

Occasional Papers, Vol. 1

“His Heart and His Hand”

Numbers 13; Joshua 14

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earth and all that is below, that may be true of us which is expressed in the lines –

“We are but strangers here, we do not crave
A home on earth which gave Thee but a grave;
Thy cross has sever’d ties which bound us here,
Thyself our treasure in a brighter sphere.”

This is the real truth. Christ our *treasure* in heaven, and only His cross on earth. The more deeply you search into the subject, the more full you will find it in every way. The glory is the place of our treasure, and the cross defines our path on earth. May our hearts be encouraged to press on; it is only for a little while; the darkest moment is that immediately preceding the dawning of the day. We have, through His grace, two blessed realities to sustain us here: as a present reality we are the objects of the Father’s love even as it rested on Christ; He Himself is the witness to it: “Hast loved them *as* thou hast loved me.” And then, as to the future, we have the bright and blessed hope of being *perfectly like Him*:

We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him,
for we shall see him as he is.

“His Heart and His Hand”

Numbers 13; Joshua 14

It is most important to understand the moral condition of Israel at this time; otherwise great difficulty must be experienced in seeking to apprehend why Jehovah permitted Moses to send out spies to search the land of Canaan. A careful study of Deut. will very clearly demonstrate the fact that unbelief on the part of Israel was the *origin* of the mission of the spies, though *allowed* of God, who can work His sovereign will in spite of all; just as the demand for a king afterwards, though Jehovah acceded to it and allowed it, was a virtual denial of His regal titles and claims over the rebellious nation. There is one important fact which appears to me to place the question of the searching of the land beyond all dispute. In the third chapter of Exodus, where the earliest intimation of His purpose is recorded, there is likewise a description of the character of the land as it existed to His eye -- its exceeding goodness, fertility, and beauty are all there delineated and traced. How, then, could it have been possible for God, having cast Israel on the fidelity of His word and promise, to originate that which virtually was a slur upon His veracity and the certainty of His word? No; Jehovah *permitted* it, but never *originated* it.

There is a principle of weighty import in the circumstances which attended the searching of the land. First, observe how the testimony of the spies was but confirmatory of Jehovah’s word:

And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs . . . And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.

And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

But then, *immediately*, other principles began to work. The goodness of the land was not denied -- how could it, in the presence of the *earnest* before their eyes? But between them where they were and the possession of this goodly land there were difficulties, and these are all mapped out with the accuracy of unbelief:

Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

And these obstacles and impediments, by occupation with them, obtained such a hold over their hearts, that they were, in their own sight, as well as in the sight of their enemies, but grasshoppers.

Now it is very important to observe how *a sight of the land* tests them; and, in truth, nothing tests like it. This principle stands true in regard to all God’s ways with His people at all times. As soon as ever He discloses His purpose regarding us, His mind and thoughts for the time present, then it is that all the difficulties standing in our way are presented in full array; and hence it is, at this present time, that those who see what God’s great thought is concerning His beloved Son, have difficulties and opposition that all others are strangers to. If any doubt the application of this principle, they have only to study the history of God’s testimony on the earth, in order to be certified as to its truth. Who, may I ask, are beset with every kind of opposition at this present time? Are they not those who seek to keep the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”? Only give up the truth of Christ’s body on the earth as a *practical* one, and you will be promoted to great honor; stand out as a unit, and you will be let pass. But connect yourself *practically* with the great truth -- “There is one body, and one Spirit,” and you are at once subjected to all the opposition of men, and the most malignant hatred of Satan. You are surrounded with difficulties on every side; and if you allow such between you and God, instead of having Him between you and them, your heart will lose confidence, as Israel’s did, and the test will become to you an occasion which Satan will use to turn you away from God, instead of being an opportunity to turn to God. Now observe the consequence of failing before this test. First, there is *weeping*, next *murmuring*, then *hard thoughts* of God; and lastly, they propose crowning self-will –

Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

Observe how gradual the nature of their declensions -- of every declension -- is. They had forgotten the living God, and His interest in them as His people; they had preferred the estimate which their foolish hearts had formed of God’s land in the light of the difficulties between them where they were and it; and now the issue is complete -- a captain of their own choosing is their resource. This gradual character of all decline is very solemn, and has a special voice, because of the spurious notion that our falls are immediate, or all at once. Not so, beloved

reader; like everything else, they have their beginnings, and hence the solemnity of the words

