

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY

LIFE IN THE LAND

(Joshua 22)

“Give us now, now! to live in the life of God.
Give us now, now! to be at one with him.”

- Jean Ingelow

WHEN the seven years of fighting came at last to an end, the children of Israel settled down to the enjoyment of their land. It was like the clear shining of the sun after a wild morning, or like a happy and prosperous manhood after a tempestuous youth. The comparative silence of the record suggests the engrossing interest with which the people gave themselves to the culture of the land, and to the occupation of great and goodly cities which they had not built, of houses full of all good things which they had not filled. Cisterns which they had not hewn poured forth refreshing waters to vineyard, oliveyard, or garden; and they ate and were full.

The soul, as it matures in Christian experience, though it never ceases to walk carefully, yet comes to realize more fully the blessings of the heavenly places. It is satisfied with the goodness of the Lord, and is like a watered garden. It is fanned by breezes from the mountains of myrrh. The air is heavy with perfume; the vines bud, their blossoms are open, the pomegranates flower, and at the door all manner of precious fruits, new and old, are laid up. It is in such seasons that we learn the meaning of rest; the true source of unity; and the need of patience in dealing with the erring or fallen.

I. OUR FIRST DISCOVERY IS THE MEANING OF REST

“The Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers” (21:44).

“And now,” said Joshua, addressing the two and a half tribes, “the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them.”

And this was the climax of The Lord’s dealings with the chosen people.

- For this he brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock.
- For this he put his Holy Spirit in the midst of them.
- For this he caused his right hand to go at the right hand of Moses, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name.
- For this he led them through the depths, as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble.

The divine intention through it all was that as cattle go down into the valley, with its shade and succulent pasture, to hide themselves from the burning heat, so the Spirit of the Lord should cause them to rest (Isaiah 63:14).

There was a very distinct measure of rest. The land rested (Joshua 11:23), and the people also. But it is equally clear that Canaan did not exhaust God's ideal. Fair as it was, its benediction did not go beyond the narrow circle of mere worldly prosperity and material interests. And these were manifestly inadequate.

How impossible it is for the soul to take its ease, just because of some large increase in worldly prosperity! As well expect it to grow fat on husks! It was equally impossible that the mere possession of the Land of Promise could give rest to hearts with infinite capacity for love, or to minds with an insatiable appetite for truth.

The rest of Canaan, like so much else in this Book, could at the best be only a type and shadow of that spiritual repose, that holy tranquility, that unspeakable peace, which fill the souls of men with the rest of God himself. Listen to these words - my rest; his rest; the Sabbath-keeping of the people of God.

These are more than Canaan, with its joys of harvest, and the song of the treader in the press. Therefore, it is truly said in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "**If Joshua had given them rest, then would he [the Spirit of inspiration by the mouth of David] not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God**" (Hebrews 4:8, 9).

There is rest from the first glad outburst of the new life; but it gets more intense as the years go on, as the hue of the sky deepens from the pale blue of April into the ultramarine of August. The cause of this is in the ever-growing conviction that God's way is perfect, his will loveliest, his plan best.

When first we enter into rest, we have to watch against distrust, to reason with ourselves that all must be well, to solace ourselves with promise and assurance. But, as the days pass, each utters speech to the next; and the accumulated voice of experience gathers volume within the secret chambers of the heart.

- We come to know him whom once we did but trust.
- We remember that not one good thing has failed of all he promised.
- We see that the most threatening tempest clouds of our lives have either been dissipated or have broken in showers of blessing.

- We remember that things we prayed against, and fought against, have been our greatest blessings. - We are driven to admit that whenever we got our way, it was gall and bitterness; but that when God had his, it was milk and honey.

When such thoughts throng the heart, whilst from some summit in life we review the past, our hearts are filled with emotions of tranquil restfulness. Why should we fret and chafe, or beat our breasts against the bars, or allow our souls to be disquieted within us? All is under law, all under love, all things are working together for good. He will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from those to whom he has given his only-begotten Son. In him the tenderness of motherhood and of fatherhood blend.

