

Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 23

Final Instructions to Joshua

H. L. Rossier

Joshua 23

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS TO JOSHUA

Israel are now in possession of their inheritance; Joshua, old and stricken with age, is ready to go the way of all the earth. When the outward props of divine order in the assembly are taken from us, and those who are to the front in the fight are no more, everything is apparently gone; but in reality to faith there is no lack. "The Lord your God," said Joshua, "he it is that fighteth for you." (vs. 3, 10) Leaders may depart; and it is a blessed thing to consider the end of their conversation, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ev. Yes, nothing is lacking where there is faith; and where it is wanting everything decays, as happened with Israel and the church.

Henceforth, if the people were to maintain themselves at the height of their privileges, they must realise in their own souls, and in their entire lives, that power of the Spirit which led them on to victory in the person of Joshua. "Be strong and of a good courage," He had said to Joshua in Joshua 1: 6, "for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I swore unto their fathers to give them." There lay the power for victory, and now Joshua says to the people: "Be ye therefore very courageous." (v. 6) This is realisation in the soul.

Now how will this spiritual strength show itself in the people? In obedience to the written word, "to keep" — and this is inseparable from practice — "and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses." To obey thus, the people had not only the power of God's Spirit with them, but they had before their eyes, a man Joshua, on whom the same things had been enjoined, who had followed to the end in the pathway of obedience, and who could say with Paul: "I have kept the faith." But we, dear readers, have before us the true Joshua, the perfect model, the author and finisher of faith.

Notice too, how Joshua, like Paul, has a full sense of the changes which his departure would bring about. It would be the introduction of a new order of things. Decline would surely set in, as they both knew, but like a thread through a labyrinth, an infallible guide, they commend the word of God: "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace." (Acts 20: 32)

Ah! it is the word which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance, but above all to sanctify us. It was from neglect of it that Israel sunk by degrees to the level of the idolatrous nations and their abominations. See in verse 7 how imperceptible, and at the same time slippery, is the downward path; first they come amongst these nations,

forgetful of separation from the world; then they make mention of the name of their gods; we become familiarised with the ruling principles of the world; then we cause to swear by them; it seems natural that others should acknowledge them; then we serve them, and finally bow down ourselves to them; a downward path truly!

But there are other means of retaining their blessings besides obedience to the word, and to these Joshua directs their attention. The second is "cleaving to the Lord" (v. 8); the heart and affections must be set on the Person of Christ. Do you often think, beloved, of that verse in Psalm 43? "My soul followeth hard after thee, thy right hand upholdeth me." Do we not feel — there is a heart which has given itself wholly to the Lord, and is able to tell Him so? for these are not experiences which one would display before the world. It is a soul captivated by the beauty of its object, entirely surrendered to Christ, and discovering a power in Him to lift it above every difficulty, and preserve it from all danger. "Thy right hand upholdeth me." It is the same in our chapter (vers. 9, 10); in cleaving to Him, the people experience the strength of Jehovah. Oh! may we in our troublous days realise more of this close cleaving of soul to Christ; may we have hearts that seek and desire nought save Himself, which do not make a show before the world of their feelings or of their consecration to God, which do not say, "I am rich and have need of nothing," but which say to Christ in the silence of His own presence, and in accents which His ear alone can hear: "I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me," and also on account of Thy matchless beauty; oh, inimitable Pattern, some traits of whom, however feeble, I would fain reproduce! "My soul followeth hard after Thee."

Thirdly we find vigilance. "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God." (v. 11) We have to be watchful over our hearts, so as not to tolerate the oft-times subtle entrance of lusts which weaken our affections for the Lord, and by means of which He is replaced by objects unworthy of being compared to Him, and which oblige Him to judge us. (vs. 16-22) "Flee also youthful lusts," says the apostle. "Be ye sober, and watch."