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

But now let us turn for a moment and look at a bright side of this dark picture. The dismal dreariness of unbelief serves ends we should little fancy. The crisis not only brings out the man of unbelief, it likewise calls to the front the man of faith; and this scene is no exception. Joshua and Caleb, men for a crisis, are equal to the emergency; and their united testimony at this moment is very beautiful -- "We are well able to overcome," is the language of the one, and "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us," is the testimony of both. That is to say, the *hand* and *heart* of God are the resources of men of faith in a crisis. Is it not blessed to see a man like Caleb hiding himself behind the power of Jehovah, the arm of God? -- so that forgetting the weakness of Israel, and the strength of both giants and walled cities, he rallies, as it were, the broken ranks of his people with these words --

Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it,

because the right hand of Jehovah's power, which was celebrated on the shores of the Red Sea, as having dashed in pieces the enemy (Ex. 15:6), was before Caleb's heart and thoughts; he goes back to that wondrous scene in his testimony, and seeks to connect his people thereby with that same Jehovah who always triumphs gloriously.

And their united testimony in Ex. 14 is not less beautiful. The delight of Jehovah in His Israel -- that is, His affections, His heart -- is a sufficient plea that He would surely bring them in, thus in the light of this love, this delight of God, they can say, "the Lord is with us." Oh, what rich resources of faith a *crisis* calls forth! It is very striking to see how it is all that is in God they testify unto. The springs of delight in God's own heart, motives there entirely apart from the objects of His favor, are wondrous topics for faith to rest on. And hence it is that even the acknowledged difficulties become tributary to his own, "the people of the land are bread for us." Our God delights in difficulties, to show how entirely above and beyond them He is. The faith of God's elect, these crisis men, look upon them as bread! There is another point of great beauty here. These men of faith are exposed in this crisis to be turned upon by their own --

The congregation bade stone them with stones;

then it is the glory of Jehovah appears, to vindicate the witnesses to the power of His hand and His heart:

The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

Now, ere we pass from this part of our subject to pursue the history of the land possessed, let me point out the immense advantage a saint now has over any of God's people at any previous period, but only to take shame to ourselves that so few of us are crisis men in purpose and heart at this present time.

Most blessed as this testimony of Caleb and Joshua was, as far as they could witness to the *ability* and *delight* of God to

bring His people into possession of what His heart had in store for them, yet what is it if compared with the witness which a saint now can bear to power and love? Who, for instance, in olden times, knew the power of His right hand, in taking the beloved Son out of death, and seating Him in highest glory? How blessed by faith to be spectators of the glory of the Father visiting the grave of Jesus, raising Him up and claiming Him as his own! How blessed to-day to be witnesses, in the power of the indwelling Spirit, to such glory! Truly we are they who are privileged to know

what is the exceeding greatness of his power . . . which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all {Eph. 1}.

Blessed and wondrous vision this is to occupy faith, the Christ of God, the glorious Man, constituting as His point of departure all those things which are termini with us. Principality, power, dominion, names, are the *extent* to which poor things like us can reach in comprehension; but when we look at Jesus raised and exalted by the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, we behold Him *departing* only from that which *bounds* our ken {understanding}. So much for the power of His hand. If again we think of His heart, His affections, when were they proclaimed or known until the beloved Son, ever in His bosom, disclosed them? Joshua could say, "If the Lord delight in us, he will bring us in." I hesitate not to say that an "if" now, in the light of the cross, and the *glory*, of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the position of the saint by virtue of union with the beloved Son as man, would be the unbelief which casts a slur on the love which has disclosed itself in such a manner as to secure confidence in itself. "All the Father's heart made known" -- marks the wondrous place into which we have, through His sovereign grace, been introduced.

How it speaks to the heart and moves the affections, the thought that this marvelous love of God (His own peculiar love) has been made known in the sorrows of His own Son, His Lamb! The agonies and the blood of Jesus not only measured the distance of ruined creatures from God, they also measured the affections of God. Is it too much to say so? When you and I, beloved, by faith visit that wondrous scene of sorrow and love, when by faith we see His travail and sorrow, do we not also see the heart of God therein expressed as never before; and we, by virtue of the same agony and blood standing, not only to witness such love, but to adore the source and the channel through which it flowed forth so blessedly to us?

It was a wonderful day for the earth and for Moses, when, in response to the desire of his heart to see His glory, Jehovah replied --

Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall