

Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 1

The Leaders — The Land — The Moral Qualifications for Entrance — Those Who Enter

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The Book of Joshua gives us, in type, the subject of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The journey across the desert had come to an end, and the children of Israel had now to cross the Jordan led by a new guide, and to take possession of the land of promise, driving out the enemies who dwelt there. It is the same for us. The heavenly places are our Canaan, into which we enter by the power of the Spirit of God, who unites us to an ascended Christ, and seats us together in Him in the glory, so that thus we enjoy anticipatively this glory which He has acquired for Himself, into which He will introduce us, and which we shall share, ere long, with Him.

But, meanwhile, we have to fight the fight of faith against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places, in order to appropriate every inch of ground which God has given us to inherit. The difference between the type and the reality is, that the wilderness journey was over for Israel before they entered Canaan, whilst for us the desert and Canaan exist together, but this only increases the blessing. If the wilderness teaches us that we still need to be humbled and proved to know what is in our hearts, it is there that, in answer to our infirmities, we experience the preciousness of divine resources in the midst of this "dry and thirsty land where no water is": God opening His hand to feed us with manna, to refresh us with water from the rock, and to make us taste the inexhaustible resources of His grace, for His people have "lacked nothing." "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years." (Deut. 8: 4) Moreover, we find ourselves at the same time, if not at the same moment, in the green pastures and still waters of a rich country whose firstfruits we taste; we can sit at peace at the table spread on the other side of Jordan, and enjoy its food, delighting ourselves in a heavenly Christ seated in the glory at God's right hand.

THE LEADER

At the moment when this new stage of Israel's history begins, Joshua is called to take the leadership of the people. This remarkable man appears for the first time in Exodus 17, at the time of the war against Amalek, and this gives us the key to his typical character. Whilst Moses, type here of divine authority intimately associated with the heavenly priesthood and the righteousness of Christ, stands on the top of the hill during the combat, there is a man down in the plain associated with the people whom he leads, a man "in whom is the spirit," as the Lord said to Moses (Num. 27: 18), and who conducts the battle of the Lord. This Joshua is Christ, but Christ in us, or amongst us down here, in the power of the Holy Ghost. Moses, as their leader, had been inseparable from Israel in

the desert, and so it will be with Joshua as leader of the people in Canaan. It is said of this last: a man "which may go out before them . . . and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd.... And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient." (Num. 27: 17, 20)

THE LAND AND ITS BOUNDARIES

In verse 2 the Jordan is mentioned, a barrier between the people and the promised land which they must cross under the guidance of Joshua to enter Canaan. Their inheritance was a pure gift of the grace of God: "the land which I do give . . . to the children of Israel" They were entitled to it by God, but it was a question for the people not only of possession, but of entering into possession: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you." (v. 3) So it is with us spiritually: we have all these things, but we cannot enter into them except as having passed through death with Christ, and entering by the power of His Spirit where He is. In short, it is as we occupy ourselves with these things, and enter into them diligently and personally, that we lay hold of each one of our blessings, and prove their heavenly reality. In one word, the Christian must himself appropriate them by faith in order to enjoy them; otherwise he would be like a poor king, ill and living abroad, who had never travelled in his own kingdom.

In verse 5 we find another important feature which characterises the land: the enemy is there obstacles are there, wherever we put our foot an adversary arises. We see here clearly, as has often been remarked, that Canaan is not heaven in the sense in which we shall reach it by actual physical death, but heaven in which the enemy is found, heaven the scene of present warfare for the Christian. But, precious promise: "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee," said the Lord to Joshua, "all the days of thy life"; that is to say, until he should have established the people definitely in possession of the land. And what security there was for the people in this promise. Scarcely, says God, will you have encountered the enemy on your path, ere he shall be dispersed. The people might have shouted: Victory! Satan cannot stand before us! Poor Israel, you will soon see it before Ai; you are but a toy in the hands of Satan, you have no strength to resist him, but the power is in Christ. "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee," said the Lord to Joshua; whilst the promise to the people was, "I have given unto you." (v. 3)

We may notice another point in verse 4. God gives them an exact description of the boundaries of Canaan. What are they? In their full

extent they were never reached by the people, but will be given to them in millennial glory. Likewise for us, the heavenly places are our present conquest wherever we place our foot, but shall we ever measure the extent of our inheritance? Now we "know in part," but the day is at hand when that which is perfect shall have come, and that which is in part shall be done away; "then shall I know even as also I am known."

The boundaries of the land were a great desert, a great mountain, a great river, and a great sea. That is what was to be found outside this fertile country, that on which the people could not or ought not to tread. Do we not find here the world with all its moral characteristics: its aridity, its power, its prosperity, and its agitation? As to its aridity, Israel had gone through it, only to prove that it had no resource for them, and that the bread from heaven alone could feed them in these solitudes. Such, beloved, is the character of the things which are not ours. But Canaan — heaven, is ours; Canaan with its warfare no doubt, but its victories; Canaan with the peaceful enjoyment of infinite possessions, resuming themselves in, and concentrating themselves around the person of a risen Christ seated in the glory.

