

Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 3

Jordan

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dead works which are not the product of faith; and there is a dead faith which does not produce works; but Rahab's works can only be the fruit of faith. An Abraham to offer up his son as a burnt offering, a Rahab to betray her country, or a Mary to break a costly box of alabaster to waste her all, an odour of great price — human wisdom condemns, and the authors of such deeds are blamed or punished by the world; but what renders them approved of God is the faith which is the motive spring, and faith which sacrifices all for God, and which surrenders all for His people.

Rahab finds her recompense: a place of honour is reserved for her with those who, amongst God's earthly people, form the lineage of Messiah. (Matt. 1: 5)

Joshua 3

THE JORDAN

The two preliminary chapters with which we have been occupied bring us now to the main point of the narrative. Israel had to cross the Jordan to enter Canaan; and what is the Jordan?

From Egypt up to this, the deliverance of the people is characterised by two great events: the Passover and the Red Sea; and in order to understand the third great event, that is, the crossing of the Jordan, it is well to seize the meaning of the first two. All three are types of the cross of Christ; but its aspects are so rich, so various, so infinite, that we need all these, and many others, in order to comprehend its depth and extent.

The Passover shows us the cross of Christ as a shelter from the judgment of God. "For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment." (Ex. 12: 12) Now Israel themselves could only be sheltered by the blood of the paschal lamb placed between the people as sinners and God as a Judge who was against them. This is expiation. The blood stays God, so to speak; keeps Him outside, and places us in safety inside. "When I see the blood I will pass over you." Only let us not forget that it is the love of God which provides the sacrifice capable of meeting His own judgment. Love thus spares the people who could not of themselves escape judgment any more than the Egyptians.

But we learn more than this in the Passover. The blood was that of the paschal lamb wholly roast with fire; a type of Christ who endured in the fullest way both externally and in the depths of His whole being the judgment of God for us and in our stead. Whilst under the shelter of the

blood, the Israelites, and above all the believers amongst them, found food for their hearts in the thought of Him in death, yet with a deep feeling of the bitterness of sin, as typified by the bitter herbs, but of a sin completely atoned for.

At the Red Sea we find a second aspect of the cross of Christ, which is redemption: "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth thy people which thou hast redeemed." (Ex. 15: 13) Now if God delivers and redeems us, He is for us instead of being against us; indeed, it says: "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." (Ex. 14: 14) The Passover stayed God Himself as a Judge, and set Israel in safety; at the Red Sea God intervenes as a Saviour (Ex. 15: 2) in favour of His people, who have nothing to do but to look on at their deliverance: "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." (Ex. 14: 13) In redemption God, so to speak, acts as if the enemies which were against us, and which we were quite powerless to overcome, were against Him.

What a terrible and critical situation was that of the people of God at this solemn moment! The enemy seeking to recover possession of his prey, pursuing hard after Israel and driving them to an extremity towards an impassable sea. It is the same with sinners. The power of Satan hurries them on towards death, and death is the judgment of God: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Now the soul must have to do with this last directly and perfectly, must come into immediate contact with death which is the expression of it. There is no means of escaping. The people were weaponless and resourceless in presence of the enemy and the power of death, and it is in this extremity that God intervenes. The rod of judicial authority is stretched out, not over Israel, but in their favour, over the sea, and death becomes, instead of a gulf, a pathway for the people. They can cross it dry-shod. What a new pathway it was, and what a solemn hour for Israel as a nation, when they passed between these liquid walls formed on their right hand and on their left by the action of "the east wind," between these floods, which instead of engulfing them proved their rampart! The solemnity of the scene remained; the horror of it was for ever obliterated.

We find in this scene a type of death and judgment borne by another, and for us the Lord presents Himself in it: "For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me." "The waters compassed me about even to the soul." (Jonah 2: 3, 5) Christ endured to the full the horror of death, and felt it alone in the infinite depths of His holy soul.

