Crossing the Jordan

Streams of Refreshing · Joshua 3–4

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And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither and hear the words of the LORD your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan (Josh. 3:9-17).

The scene here described was Israel's last trial in the wilderness. For forty years they had journeyed through the desert; but their last experience, like the first, only proved their own helplessness and entire inability to enter the land by their own works. The green fields and luxuriant hills of the land flowing with milk and honey {Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5}

were now in sight, but they could not enter in. The overflowing Jordan rolled before them, and threatened to swallow up with death any who ventured in nature's strength to cross it. But the point was so conclusive, that we are not told that any one even proposed it; but Joshua and all the hosts of Israel are presented to us as standing on the wilderness side of Jordan's overflowing banks in conscious helplessness, and without hope, so far as their own resources were concerned. They again had to find that the law could not bring them into the land, and this lesson they had often bitterly to prove in their experience, though, like ourselves, they were very slow to learn it. It is remarkable how prominently this is brought out at the close of their wilderness course. Only about a year before the scene we are contemplating, those who had so willingly placed themselves under the law, the terms of which were, This do, and thou shalt live {Luke 10:28},

were dying in all directions from the fiery serpent's bite, which not only shows us that they had not kept the law, but that they were so disobedient as to bring upon themselves the special judgment of

God; so that, instead of having life as the fruit of obedience, deliverance from death could only come to them in the way of grace -- the free gift of God. Just before this, the venerable lawgiver, notwithstanding all his previous meekness and faithfulness, so grievously dishonored the Lord, that he could not be allowed to bring the congregation of Israel into the land. (See Num. 20 and 21) Thus we see that the law could neither give them life nor righteousness, but was the ministration of condemnation and death, and that in its working it served to prove the New Testament doctrines, By the law is the knowledge of sin,

and, By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight {Rom. 3:20}.

And how blessed it is to contemplate that all these failures of man were only occasions for bringing out, in types and shadows, the resources of God's abounding grace, as the realities were afterwards so wondrously manifested in the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! How important, also, it is to notice, in the history of those under the law, that whatever blessing they had, it came to them, not as the fruit of their own worthiness, but only in the way of Divine mercy! If you see them in Egyptian bondage, or exposed to the destroying angel's sword, it is God that shelters and delivers them through the blood of the lamb. When Pharaoh and his host hotly pursued them to the borders of the Red Sea, it was God that wrought deliverance for them, by dividing the waves and heaping them up in a liquid wall, thus bringing them through as on dry land, and cutting off their enemies in judgment. See them again with parched lips murmuring beside Marah's waters; and it was God who directed them to that mystic tree which could make the bitterest water sweet. See them, also, hungry in the barren wilderness, or burning with thirst in a land of drought; and it was God that rained down daily bread from heaven to feed them, and caused the flinty rock to pour forth rivers of water to refresh them. It was God who led them by the right way; it was God who brought the pillar of cloud over them to screen them from the sun's burning rays, and caused the pillar of fire to light up the darkness of the night watches. See them again suffering the due reward of their sins from the fiery serpent's bite; and it was God that brought life to them through the serpent of brass lifted up. See their leader deservedly cut off through transgression; and it was God who raised up Joshua to successfully lead them through every obstacle; and lead them into their promised inheritance. Lastly, see them on Jordan's bank, afresh learning the lesson of being without strength {Rom. 5:6};

and it is God, the living God, against whom they had so often sinned, that in sovereign grace made a way for them through the river of judgment, and brought them into their long-desired land. All these facts read to us, as they should have to Israel, the happy lessons, that we are saved and blessed solely on the ground of mercy, and

not by works of righteousness which we have done {Titus 3:5}. "Grace, we sing, God's grace through Jesus; Grace, the spring of peace to man; Grace, that from each sorrow frees us; Grace, too high for thought to scan; Grace, the theme of God's own love, Grace, the theme all themes above."