THE MORAL QUALIFICATIONS REQUISITE FOR ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN

In verse 6 we find spiritual energy, what the Apostle Peter calls "virtue." Faith led them to tread everywhere with the soles of their feet; "virtue" was to be added to faith; but it is worthy of note that this energy is not to be found in us; for the people it is found in Joshua; it is in Christ for us. "Be strong and of a good courage, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them." "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee . . . they go from strength to strength." This principle is of the utmost importance. How many Christians there are who seek to discover strength in themselves, to feel themselves strong for the combat! Their quest, if it does not lead to discouragement, ends in what certainly is not worth more, self-satisfaction. Power is not there, it is in Christ, but in Christ for us. And why is it given to us? Is it to render us great in our own eyes, or to puff us up? Far from it; but to lead us into the path of obedience. (v. 7) It is little children who learn to obey. Strength makes us small; it makes an atom of man, in order that the power of Christ may be exalted.

We find a beautiful example of this truth in Judges 6. "The angel of the Lord appeared unto Gideon, and said unto him: The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." These two things are closely united: strength was his in the Lord Himself. "Go in this thy might," said the Lord looking upon him; and he is immediately seized with the sense of his

own nothingness: his family was the poorest in Manasseh, and he the least in his father's house. And the Lord said unto him: "Surely I will be with thee."

Obedience is always governed by the word of God. God gives strength to Joshua, in order, He says, "that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law of Moses." But besides the spiritual energy necessary to obey, there must be something more. He adds in verse 8: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein." There must then be; besides divine energy, diligent care to appropriate the thoughts of God. He says: meditate therein in order to obey. Is that our aim when we study the word of God? Often we like to read for the sake of instruction, which is of itself a good thing; at other times, so as to be able to impart to others, also an excellent thing in its place; but, let me say again, do we habitually read it for the purpose of diligently obeying? If it were so, how it would change the whole current of Christians' lives!

He adds: "Meditate therein day and night." There are some Christians who read a chapter (alas, a verse perhaps!) every morning as a sort of amulet to preserve them throughout the day. Is that meditating day and night on the word of God? What about our occupations? do you say? Well, let me ask you in return: In the midst of your occupations, is it the word given by God which nourishes you — that word given for your soul's enjoyment, and to guide you in the path of Christ? That is the way to "have good success in our ways and to prosper."

In verse 9 we find a further principle: "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage." What power the assurance of God's mind gives! All indecision as to the path, all terror, all fear of the enemy disappear. Satan cannot harm us; has not God commanded us? Such then are the principles which should govern the heart that would enjoy heavenly things and fight the battles of the Lord. It is blessed to see them stated quite at the beginning of this book, before Israel has taken a single step, in such a way as to place him in possession of well-furbished weapons wherewith to obtain the victory.

THOSE WHO ENTER CANAAN

After strewing us the Leader, the land, and the moral qualifications necessary for entrance therein, the word of God speaks to us (vers. 10-18) of those who are called to enter in. They comprise the people, and also the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh. These last do not refuse, as the previous generation had done, to enter, when the spies caused their hearts to melt. On the contrary, they associate

themselves with their brethren, and are in the first rank of combatants, but not to take possession of the land. Their portion is on the other side of Jordan. It was their circumstances which led them to choose it: they had much cattle: "the place was a place for cattle," adapted to their circumstances. (Num. 32: 1)

It is the same with numbers of Christians; indeed, one might say that to-day it is rather the nine tribes and a half who have chosen their dwelling on the other side of Jordan. The main point in the christian life of believers is the circumstances of this life, the everyday needs, abundance or want, enclosures for their cattle, or cities for their families. (Num. 32: 16) Moreover, these Christians are not, properly speaking, lacking in faith: on the contrary they experience that the Lord can enter in grace into all their circumstances, adapting Himself to them, and that He does so, He who came down to bring divine blessing to this earth. Theirs is not a worldly Christianity, but an earthly one. Israel were a type of worldly Christianity when they refused to go up to the mountains of the Amorite. "Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." (Num. 14: 3, 4) Also their carcasses fell in the wilderness. The two and a half tribes are the type of those who lower Christianity to a life of faith for the earthly circumstances they traverse, making their life to consist in these things. "They had much cattle." Moses is at first indignant, but he afterwards bears with them, seeing that although their faith was weak, still it was faith, and that these earthly links did not separate them from their brethren.

Beloved, this tendency to lower Christianity vaunts itself on every hand as a tenet in the present day. With much pretension to power, little is known beyond a Christ in whom to trust for His providential care, and in the details, great or small, of daily life. Christ is known as a Shepherd: "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"; but even in this way, how feebly the extent of His resources is appreciated! If He leads us through this world, it is not here that He gives us rest. The green pastures and the still waters are not the fields, nor the sheepfolds, nor the cities of Gilead, but the rich pastures of the land of Canaan.

It is blessed to confide in Him for everything, and God forbid that we should seek to diminish in the saints' aught of this confidence; but let us know something of the joy of entrance even now there where a glorified Christ is to be found, of being attached outside this world, drawn away from this scene, to be introduced, dead and risen with Him, into a heavenly Canaan. There, the motive for our walk will no longer be "much cattle"; it will not be a question of arranging our life more or less faithfully according to what we possess; but, having left all behind, self,