

“Helps in Things Concerning Himself” — Vol. 3, 1893

The Importance and Solemnity of Our Calling

Numbers 32:1-33

W. T. Turpin

the Lamb that was dead, but is alive again for evermore.”

Beloved brethren, has God shown us these things? If He has, shall we not earnestly cry to Him, that this further grace may be given to all who own them as true, that they act in power upon us, and that we may find power to act on them?

The Importance and Solemnity of Our Calling Num. 32:1-33

I desire to bring before you on the one hand the intense solemnity, and on the other the great importance, of knowing what our true calling is. All depends on the standpoint from which we view things, as to the solution of the difficulties that arise, and this is of the deepest moment for each of us. It so often happens that we are, as it were, all adrift, and do not know how to solve them, or what to do. It is because of where we are standing at the time, because of the state of the soul, for we can never reach the true solution of these difficulties save as we are occupying our true position. It is not possible to know how to grapple with difficulties, nor how to find the way through the labyrinths, apart from the position in which we are standing at the moment. Balak was a shrewd man on his own ground when he changed Balaam's place to get him to curse the children of Israel: there is a great principle in that. "Come," he says, "I pray thee, unto *another place* . . . and curse me them from thence." It was the most consummate piece of wickedness to curse the Lord's people, and he saw how much depended on the standpoint from whence he looked at them. And we must be really holding things in faith with God, and looking at them from that standpoint to know how to act in relation to all that comes in our path. Mere credence will not do. Credence is not faith. Faith is that which acts as well as asserts the truth of a thing. It acts out practically, and puts into operation that which it accepts as of God. You cannot leave out that part, for if you are not maintaining in faith your true standing you will be simply and only holding a creed. Sooner or later you will find with regard to the questions which arise, you will be obliged to resort to what I have alluded to, as was the case with the two and a half tribes -- a thing exceedingly popular at the present moment, and which is supposed to be the only safeguard in the midst of confusion, and that is a confession of faith. But this is not the true standing. The true standing is the confession, and it is not only a confession of faith if in your true standing.

Look at the beginning, and you will see how it comes out. Further you will find we are all tested. And it does not follow, because we have, through God's infinite grace, been preserved through one test, that we shall be necessarily preserved through another. Perhaps we have been rudely instructed as to this. We have found those who stood firmly through one test failing before another. And it is very important we should make up our minds to this, that all along the road, every step of the way, we shall find one series of tests after another. It will be all test throughout. And that is how God keeps alive a bright side in all the trouble, that is

how He keeps alive the truth of His own testimony, and it is a great thing to keep that side in view. Sometimes we get too low down, and as we see the result of the sifting we wonder what God means by it. But God will sift, and why? Because the tendency of every one of us is to drop. Is it not so? I am afraid we have too good an opinion of ourselves. It does not follow because we have been kept so far that we shall not fall under another test.

God has committed to His people the most precious thing, and the tendency is to let it go; but it is revived through sifting. That is the meaning of the whole thing, and we ought to look at it so. What do we find? As a matter of fact there are places where everything goes on so quietly, and so peacefully. Yes; but there is a quietness in death, let us not forget that. The grave is a quiet place, the shroud is a quiet robe and that is positively what has been seen -- not life enough oftentimes to assert itself in the corruption. And then what does God do? He comes in with some test that brings everything unto its true position. It is not His doing, but He *permits* something to come up that manifests and brings out into the true light what would otherwise continue to lie concealed and be passed over under a veil. That is the history of the testimony in this world. What a tendency in God's people to get away from the ways of God as revealed in His book! The principles of God are here, why should we be subjected to a different order of principles? What we have to learn is this, and it is a lesson of the deepest importance, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Very solemnly, very severely that lesson has had to be pressed upon us.

Now look at the beginning. Here is a start in what I call the departure from the true calling. At least it is so in a certain way, perhaps there are links farther back. Here we see it, as it were, full-blown in the two and a half tribes. Now a question arises, and I ask your special attention to it, a question of positively and practically taking possession of what God has given them. There are two things I do want the youngest believer to get hold of. People say God has given it to us. Yes; but have you taken it? Oh, yes; I see my title to it all very clear; but you have no enjoyment of any of it. I tell you what it is like, even a man who is the owner of the most lovely domain possible to conceive. That, he will say, all belongs to me, and he will show you with the greatest clearness that he has got his title to it; and there are the deeds all secure. But do you know he has never lived a day on the estate, never been to the castle, never walked the green sward of time beautiful lawns; he has never once settled down there; never taken into his view the beauty of its landscapes and the magnificence of all the scene -- he can only talk to you about his title. He has no sense of possession, not the least. He will talk to you from morning till night about his title-deeds. But the man who lives there can tell you about the *thing* itself and not the title merely. Oh! he says, it is a lovely spot. Will you only come and live with me in my beautiful place? It is the *place* he is thinking of now. He has got it. That is the difference between our title to the inheritance, and our having set foot upon it, having got it in conscious possession; and that is just what some would have us part with, and be content

with having the title. And suppose you talk about conscious possession, and conscious results, what is the answer? Take care, you are thinking about yourself. Though, for that matter, you may be thinking quite as much about yourself if talking only of your title. But here is a very serious question: how can I know the blessedness and the greatness and the perfectness and the glory and the beauty of what God in His wonderful grace has given me, if I refuse to allow my heart to be carried by the Spirit of God unto the realization of it? You cannot; it is impossible!