In order to get a clear understanding of the instruction of Israel's crossing the Jordan, we must endeavour to divest ourselves of the commonly received idea, that it is a type of the Christian's

experience in the article of death. The mistake has most likely arisen from not seeing that the gospel brings to us a present salvation, and that each believer is spoken of in the Scriptures as one who HATH everlasting life,

and is passed from death unto life {John 5:24}.

From not seeing this, some think of death as before them instead of behind them, and that which they have passed from.

Hence some speak of daily "dipping their foot in Jordan," that is, being daily exercised about death. A friend of mine once visited a sick Christian, who was much distressed about how she could "cross the Jordan"; and we have heard of others who commonly speak of death as "crossing the Jordan." The fact is, that we who believe are in Christ delivered from death, and made partakers of a risen life, by the death and resurrection of Christ; the blood of Jesus has removed the sting of death, and though we may fall asleep in Jesus, it is not death, strictly speaking; for Jesus said, It a man keep my saying, he shall never see death {John 8:51}.

That Israel crossing the Jordan cannot refer to this is clear, because when they crossed the river they began to fight; whereas, when we sleep in Jesus {1 Thess. 4:14},

all our fighting is over; we put off our battle garments for ever; we exchange an helmet for a crown, and our conflict for rest. But what does this scene at Jordan mean? It means that deliverance from death, and that spiritual resurrection which we have now, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Our state by nature is that of being dead in trespasses and sins -- children of wrath -- exposed to death and judgment. But God, in marvelous grace, quickens or makes alive dead ones, and those who are so quickened are made nigh to God, delivered from death, and the wrath to come; they have been quickened together, raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Israel's crossing the Jordan, therefore, sets before us the blessed doctrine, that God's children have died with Christ, have been buried with Christ, are risen with Christ, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Thus we are, as to position, in heavenly places, while actually we are walking in an evil world. But let us now look more particularly at the Scripture before us.

1. ISRAEL'S STATE, as we have before noticed, was one of helplessness. Moreover, the fear of death filled their minds; for Jordan with overflowing banks was between them and the promised land. They could not see how they could enter into their much-desired inheritance. And is not this exactly what all feel whose consciences are roused to consider their eternal state? They cannot think of heaven, and glory, and fulness of joy, without feeling that they are exposed to death; and they seem to view glory afar off, and know not how to reach it. Their consciences accuse them of sin against God, and they fear death as the consequence -The wages of sin is death {Rom. 6:23}.

They recoil from death, and tremble at its expectation. A deathbed scene makes them quiver, because they dread it for themselves. No one can write or speak on such a solemn subject without the greatest seriousness; yet if the truth of God assures me that Christ has abolished death, and delivered me from it, ought I not to be at peace? Death abases man's pride, it prostrates in the dust earth's most

honored sons, it brings down man's loftiest thoughts, and hurls into oblivion all his vain pretensions. Man's inventions and appliances are made to meet almost every other requirement; but in regard to "the king of terrors," as he calls death, he is obliged to content himself with perfuming or smoothing a dying pillow, and garnishing the grave; but death he must bow to -- death Christ only has overcome. It is death and judgment that men dread, because conscience accuses; therefore they are without God, and have no hope in the world. Of course, Satan seeks to fill the eye and heart of men with the pleasures of sin {Heb. 11:25};

but a Divinely-convicted soul cannot rest until he is delivered from the fear of death, and enabled to sing -"My sin is gone -- my fears are o'er -I shun God's presence now no more; He sits upon a throne of grace; He bids me boldly seek His face; Sprinkled upon the throne of God, I see that rich atoning blood!"

2. Now look at GOD'S WAY OF DELIVERANCE. God showed by this that He could bring His people through death and into resurrection. It is the voice of Jesus in Old Testament times that here says, I am the resurrection, and the life {John 11:25}.

Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. . . . . Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among, you. . . . . Behold, the ark of the covenant of the God of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, that as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests . . . shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand up upon an heap {Josh. 3:9-13}.

