

Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 4

The Twelve Stones at Gilgal — The Twelve Stones in the Midst of Jordan

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If it was thus for Israel, how much more for us! All that we were in the flesh has found its end in the cross of Christ. We can say: I am dead to sin, dead to the law; I am crucified with Christ. My eyes, fixed on the ark — on Christ — see in Him the end of my personality as a child of Adam; but in Him also a victorious power, now made mine, introduces me in resurrection life in Him, beyond death, into the full enjoyment of the things which this life possesses: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Death itself, of course, is not yet swallowed up: "When the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan . . . the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before." (Joshua 4: 18) But when "this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor. 15: 54) Then Christ's place, beyond all that which could hinder us, will be ours, even as to our bodies. But before the fulfilment of these things, we can already say: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15: 57)

We find then in the Jordan, in a special way, death to that which we were in our former status, and the beginning of a new status in the power of life with Christ, with whom we are risen. His death and resurrection introduce us now into all the heavenly blessings, and what we have just said explains the reason of our not finding enemies here as at the Red Sea. At the Jordan the Israelites are not pursued by Pharaoh and his host, but the enemy is in front of them, and does not begin to act until they have crossed the river.

Now they enter upon a new series of experiences. In the desert of Sinai the old man has been proved to be sin; then follows, in type, at the Jordan, the knowledge acquired by faith, that we have been taken out of our association with Adam, and set in a new association with a dead and risen Christ; finally, in Canaan, we have the experiences of the new man, though not without weakness and failure if there be a lack of vigilance, but with a power at our disposal, of which we can make constant use in order to be strong and to fight valiantly and resist the subtle wiles of the enemy.

Joshua 4

THE TWELVE STONES AT GILGAL

In the preceding chapter we have seen that it is faith in Christ which enables us to apprehend (after an experience often as long as the forty

years in the wilderness were for Israel) our deliverance from our old estate, and introduction into a new one in Christ. The soul, long exercised, learns at length — and it is God who reveals it to faith — that what it was striving vainly to attain to, has not to be done, but is a present reality, for faith a fact, an accomplished fact, in Christ.

I used to wonder at the extreme simplicity of the language produced by the discovery of this important truth in Romans 7, whilst it takes a whole chapter to describe the experiences of a soul previous to knowing deliverance. More than this, the despairing utterance caused by the hopelessness of the situation, changes without any interlude into one of gratitude and joy: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The reason now seems simple enough. When the soul makes this discovery it learns that the deliverance which it was incapable of attaining, God had already wrought by and in Christ, so that it is no longer a thing to be accomplished. The soul discovers and appropriates it as an accomplished fact, prepared long ago for faith. Then calmly and peacefully the believer can say: Henceforth I am dead, because I am in Christ; dead with Christ, dead to the law, to the world; and "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2: 19, 20; Rom. 6: 10; Col. 2: 20; Gal. 6: 14)

It is a truth which is outside the region of the intelligence; reason cannot explain it, memory cannot retain it. How often have I seen souls seeking, by similar efforts, to lay hold, so to speak, of deliverance! What was the result? When, after much painstaking, they thought they had grasped its import, a single night sufficed to disperse the illusion, just as dead leaves are swept away by a breath of wind between the evening and morning.

Ah! deliverance is not obtained in a moment, for just as there was no Jordan for Israel before the desert, so, for us, deliverance comes after we have made the discovery of what the flesh is, and not before. Deliverance is not a mere experience, but the result of the standing which faith grasps. It is only experimental in the sense that I see myself in Christ, instead of laying hold of a work accomplished outside of myself as in redemption.

Such for us is the import of the Jordan. But God desires that the memorial of this victory should be continually under our eyes. Joshua commands the representatives of the twelve tribes to take twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the feet of the priests stood firm. They were to be for a memorial unto the children of Israel, and were to be laid in the place where the people passed their first night in the land of Canaan. The place was Gilgal, but what was the signification of the stones? They represented the twelve tribes, the people, snatched from death by the ark which had stood in the very spot

where deliverance was needed, and which had stayed the waters of Jordan so that Israel could pass over. They became a monument at the very entrance of Canaan, at Gilgal, a place to which (as we shall see later on) the people had always to return; they were henceforth to be a sign constantly under their eyes and those of their children.

Now we, like Israel, stand as trophies of the victory achieved over the raging waters of the riv. Christ went into death because we were there: "If one died for all, then were all dead." (2 Cor. 5: 14) But it was in order to deliver us out of death, and bring us into a new life in His own resurrection. "When we were dead in sins he hath quickened us together with Christ . . . and hath raised us up together." (Eph. 2: 5, 6)

But the monument of this memorable work is permanently established on the other side of Jordan to serve for the maintenance of Israel's faith, a monument to be recognised at all times by the people at the entrance of Canaan. For us it is Christ, the object of our faith, the Firstborn from the dead, risen and entered into the heavenly places, but a Christ who represents us there, associating us with Himself, even as He associated Himself with us in death.

