

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WALLS OF JERICHO

(Joshua 6)

“More than conquerors even now,
With the war-sweat on our brow,
Onward o’er the well-marked road,
March we as the host of God.”

- Bonar

JERICHO, palm-girt, standing out clear-cut in the pure air and under the deep blue of the sky, in front of the vast precipice of rock down which the road descended from Jerusalem, was filled with many thoughts, chief among which was faint-heartedness. There was no mustering of forces; no issuing forth of the men of war; no sudden night attack upon that host which lay along the Jordan bank, the brown tents pitched around the central pavilion or tabernacle of God. It was as though some mysterious spell had fallen upon king and people, unnerving them, impelling them to stand upon the defensive and await the unfolding of events. **“Their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.”**

Israel, on the other hand, was probably impatient, eager to be led to the conflict. The men of war, confident in their might, were eager to match themselves against the inhabitants of the land, and to wipe out in blood the memory of their fathers' defeat at Hormah. Conscious that the passage of the Jordan had been due to the presence of the priests, it may have been that there was a secret desire in their hearts to show that the time had come for the priests to stand aside, whilst they approved their powers and won the land by might. But they had to learn that the land was a gift, to be received by faith, not won by effort. God required of them only to obey and wait and trust, whilst the divine Captain led his celestial hosts to the assault, and achieved the victory.

“And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor. And ye shall compass the city, all the men of war going about the city once.”

It certainly was the strangest spectacle ever witnessed by a beleaguered garrison. The besiegers did not make an assault, or rear mounds, or place scaling-ladders against the walls. They did not, indeed, afford an opportunity for parley or discussion of terms of capitulation. On each side it seems to have been understood that the war would be to the knife - no quarter asked, no mercy shown. Without delay the host of Israel began encompassing the city. **“Ye shall compass the city.”**

May it not be rather said that the ark encompassed the city, and that the men of war accompanied it? For in each case, whether the directions were given to Joshua by the Captain, or by Joshua to the host, the particular position of the ark was minutely specified. Indeed, as Joshua came from the divine interview he appears to have first summoned the priests into his presence, and given them his instructions. After this, he turned to the people generally. There is a remarkable emphasis in the words, **“The ark of the Lord compassed the city.”**

It was but a little after dawn. The sun had mounted not far above the eastern horizon. Blue blended with amber in the morning sky. Toward the south the mountains of Moab stood like a mighty rampart, veiled in violet, while the sullen waters of the Dead Sea gleamed like silver at their foot. The belt of desert sand added its dark red to the variegated colors of the picture, contrasting notably with the emerald green of the oasis in which Jericho stood, watered by perennial streams. Then from out the camp of Israel a long procession began to unwind itself: first the men of war, marching beneath their tribal banners; then seven priests, white-robed, blowing with seven trumpets of rams horns; next the ark of God, hidden by its coverings from gaze of Israelite and Canaanite alike; and lastly the tribe of Dan, closing up the rear.

Toward the city this strange procession made its way, preserving an absolute silence, save that the priests went on continually and blew with the trumpets. With that exception no other sound was heard. No challenge! No taunt! No cry as of them that shout for mastery! The whole host wound silently around the city, as a serpent with sinuous folds; and when the circuit was completed, to the surprise of the Canaanites, who probably expected an immediate assault, it returned quietly to the camp from which it had emerged some hour or two before. And the rest of the day passed without further incident. **“So they did six days.”**

On the seventh day the circuit of the walls was repeated seven times. And at the close of the seventh, Joshua’s voice rang out on the still evening air the command, **“Shout! for the Lord hath given you the city.”**

Then the priests blew a blast upon the trumpets; the people shouted with a great shout, that reverberated through the hills around, and was perhaps answered by the feebler voices of the women and children from the camp; and the wall of Jericho fell down flat, so that the people could go up into the city, every man straight before him, **“and they took the city.”**

As, in years long after, an inspired writer reviewed the incident, he quoted it as a remarkable instance of that faith which, in various dispensations, unites the hearts of all the saints in one, as a thread a number of diverse beads. **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.”**

In various directions we may find a counterpart of this remarkable incident.

I. IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

If Egypt represents our conflicts with the world, and Amalek our conflict with the flesh, the seven nations of Canaan represent our conflict with the principalities and powers of wicked spirits, who resist our entrance into the heavenly places, and dull our practical realization of what Christ has wrought for us.