Now you will find that is what meets us here. God had given to the two and a half tribes the land of Canaan for an inheritance. That is a distinct feature. It was the other side of Jordan, in figure that which answers to being dead and risen with Christ. That is the meaning of Jordan. The inheritance was the other side of the river of death, and there was no other way to it but to cross over. This was clearly the case as to Israel, and certainly it is the same now as to the inheritance God has in infinite grace given to us -- it is the other side of death and resurrection.

Now look at the first thing. Here are the two and a half tribes, the genuine people of God; and God had given them the land, and now it was a question of setting their foot on it, or, in other words, taking possession. Did you ever notice that little word in Josh. 1? Take notice of it. Joshua who is their new leader, a picture of Christ in resurrection, says to them: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you." He does not only give, but it is for them to possess; their foot must be set upon it, and you cannot possess it otherwise. You might stop short with the fact that God had given it; but the thing is, that you possess it. They were "to go and to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it." You are to practically realize, and have the enjoyment of, what God has given.

There is another thing concerning which, perhaps, we have made a little mistake -- the way in which they are put in possession in v. 5. It says: "There shall not any man be able to stand before *thee* all the days of thy life." Who was this said to? Not to Israel, but to Joshua! He was the leader, the one to bring them into possession. He is the one who leads them across the river of death, a type of Christ. And you see that is an immense comfort; our leader is an invincible leader, One whom no power can stand against. How is it, then, we fail when something arises? Is it not because we do not submit ourselves to, and follow our Leader? It is a simple question of confidence in Him who can lead us across, and bring us into practical possession of what God has given us.

Now see these two and a half tribes when the question of taking possession comes up. They say, we have certain possessions of our own, and what is that? Now that cuts at us all; we have certain possessions of our own. Well, we have cattle, and this is a good place for cattle. Yes; that is so, thinking of our cattle, our substance, our possessions in the wilderness, all we have got down here. And there was a country which God had subdued before Israel, which was not Canaan properly, a place they wished to take as their possession. It was not Egypt, and it was not the wilderness;

but it was not Canaan. It was a country that expresses the very thing that so many people look out for, a sort of *via media* (a middle path), and you lay the flattering unction to yourselves that you are not resting in Egypt, nor yet in the desert, though not in the land; and that is just the point, it is not Canaan, *not the other side of Jordan*; but it is a good country for cattle, and we have cattle. Like Lot, it was the same principle, he saw the place that it was well watered -- even as the garden of the Lord. There was the snare -- it was *like* the garden of the Lord. Thus, when people intend to have a thing like this, they attach the Lord's name to it, as they must have a religious sop for the conscience. They say, I am quite sure the Lord gave me this or that; and alas, it is clear He did not.

Now see what a solemn thing it is: they give up their calling, their true inheritance, and positively refuse to be brought across the river of death to take their possession. Bring us not, they say, over Jordan. And what makes it the more striking is, they are actually ready to go across and to fight for a country they do not intend to possess or enjoy at all. They are actually ready to accept the trials and vicissitudes and dangers, and engage in the battles of their brethren to subdue their enemies, and fight for a land they were not going to possess, and would not have. And they are very solicitous about it, too. I often think they were in a certain sense very superior to a great many Christians of the present day.

But God was overruling. He would not have the unity of the nation broken in taking possession. It is perfectly true the unity of the nation and the unity of the body are not the same thing, but the unity of the nation is a striking *illustration* of the unity of the body. God had His thoughts about a unity in those days, and had got then a unity, mark, that He would not have violated, would not have touched, though it was only the unity of the nation. And if he was so jealous about the unity of a nation that He would not have it infringed upon in the slightest degree, how much more do you think he is jealous of anything that in the slightest degree touches or infringes upon the great truth of the unity of the body now? You see how all these truths are enforced and illustrated.

But what was the effect of this departure from the calling? See where it places them? You see they had set the commonest details of their life -- their substance -- before their calling. What did they care for their calling? Did they care to be in Jehovah's territory, in that place which He had described as "a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven; a land which the Lord thy God careth for, the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year"; did they care for this before their cattle which they had down here in this world? That is where the test comes. It comes down into the practical details. That is the way we are tested to-day. I do not believe any saint of God at this present moment, who is going on with his calling, and living in the truth of it, can possibly prosper in this world. It is in the nature of things perfectly incompatible.