Moreover God desires that Christ thus set before us should produce a corresponding moral effect in us; that, in the contemplation of Him, our consciences should be laid hold of in a lasting way. "It is a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever." It is also this for us, accompanied by an inward effect. The believer, risen with Christ, has the indelible marks of His death imprinted on him, and, if such is my place in Christ, can I live any longer in the things which I have abandoned, which Christ has left in the depths of Jordan? "In that he died, he died unto sin once, but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Up to this, it is the memorial, and then comes the moral effect: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 6: 10, 11)

The twelve stones at Gilgal, then, are not merely our death and resurrection with Christ (the Jordan typified that), but the memorial of this death and resurrection as seen in a risen and glorified Christ. This monument reminds us of what we have henceforth to be. In the Jordan God declares us to be dead, and it is the portion of all the people; every Christian is dead and risen with Christ; in Gilgal we have the moral realisation of this. All had crossed the Jordan, but many amongst them perhaps cared but little to inquire the meaning of the monument in Gilgal, those stones which seemed to say in living accents to the people: "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus."

THE TWELVE STONES IN THE MIDST OF JORDAN

If the twelve stones in Gilgal spoke to Israel's conscience, there was another monument set up in the midst of Jordan which spoke seriously to their hearts. Who could see the stones which the overflowing waters had covered? They could only be known to faith. They were not typical of a resurrection-life which had passed through death and bore its impress and character; they were essentially the sign of death. The stones in Gilgal are the monument of our introduction by Christ into our privileges, and into which we only enter after having passed through death with Him; but when I think of the stones in Jordan, my heart is in communion with Him in death.

I return to sit, so to speak, on the banks of the river of death, and I say: That is my place; it is there that I was; it is there that He has been for me; He has delivered me from my old man; He has left it with all that belonged to it in the depths of Jordan; I am buried beneath its waters in the Person of Christ. What led Thee, blessed Saviour, to take this place? Thou alone couldst claim exemption from it, and having laid down Thy life, Thou alone hadst the power to take it again. But it was Thy love to us which led Thee down to death; no other motive, save the glory of God which I had dishonoured, could have led Thee there. Thou hast not only fought the fight alone, and victoriously stayed the waters of Jordan "until everything was finished that the Lord commanded" (v. 10), but those waters themselves passed over Thee. I see in this monument what death was for Thy holy soul; I recognise the memorial of the exquisite bitterness of the cup which Thou didst drink.

The twelve stones "are there unto this day." (v. 9) The monument remains, the cross remains, eternal witness of a love I have there learnt to know, testimony too of the only place where God could put all that belonged to my old man.

In connection with these things, notice also what we find in verse 18: "And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before." The sentence is executed, the old man condemned, the judgment is passed, death is conquered, but death remains. What was formerly an obstacle to entrance, an obstacle removed by the ark which opened the pathway for us, separates us when we are once across, not only from Egypt and the desert of Sinai, but from ourselves. If it were otherwise, we could have no lasting enjoyment in the land of Canaan.

The two and a half tribes (vers. 12, 13) truly crossed the Jordan with their brethren, armed for war and prepared to fight, but there were two things of which they remained in ignorance: the value of the land of Canaan, and the value of death. The river did not arrest them when they turned to rejoin their wives, their little ones, and their cattle, who were awaiting them on the opposite shore. The country "on this side" had its attractions for them, whilst the people, who were peacefully in the enjoyment of Canaan, saw with joy that the Jordan was a barrier to separate them from all that which formerly was of any value to them.

"On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life." (v. 14) It is thus with Christ. He is highly exalted as Saviour by the glory of the Father before our eyes, in virtue of His finished work, and, as the result of this work, the saints are introduced with Him into the present enjoyment and future possession of the glory. This will be to His everlasting glory and honour.

But the Lord will also have other crowns. The day will come for Him, which Solomon enjoyed in type, and of which it is said: "Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him. And all the princes and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king. And the Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel." (1 Chr. 29: 23-25) He will reign; His people Israel will be subject unto Him, and even those whom He deigned to call His brethren will bow the knee before Him, happily and joyfully acknowledging openly in His presence that He is Lord, even as they have owned Him on earth in the days of His absence and rejection.

We find another future glory of Christ in 2 Chronicles 32: 23. In the time of Hezekiah, after the deliverance of Israel by the judgment of the nations in the person of the Assyrian, it is said: "And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was recognised in the sight of all nations from thenceforth." The nations will be subject unto Him.

Finally, it is said in Philippians 2: 9-10: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Heaven, earth, and hell will bow before Him who humbled Himself even unto the death of the cross.