Thus we see that the waters of judgment fled before the ark of the covenant,

a new and living way {Heb. 10:20}

was made for the people, and they were delivered from death and its terrors, and at once enabled to enter the land. It was all of God -- His wisdom, His power, His grace; and is a vivid illustration of the well known text,

death, and opening the way into the land. They beheld the liquid wall on the one hand, that the waters failed on the other, the ark of the covenant {Josh. 3:17}

none other name under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ {see Acts 4:10, 12}?

being in the midst, and a straight path made for them to pass over dry shod. Thus they were inspired with confidence, all fear and doubt were removed, and onward they went according to the word of the Lord, and quickly planted their feet upon their promised inheritance, the land flowing with milk and honey. And so it is now. It is a believing view of the death of Christ, the knowledge of His having died for us -- of the curse, and wrath, and death, which we deserved, having fallen on Him instead of us -- that He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification -- thus seeing the wondrous love of God in providing such a Savior, and accomplishing such a work for us, that fills us with

confidence, delivers us from guilt and fear, and enables us to find rest and peace in the holiest of all, in the presence of God Himself. Knowing that the risen Jesus has entered into heaven itself with His own blood, now to appear before the face of God for us, we follow Him in there by faith, and know our blessed liberty as blood-washed worshipers in His presence. Therefore in Christ, and by His blood, we who were once afar off are made nigh; and we, who were once dead in sins, have been quickened together, raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Our standing, then, is heavenly, we are brought into the heavenlies in Christ, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places; death is behind us, glory before us, and our expectation is to bear the heavenly image; heaven is our home.

Does not the Holy Ghost here teach us that we have died with Christ, by His having died for us? And do not our souls cry out while contemplating the cross of Christ, and His triumphant resurrection,

Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body {Phil. 3:20, 21}.

By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast {Eph. 2:8, 9}.

On referring to the construction of the ark in Ex. 25, and its use as recorded in Num. 10:33, we cannot fail to recognize that Christ is prefigured by it. As the ark of the covenant going before into Jordan, and resting in the waters of Jordan {see Josh. 3:11, 13},

made the way for Israel to enter the land, so it is by Jesus going into death that He destroyed death, 13and him that had the power of

death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage {see Heb. 2:14, 15}. Does not this clearly show that we have deliverance from death only by the death of Christ? Does it not magnify the work of the cross, and plainly point us to Christ crucified as the way, the truth, and the life {John 14:6}?

Does it not tell us that there is

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ {1 Cor. 15:55, 56}.

Oh, how blessed is the remembrance of the fact, that the holy and spotless Jesus went into the cold waters of death for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. It is the death of Christ alone that removes the sting of death from us, and enables us to find access with confidence into God’s presence. We know that, when Christ died; the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, to show us that through His death every hindrance was removed to the believer’s coming into the presence of God. 3. CROSSING THE JORDAN we may look upon as the action of faith on God’s way of deliverance. Believing that the living God had made this way, this living way, into the land, they all passed clean over {see Josh. 3:17}.

Their eyes rested on the ark in the river for them, and the wondrous power of that ordinance in delivering from the waters of

13. {This is not accurate: ". . . in like manner, took part in the same, that through death, he might annul him who has the might of death." 1 Cor 15:26 tells us when death will be destroyed.}

Our worship therefore is heavenly; we come boldly to the throne of grace {Heb. 4:16},

having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience; and, as a heavenly people, risen with Christ {Col. 3:1},

we are exhorted to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth {Col. 3:2},

because our life is hid with Christ in God {Col. 3:3}.

It is most important for the believer to see that he not only has forgiveness of sins, but that he is risen with Christ, and belongs to the heavenlies; that he is a partaker of the heavenly calling, a heaven-born, heaven-bound son, having life, resurrection-life, and, by the Holy Ghost, union with the glorified Son of God -- a member of Christ's body, of His flesh and of His bones. Not like the earthly people of Israel, who were called from Egypt to an earthly land of promise; but called from a state of death in trespasses and sins to heavenly places -- an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The blood of our sacrifice not sprinkled again and again on a brazen altar, but

presented once and for ever in heaven itself. Not having a dying priest to minister in an earthly sanctuary, but having a priest for ever in heaven to make intercession for us. Thus we are not of the world, but knowing its doom, and that the earth and all things therein will be burned up, we find our peace and blessing in heaven, inside the vail, and that our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ {1 John 1:3}.

