

Numbers 27, Colossians 3 & John 21

The Earnest Desire for the Inheritance

Scripture Readings

“Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad... and they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest... saying... Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.” — Numbers 27:1–4

“The daughters of Zelophehad speak right.” — Numbers 27:7

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above... Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” — Colossians 3:1–2

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.” — John 21:7

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness for entering into the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus... let us approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.” — Hebrews 10:19–22

The Tone of Psalm 84

The psalmist of Psalm 84 expresses himself with earnestness and sincerity. These are not casual words, words tossed off without thought. He has a heart, a desire, and he means what he says. It is not precisely what he says but the tone of those words that sets the key for all that follows — the tone of one whose heart is genuinely set on something, and set on it deeply.

The Second Numbering — Numbers 26

Numbers 26 records the second great census of Israel, taken at the close of forty years in the wilderness. Twelve tribes are registered, family by family, and the grand total comes to 601,730 men of twenty years and upward — scarcely changed from the number that had left Egypt. But one tribe tells a stark story: Simeon had lost sixty-three percent of its men. A glance back to chapter 25 gives an answer in part — the name of Zimri the son of Salu, a prince of the tribe, slain by Phinehas. He was a leader who set the worst possible example. A leader forms the character of those who follow him, for better or worse.

At the end of that great census chapter, five women are singled out from the whole registered multitude: the daughters of Zelophehad, of the tribe of Manasseh, the son of Joseph. The mention of Joseph is worth pausing on. The last verses of Genesis give us his dying request: he made the children of Israel swear that when God visited them, they would carry his bones out of Egypt. He died at a hundred and ten, was embalmed, and lay in a coffin in Egypt. But his heart was set on Canaan. He made it — in his bones — to the inheritance, even after death. Of all the vast company of men numbered in Israel, only two living men walked all the way from Egypt to the promised land and received their inheritance: Caleb and Joshua. Joseph, in a sense, was the third. His desire for the inheritance outlived him.

The Daughters of Zelophehad — Their Plea

They stood before Moses, before Eleazar the high priest — for Aaron had now passed away — before the princes, and before all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle. This was not their ordinary manner. A godly woman in Scripture is marked by quietness and modesty; the old English word is shamefacedness. But this matter was important enough, and they cared enough, that they came forward. They were sincere. They were earnest. And what they

wanted was their father's possession, the inheritance that would have been his.

Their father, they said, had died in the wilderness, but not in the company of those who gathered against the Lord in the rebellion of Korah. He died in his own sin and had no sons. Why should his name be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give them therefore a possession among the brethren of their father. And Moses brought their cause before the Lord.

The Company of Korah and Those Whose Eyes Were Set

The distinction that their father was not of the company of Korah is significant. Numbers 16 records what Korah's followers said: "We will not come up. Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness?" They called Egypt the land of milk and honey. But what does the Bible say is the land that flows with milk and honey? Canaan. Not Egypt. What came up out of the river Nile? Frogs — not milk, not honey. These men called the world the good place and called the inheritance a hardship. They had their eyes in entirely the wrong direction.

The eyes of the daughters of Zelophehad were set on the inheritance. No one was putting them out. And that earnestness — that intelligence as to what truly mattered, that refusal to be satisfied with less — is what marks them among all the hundreds of thousands of their generation.

The Lord's Answer: They Speak Right

The Lord's answer to Moses was direct: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right." There is such a thing as what is absolutely right. In the great controversy between what is right and what is wrong, the Lord said of these five women that they spoke right. May it be our privilege to be like them — to speak right of Christ who is our life, to have that earnest, sincere, intelligent desire for the heavenly inheritance that is ours in Him.

Colossians 3 — Seek Those Things Which Are Above

The daughters desired the earthly inheritance in Canaan. Our inheritance is a heavenly one. Paul writes to the Colossians: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” The principle is the same: set your heart on it; be in earnest about it. It is real, and it is above.

John 21 — “It Is the Lord”

After His resurrection the Lord showed Himself to His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. Simon Peter, drawn back to the familiar, said: “I go a fishing.” Several went with him. They fished through the night and caught nothing. At dawn the Lord stood on the shore, unrecognised. He asked if they had any food; they said no. He told them to cast the net on the right side. They could not draw it in for the multitude of fish. And then it was the disciple whom Jesus loved who said to Peter: “It is the Lord.”

Four words: It is the Lord. How much meaning in them. This disciple appears five times in John’s Gospel as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He had been so near, leaning on the Lord’s bosom, knowing His heartbeat, that even in this moment of scattered purpose he was the one who recognised the Lord’s hand in the circumstance. It is the Lord — not merely something that happens to everyone, but the Lord Himself present and active in what appears to be the ordinary. Peter and the others had drifted back to what they knew. But the one who had been closest to the Lord was the one who still saw Him clearly. May those words ever take hold of our hearts, so that in the circumstances of life we may recognise: it is the Lord.

One note from J.M. Dennett is fitting here: Psalm 84 is not so much the soul's desire after God as in Psalm 63, but the soul enjoying God as He manifests Himself in relationship with His people in their midst. The tabernacles of God are the resting place of the soul. These disciples had been in that relationship with the Lord and had in some measure gotten away from it. The Lord came to meet them where they were.

Hebrews 10 — Boldness to Draw Near

The daughters of Zelophehad drew near to Moses and to Eleazar the priest. We have a far greater drawing near. We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way He has opened for us through the veil. We have a great Priest over the house of God. We may draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. And we are called not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but to encourage one another — and by so much the more as we see the day drawing near.

Joseph's Bones and the Living Christ

Joseph's bones made it to the land of promise. He received his inheritance — but not as a living man. Our Lord's bones lay in the grave for three days and three nights — but He arose. He is alive. He sits at the right hand of the Father as the risen, glorified Man, not as bones carried in a coffin but as the living One. His baptism — the baptism of His death — is accomplished, as He Himself said: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straightened until it shall have been accomplished." It is accomplished. He is there, and He is alive, and we may set our hearts upon Him in that heavenly place where our inheritance is laid up for us.

"May it be our privilege to speak right of Christ, to be like those five daughters — sincere, earnest, and set upon the inheritance."