But the people cross the sea dry-shod. Judgment finds nothing in them, because it has spent itself in death, and for us on the person of Christ on the cross.

They come out on the other side safe and sound, and here we have a type not merely of the death of Christ, but also of His resurrection for us.

This is what may be learnt from the Red Sea. The army of the adversary is overthrown, and finds its grave where we have found a pathway. All fear is over; we can stand in peace on the opposite shore in the power of a resurrection-life which has passed through death.

It is by faith that we share in this blessing: "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned." (Heb. 11: 29) Whilst faith passes through it, the world, which seeks of itself to meet death and judgment, will be engulfed.

Having now considered the meaning of the Red Sea, typical of the death and resurrection of Christ for us, let us ask ourselves, What is the extent of the deliverance therein operated in favour of the people?

It is salvation, a simple word in itself, but one of unparalleled importance to our hearts. Salvation has its negative and its positive side. The first comprises the destruction of the enemy, of his power and all its consequences. Grace, in the person of Christ, has taken our place in death under all this: "It is the grace of God that bringeth salvation." Thus, Satan's power, the world, sin, death, wrath, and judgment, are overcome and destroyed for faith in the cross of Christ.

But there is also a positive blessing to be found in this blessed work.

"Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." (Ex. 15: 13) "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." (Ex. 19: 4) "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3: 18) "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 2: 18)

Infinite blessing! The people have not only escaped, but they have arrived by a new and living way which has brought them to the end, into the presence of God Himself, a God whom we know as the Father.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God." (1 John 3: 1) Let us celebrate with Israel only in a higher key, the song of deliverance! No more separation, or distance; the port is gained, which is God Himself, He whom, by the Spirit, we call "Abba, Father."

What share did Israel take in all this work! Absolutely none. Salvation is brought to us by the free grace of God who exacts nothing, and who does

not claim His rights over us, but who finds His satisfaction in being a sovereign and an eternal Giver.

But to return to the Jordan. At the Passover atonement was made; at the Red Sea redemption was accomplished, and salvation obtained; but here it is another question. In order to take possession of the land of Canaan, the people must be in a certain condition.

Between the Red Sea and the Jordan Israel had crossed the desert, and this journey is divided into two distinct parts. In the first part, up to Sinai, it is grace which leads the people — the same grace which had redeemed them from Egypt, and by which they experience the resources of Christ in the midst of all their infirmities. In the second part, after Sinai, Israel is under the reign of law, and it is then that they are proved to know what is in their hearts. The trial only demonstrated that they were "carnal, sold under sin"; that they had no power, that their will was enmity against God, that it was not subject to the law of God, finally strewing itself in positive open rebellion when it was a question of going up into the mountain of the Amorites, and entering into possession of the promises.

The condition of Israel was an absolute obstacle to their entering Canaan. When they come to the end of their experiences in the flesh, they find the Jordan, an overflowing flood, as a barrier to their onward progress. The Red Sea hindered their escape from Egypt, the Jordan prevents their entrance into Canaan, and to attempt to cross it would be their destruction. Here we have a fresh type of death. It is the end of man in the flesh, and, at the same time, the end of Satan's power. How can we, who are without strength, withstand it? It separates us for ever from the enjoyment of the promises. "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

But the grace of God has provided for it. The ark goes before the people; it not only makes them know the way by which they should go, for they had not passed this way heretofore (Joshua 3: 4), but it associates them with itself in the passage. The priests, the representatives of the people, were to take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before Israel. (v. 6) It was indeed the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth (v. 13) which was to pass on before them across Jordan, but not without them. The ark maintained its pre-eminence: "There shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure" (v. 4); but as the eyes of the people were fixed upon it (v. 3) they beheld at the same time the priests of the tribe of Levi who bore it. As soon as the soles of the feet of the priests rested in the waters of Jordan, they were cut off and ceased to flow. A power was there which was victorious over the power of death, and which associated Israel with the victory.