These things, known in the soul by the teaching of the Holy Ghost as God's eternal truth, answer a thousand perplexing questions, and plainly mark out for us a path of heavenly-mindedness in a self-seeking, Christ-rejecting world. 4. Lastly, let us look at ISRAEL IN THE LAND. We are repeatedly told that they clean passed over, and the waters again returned to their place as before, which facts speak solemn and comforting lessons to our hearts. The people now lived in the promised land. God gave it to them, and brought them into it dry shod. They were no longer in the desert of drought and barrenness, but in the land flowing with milk and honey, where grapes and pomegranates abounded. The way which God brought them was never to be forgotten; therefore they were to take twelve stones out of the middle of Jordan, and carry them over with them into the place where they lodged, for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever . . . and they are there unto this day {Josh. 4:3-8}

so that ages and generations to come should know the exceeding goodness of God to them. (Compare Josh. 4:4-24 with Eph. 2:7.) And so in ages to come the Church shall be to the praise and glory of God, for His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. We shall ever remember the cross. It is

the death of Christ we specially remember in the Lord's Supper -- we shew the Lord's death till He come {1 Cor. 11:26}.

"The more Thy glory strikes mine eyes, The humbler I shall lie; For while I sink, my joys shall rise Immeasurably high."

The people also kept the passover; and oh, with what rejoicing they must have celebrated it! (Josh. 5:10). They must have valued the blood of the lamb more than ever, when they remembered where it had brought them, as well as what it had delivered them from. And who estimates the redeeming love of God, and the unutterable preciousness of the blood of Christ, like those who know it, as not only blotting out their sin, but as enabling them to enter with boldness into the holiest of all! We next notice that the manna ceased, and the people did eat of the old corn in the land (see Josh. 5:11, 12).

This is very significant. In days of wilderness experience, the people were fed by that which came down from heaven; but when in the land they fed and lived upon that which sprung up from the corn of wheat that died. So now those who may be trusting in the blood of the Lamb, who have merely a wilderness experience, will be sustained by the limited, though most blessed, thought of Christ having descended; but those who know their full deliverance from death, and standing in life and righteousness in heavenly places in Christ, find their joy and strength in the blessed knowledge, that He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things {Eph. 4:10}.

They live on resurrection food, on Christ risen, Christ exalted, Christ the abolisher of death, Christ crowned with glory and honor, Christ our Lamb and Priest now in the presence of God for us, Christ our Lord, Head, righteousness, and life, Christ soon coming to take us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also.

We do not keep the Lord's supper in order to be saved, but we do it in remembrance of Him, by whose stripes we are healed, by whose death we have life.

But though God gave them the land and brought them there, they had to fight the fight of faith to keep it. So we have to

We may next notice that the people of Israel, when in the land, were circumcised according to the Lord's command. This teaches us that a realization of our heavenly calling and standing in Christ will be connected with self-judgment, and practically putting off the old man and his deeds; we shall reckon ourselves to have died unto sin, and to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ. Hence heavenly worship and rejoicing in Christ Jesus will be associated with having no confidence in the flesh. Circumcision was not practised in the wilderness, which shows us typically that trials and necessities do not give us power over self; hence those Christians who are pressed down with the cares and difficulties of the way will have little power to keep under the flesh; whereas those who know the portion which

to maintain the consciousness and joy of our heavenly standing. Satan and his host only consult to cast us down from our excellency, and we need divine strength, and divine armour, to wrestle with

principalities and powers, to enable us to maintain in our soul's our conscious standing in the blessing God has given us and brought us into in Christ Jesus in heavenly places.

perfect love {1 John 4:18}

has given them in a risen and ascended Savior will judge the flesh to be unfit for God's service, and as unclean in its moral or religious actings as in its grosser workings. We may be assured that abiding in Christ in heavenly places is the secret of true humility.

put on the whole armour of God {Eph. 6:11}

May the Lord bless His own truth!