

Elijah and the Fiery Chariot
II Kings 2:1-12, Trinity Sunday XX
October 25, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....The ascension of Elijah into heaven by the fiery chariot has its parallel in Christ's ascension into heaven. The Bible says, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Though we were born as servants to sin, even prisoners of the devil, Christ came to set such captives free through His blood atonement of the cross. In, by, and through the preaching of the Gospel, the Spirit of Christ, the Comforter, comforts our hearts with His Means of Grace, the Gospel in its various forms. After the Gift of His Son, the greatest gift God can give is the Gift of the Spirit, faith by His Gospel so that we believe, teach and confess "that a man is not justified by the deeds of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ."

Through faith in Christ, we then as Christians really don't belong here in this world for we have a desire to depart and be with Christ. We live in the world, but we are not of the world. Let us then not get too comfortable here or desire to live here always when our Savior, saints and angels live in heaven above. For "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit." Though the saints on earth are indeed divided for a short time from the saints above, as Elisha and Elijah, let us rejoice that through our common Savior, we will meet again and our hearts will rejoice.

I. Elisha's request for a double measure of the Spirit.
From God's Word it is evident not only Elisha, but the "sons of the prophets" knew that God would soon take Elijah to heaven. Everywhere Elijah went with Elisha he was told, "Don't you know the Lord will take away your master from your head today?" "Yes I know it, hold your peace" Elisha said. Whereas Elijah encouraged Elisha to stay behind, Elisha refused to leave the side of his teacher. "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." This is the strong love which believers have by faith toward one another. The bonds of the spirit can and should be stronger than the bonds of the flesh. When Jesus' mother and brothers came to see Him, certain people insisted Jesus stop preaching so He could talk to His family but Jesus said, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it." Our

love for one another brethren should be just as strong as that between Elisha and Elijah. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

After going to both Bethel and Jericho, each city having its own school for the prophets, Elijah and Elisha came to the Jordan river. Like the Children of Israel long ago, Elijah with his mantle "smote the waters, and they were divided..... So that they two went over on dry ground." There is great symbolism here in that after Elijah crossed the Jordan God took him straight to heaven. Life everlasting immediately follows death for all who repent and place their faith in Jesus, because Jesus crossed His Jordan too. He made all our sins His own upon the cross, then in our place suffered the most bitter and shameful death this world has ever known. We should never take our sins lightly, for "if one died for all, then were all dead." Yet His death purchased our life everlasting. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." That is why before Jesus died He said to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you." The Gospel says "Come, for all things are now ready." Those who place their faith are indeed ready to cross the Jordan and enter into their heavenly home.

There can be no doubt Elijah was ready for that life everlasting to come. He now said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.....I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Notice Elijah said, "before I be taken away." After he was taken he could not help, but before he was taken he could. What does this mean? It means the saints in heaven cannot hear or help us when we pray. While there is nothing wrong with asking our fellow saints on earth to pray for us, those saints now in heaven cannot hear nor help us. Mary didn't shed her blood for us on the cross. As for those saints in heaven, all their works on earth were still filthy rags in the sight of God. The Bible says, "we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rag." This means even the good works of believers appear before God as a bloody menstuous cloth. It is then the blood of Christ alone which can cleanse us from sin. Those saints in heaven then are only there because they placed their faith in the blood of Christ, His works, His merits and not their own. While the saints above do indeed long for that happy

reunion yet to come, it is a rather blasphemous thought to think they can hear the prayers of all the saints on earth for there is only ONE OMNISCIENT GOD who can simultaneously hear and answer the prayers of all. Saints in heaven cannot do that! Neither Mary nor the saints have any mediating power, “for there is only one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.”

Elisha now asked for a double portion of Elijah’s Spirit. What does this mean? As it was the right of the first-born to receive a double portion of his father’s inheritance, so Elisha in a spiritual sense was the son of Elijah the prophet, hence he later cried out “My father my father, the chariot of Israel.” Elijah was Elisha’s father in that he taught him the Gospel, but not a spiritual father in the sense of a priest with mediating power. Jesus said, “Call no man father.” As for this “double portion of Elijah’s Spirit”? Elijah’s Spirit was the Holy Spirit who enable Elijah to preach the Gospel with power. Hence Elisha desired likewise to preach God’s Word in an even greater measure than Elijah, and God granted Elisha this “hard thing“, this large petition. Through Elijah’s preaching 450 prophets of Baal were slain, but through Elisha’s preaching the Temple was repaired and the true worship of God restored. Likewise Elijah performed seven miracles, but Elisha fourteen. In like manner the Holy Ghost still works through the Gospel Word today, quickening our hearts with His grace. His Spirit dwells continually in our hearts by faith. His Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are the sons of God and “because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Believers know they are believers because the Holy Spirit tells them so. You know you are a believer dear believer because you believe “that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.”

II. The fiery chariot and the parting of the saints.
“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!” What a sight this must have been! Elisha up close, and the sons of the prophets from a distance were eye witnesses. As for the fiery chariot and horses, this was likely zealous and fiery angels in such a form. The Bible says God makes “His angels spirits, His ministers a flaming fire” and “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.”

What was the meaning of this miracle? The fiery

chariot and horses reminds us of the fiery zeal Elijah had in the preaching of God’s Word and true obedience to His commands. His love for God always burned hot nor did it ever wax dim as those Ephesians in Revelation. So should our love be. Most importantly, Elijah ascended up into heaven both body and soul, the same as Enoch and later Jesus. Elijah’s ascension parallels Christ’s. So we too will ascend. Being justified by grace through faith we one day will be in heaven, both body and soul. St. Paul writes, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” On that great and Last Day, these dead bodies will rise to life forever changed and glorified. Never again will they be ungodly vessels of sin, but only holy vessels of His glory! Even now in heaven countless saints sing His glory and their triumphant song thunders like a waterfall! “The voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come.”

All this is made possible by the power of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. While we are yet saints on earth, let our faith be in Him who came to set us free and let us like the Elisha, the sons of the prophets, and the disciples keep our gaze fixed on our heavenly home. For a time, for a moment, the saints on earth are indeed divided from those saints above, but it will not always be so. In His own good time, in His own gentle and tender way according to His grace, God will call us to our heavenly home, sending His holy angels to carry us. In the meantime then do not fear, do not worry, for Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” We do indeed believe in Him, because He has sent us our Comforter, His Holy Spirit who has testified to our hearts the sweetness of His grace. This Comforter will teach us all things, even bring all the words of Jesus to our remembrance. “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.” Amen.