Entrenched behind the ramparts of some stronghold of difficulty or habit, they defy us and threaten to arrest our progress in the divine life. Who is there amongst us, or who reads these lines, that does not know, or has not known, of something a cherished indulgence, a friendship, a pernicious entanglement reared as an impassable barrier to the enjoyment of those blessed possibilities of Christian experience which are ours in Christ, but which for that reason seem beyond our reach?

That thing is a Jericho. Now it cannot be the purpose of God that anything, however deeply rooted, should shut his redeemed ones out of the heavenly places, which are theirs in Christ even though it should be the result of their own sin or mistake, the heirloom of early indiscretions, the better entail of trespass off the narrow path. I have met with those who have declared that they have forever forfeited their right to the richer experiences of the blessed life because they have wrought some wickedness in the past. What though it has long ago been forgiven, yet it has left its shame, its scar, its fatal offspring, by reason of which, in their apprehension, their path into Canaan is barred.

I have met with others who, eager enough to enjoy all that may be experienced on this side the Golden Gate, yet point to some hindrance in the way, the lasting memorial of days when the spirit was less on the alert, and conscience less sensitive; and for this cause they too fear that they can never do more than encamp, beyond the Jordan indeed, but on the fringe of the Land of Promise. Again, it may be asked, Who is there that has not stood, at some period or another, before a Jericho, right in the pass to Canaan? To all such there is infinite sweetness and comfort in the word spoken by the Great Captain to Joshua, standing with bared foot on the holy ground:

“See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor.”

Be still!

The hardest of all commandments this! That our voice should not be heard; that no word should proceed from our mouth; that we should utter our complaints to God alone - all this is foreign to our habits and taste. As death is the last enemy to be destroyed in the universe of God, so is the restraint of the tongue the last lesson learned by his children. We like to air our grievances; to talk over our ailments; to compare ourselves with others; and to discuss the likeliest remedies. We tell our friends our secrets under strict promises of confidence, to discover in bitter experience the truth of the Master's words, that what is told into the ear in closets will be proclaimed upon house-tops.

It is only the still heart that can reflect the Heaven of God's overarching care, or detect the least whisper of his voice through its quiet atmosphere, or know his full grace and power. Only when we have quieted ourselves as weaned babes can we reach that position in which God can interpose for our help. Not dumb toward God, but dumb as the dove amongst strangers, or as the lamb before her shearers.

“Be still,” saith God, “and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth.”

And that soul may well be still and wait which has learned that the Lord of hosts is beside it and the God of Jacob its refuge. To that Friend it flies to pour out its secret agony. In that home it nestles as in the covert of a great rock, sheltered from the blast.

Obey!

As in this story so in grace, there must be cooperation between God and man. The walls of Jericho could fall down only by the exercise of divine power; but the children of Israel must needs encompass them. Only God can give a body as it hath pleased him to the seed corn; but man must plow and sow and reap and thresh and grind. Only the Son of God could multiply the loaves or raise the dead; but man must provide and distribute the broken bread, and roll the stone from the sepulcher door. Only God can remove the difficulties that stand in the way of an entirely consecrated and blessed life; but there are commands and duties which it is incumbent on us to fulfill.

What are these? In some cases we are withholding obedience that we should give at once. There are things which we ought to do, but which we are not doing. And there is equal danger in doing more than we should endeavoring to scale walls which we are told to encompass; shouting before the word of command has been uttered; making the circuit of the city oftener than the once each day prescribed by the divine ordering. It is so hard to feel that we do more by doing less; that we save time by resting quietly in our tents; that it is vain to rise up early, and so late take rest, because he giveth to his beloved while they sleep.

Whatever, then, is clearly borne in on us as the will of God, either for us to do or discontinue doing, let us immediately perform; and leave it to Him to do all the rest.

Some must bear the sacred ark in witnessing to the Gospel; others must blow on the rams horns perpetual blasts of victorious anticipation; others, again, must face the daily routine in silence; but our position should ever be the prompt soldier-like one that rang out through Joshua's noble words, **“What saith my Lord unto his servant?”**

Have faith!