You cannot prosper in both. Possession in heaven is that which shakes you out of the desire to have possession here.

And there is where the test comes in. This is a most solemn instance. It is said, "And when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle" -- then they desired it. Ah! those Jazers and Gileads, may we not well dread them! They are the snares to draw the heart from the calling, exactly what they proved to the two and a half tribes. There the calling was really given up. I will now point out the effect of this in a certain way. Turn to Josh. 22:9, 10.

The two and a half tribes were now going back. We were looking at how they were compelled to share in the fortunes of the war, and now they were taking their departure to the land which had been given to them by the hand of Moses. Let me remark here, as it may be some have a difficulty about it, and say, Did not Moses allow this? Yes, they were allowed, so that they might work out in God's government His own ways, which He permits for chastisement, but not the purposes of God at all. You remember at the first when this proposition was made Moses was indignant at it, afterwards the thing passed and was permitted. Just as in the same way when afterwards the children of Israel desired a king to be set over them, Samuel was at first indignant at their rebellion; and yet afterwards they were allowed to have their desire. In both cases it was the *permission* of God, but only to work out His own moral government. Well, now the people are returning unto their possession, and coming to the border of Jordan they set up a great altar to see to. What was the meaning of this? Now here was the first effect of giving up the calling, the first consequence of it. Now they begin to realize what they had not thought of before. They said, we shall soon be passing away, and our children will come on the scene, and then they turn to the other tribes and say, "your children may speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel? For the Lord hath made Jordan a border between us and you." Look at the effect of giving up the true calling of God. The effect is not all seen exactly at the moment. Now the thing is upon them, and they are going over to the wrong side of Jordan, to take up a position there, and then they begin to think what may result from this. Well, there is the effect of giving up the calling, and mark what they did; they set up) an altar. What does that mean? Well, they set up what was in reality a sort of crutch, the result of their lameness -- a great altar to see to, something the eye could rest on, point to, and say, Look at this! There is no difference between us.

Well, as soon as ever the altar was built, set up, and called "Ed," that is, "witness," the rest of the tribes were indignant, and rightly so. And they were not only indignant, but were actually prepared to go up against them. Why? Because they had broken the unity of the nation, and they were setting up a kind of independency there on the borders of the Jordan, seeking to establish something, the result of their self-will, being outside the unity of the nation, outside the divine calling and divine portion, a resort to human expediency, which appeared like a connection, but the worst thing possible. For the thing that is nearest to the truth is the worst thing, because it *resembles*, but is not the truth.

And that is the tendency at this moment. People say, Are we not free? What do they mean? Alas, is it free to do their own will? But that is not liberty, it is license; and that is the prevailing spirit of the day. It is called liberty, but that is not the right name at all. It is very low down indeed, it is in reality license. Oh, but, say they, will not the Lord be just as much here as he is there? Surely the Lord is as much in one place as another? Do you think we can put the Lord where we please? Let us take care what we say about these things. It is a great and a solemn and a serious mistake to say that the Lord is in that which is not His call. He is not in that which is not His call. I do not for a moment question that the Lord, in His grace and care and goodness and kindness, is with His people individually, that He takes account of their feebleness, and bears with them in His longsuffering in all their slowness; but that is a very different thing from having a great altar like Ed, a great piece of independency, the result of having departed from their true calling.

And I know this spirit may creep in among us; it is the tendency all round, and people get so far from the true calling that they positively come to be a center to themselves. What is it the result of? Simply and plainly of having given up the calling. Do you ask what is our calling to-day? "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." And you cannot depart from it, you cannot surrender it, you cannot infringe it, and then say you will have your altar set up. You are not to carry out what you think right, and do what you think best. The intention, perhaps, here was good; but good intentions and the leading of the Spirit are not the same thing. The question is, Is the Spirit of God leading? He leads only in a divine way, in the divine calling, and according to divine principles; who can doubt it?

And we must face this question plainly and distinctly: are we to return, and give up this truth which God in His infinite mercy recovered to us, now over fifty years ago, which, through the Lord's mercy, has been so wonderfully kept alive to this day, and which He has brought out now so clearly -- are we to give all this up, and drift back unto independency, and I know not what else? Impossible. As a matter of fact I have seen it. I observe that where this has been departed from, sooner or later the drift is down unto the very worst order of things in all this unhappy Christendom. Some have got away from God and been unable to help themselves from drifting thus. There is no security outside the calling. In fact, if you surrender it in the first instance in connection with the thing that comes near to yourself, or because of your cattle, your substance, you soon surrender it altogether. And it is in this way that the call of God is surrendered in the things that come nearest and closest to us. It is a very solemn thing to take into account, that thus it was with the two and a half tribes.

Well, Israel did not go up to war with them; they were satisfied that while the thing was wrong *in principle*, it was not *in intention*; and therefore the grace and kindness of God settled it.

But who was the man they sent down about this matter? The man they sent down was the javelin man, Phinehas! He who,