Look away from all your preparations, and even from your God-commanded acts to God himself; and as you do so, your difficulties will melt away that stone will be rolled from the mouth of the sepulcher; that iron gate will open of its own accord; those mighty walls will fall down flat.

Whatever it be that seems an insuperable difficulty to your enjoyment of the best of those things which Christ has purchased, hand it over to your Saviour; wait before him in silence, till you know what he would have you do. Be sure in the meanwhile to put off all that belongs to the past, and cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; then do his bidding, at whatever cost.

At the same time believe that he is working for you, and that the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth, and that the glory of the Lord shall be seen in your heart and life, so that all who know you shall be compelled to confess that the Lord has done great things for you. He has given you Jericho. Let your heart already dwell on that glad word. Though the walls are yet standing, they are as good as gone; and with their ruins in your rear, you shall go forward to possess the land.

II. IN CHRISTIAN WORK

The Apostle speaks of strongholds that had to be cast down, and of high things that exalted themselves against the knowledge of God; and asserts that he did not war against such things according to the flesh, and that the weapons of his warfare were not of the flesh, but mighty before God for the casting down of strongholds, and for the bringing of every high and proud thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. What need there is for all Christian workers to ponder these pregnant words! The peril of our time is that we should get away from the simplicity of the early Church, which went into the conflict with the mighty superstitions and flagrant sins of its age with no weapons save those that may be found in symbol in this old-world incident.

There were the white robes of priestly purity; the lifting up of the propitiation of Christ; the blowing of the rams horns; the Gospel message proclaimed with no silver cadence, but with rude and startling effect, as a summons to surrender. It was in the use of such weapons as these that giant forms of error collapsed, and hoary systems of idolatry were dissolved like morning mists touched by the warm fingers of the sun. With what dismay would the confessors and martyrs, the prophets and apostles of primitive Christianity view the methods with which we assail the monster forms of vice that confront us!

- Drink is entrenched behind mighty fortifications the bastions and walls of social custom and habit, of national usage and immense revenues.
- Impurity has built around itself a girdle of defense, flaunts itself undismayed in our streets, and mocks us from the gilded splendor of music-hall and theater.
- The drug traffic laughs us to scorn supported by government; ministering to an inveterate habit; willing to pay a handsome sum for its right to exist.

The depravity of the human heart is another Jericho, in which there are the towers of spiritualism, indifference, pride, and high imagination, which proudly rear themselves against the law of God. And in the case of each individual worker there is almost certainly some Jericho in the apathy of fellow-workers, the spirit of opposition from other Christians, or the special forms of sin that are rampant in the sphere entrusted to his care.

When confronted with all these things we are apt to fight the world with weapons borrowed from its arsenals, and to adopt methods which savor rather of the flesh than of the spirit. It is a great mistake. Our only hope is to act on strictly spiritual lines, because we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with the wicked spirits that lie behind all that is seen in this world of men and things. If we can overthrow the dark spirits that abet and maintain, we shall see the system which they support crumble as a palace of clouds before the wind.

Let us be pure and holy, giving time to heart-searching in the presence of the Captain; let us lift up the sacrifice and work of Jesus; let us blow the Gospel trumpet of alarm and summons to surrender; let us be much in silent prayer before God; let us cherish a spirit of unity and love, as the tribes of Israel forgot their differences in one common expedition against their foes; above all, let us believe in the presence and cooperation of God, and we shall see the old miracle repeated, and the walls of Jericho fall down flat.

III. IN THE STORY OF THE CHURCH

This capture of Jericho is surely capable of being read as a parable of things that are yet to be. We know that the world lieth in the power of the wicked one. It has long boasted itself against God, with its mighty walls and gates; and it would seem as if the time will never come of which psalmists and kings have sung and spoken in rapturous phrase.

In the meanwhile the various tribes of the Church of Christ have been perambulating about the walls, subjected to much derision and mockery, though sometimes a sickening premonition of approaching judgment must steal upon the hearts of the votaries of worldliness. For nearly nineteen centuries the circuit has been made, the trumpet-blast uttered, the testimony maintained. And surely the seven days have nearly expired.

It may be that this narrative of the taking of Canaan is even a miniature anticipation of what is yet to transpire in that future which is probably so near. God has given the kingdoms of this world to his Son; but they will have to be engirdled by the sacramental hosts of his elect until he shall have put down all rule and authority and power.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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