- There is not a step He does not weigh;
- Not a path He does not winnow;
- Not a tear, the shedding of which has not been to Him a subject of anxiety;
- Not a stab of pain, the edge of which He has not felt before it touches us;
- Not a sorrow, the weight of which He has not felt before He allowed it to impinge.

Such a God is thine, O my soul! hush thee; trust him; He is doing all things well; be still and at rest! Thou art as safe as if the gate of pearl were behind thee; thy joy cannot rust or be stolen; every wind is a south wind; every shore thy native land; every circumstance a rough packing-case containing the gifts of thy Father's love. And so the rest, born of trust, gets ever deeper; because the trust enlarges with growing knowledge. The more we grow in the knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, the more absolute is our trust in His everlasting, all-pervading love; and the more unbroken is our rest.

It is true that the people entered into rest when they crossed the Jordan; it is also true that seven years after they drank higher up the stream, where the waters were more pellucid. A meet emblem this of the successive increments of restfulness experienced by those whom the Lamb leads ever farther into the heart of the land, unswept by tempests, and within the limits of which there is no more sea.

II. OUR SECOND DISCOVERY IS THE TRUE CENTER OF UNITY

The forty thousand warriors who had so nobly fulfilled their early promise received the public thanks of the great leader; and his last advice, "**Turn ye, and get you unto your tents; . . . only take diligent heed to do the commandment of the Lord.**"

He expressed also in the name of the congregation his fervent desire that they should have much cattle, silver, gold, brass, and iron, with very much raiment words and wishes which they most certainly deserved.

When they reached the fords of Jordan, and reflected that the stream would presently divide them from the rest of the people, a sudden fear seems to have overtaken them, lest, in coming days, the seven tribes and a half might say to their children, "**What have ye to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord hath made Jordan a border between us and you: ye have no portion with us.**"

To obviate this, and to make clear for all coming time their identity with the rest of the people, they built an altar on the western bank of Jordan. It was a great altar to see to, not intended for burnt-offering or meal-offering, or for religious rites; but as a perpetual witness that its builders were leal-hearted Israelites.

But it was a great mistake. No pattern for its shape had been received from God, nor any direction as to its construction; whilst if they had obeyed the divine instruction, that three times in the year all their males should appear before God in Shiloh, there would have been no need for this clumsy contrivance. In their view the unity of the people could not be preserved by a merely spiritual bond, but by an outward and mechanical one. The common ties of the altar at Shiloh were insufficient; there must be in addition the great altar of Ed.

There was in vogue, however, a truer conception - that of Joshua and the rest of Israel. Similarly, life in heavenly places begets in us a clear conception of the true unity of the people of God. And here is another remarkable parallel between this book and the Epistle to the Ephesians, which, whilst it is specially the book of the heavenly places, is also the revelation of the mystery of that body which, amid the diversity of its parts, partakes of the unity of God himself.

In the early stages of Christian life, we suppose that unity can only be obtained by the formulation of a common creed, and the inclusion of all believers in some great visible body. We build the altar of Ed. Ignorant of God's principle of unity, we make one for ourselves.

In a word, we mistake uniformity for unity. But as we go from strength to strength we discover that all true souls who meet around the altar are one. Coming from all points of the compass, fired by the same hopes, suppliants at the same meeting-place, reliant upon the same Blood, the common attraction establishes an organic unity; like that of the tree, the multiplicity of whose parts is subsidiary to the one life force; or like that of the body, the variety of whose members is subordinate to the one animating soul.

The nearer we get to Christ, the more clearly we discern our unity with all who belong to him.

We learn to think less of points of divergence, and more of those of agreement. We find that the idiosyncrasies by which each believer is fitted for his specific work do not materially affect those depths of the inner life which in all saints abut on the nature of the living Saviour. As the scattered sheep browse their way up toward a common summit, they converge on each other, and there is one flock, as there is one Shepherd.

It is the supreme vision of the Bible, granted to the most eminent saints, that though the new Jerusalem comprehends the names of the tribes of Israel and of the Apostles of the Lamb, is garnished by jewels of many hues, and has gates facing in all directions, it yet is one, "**the Bride, the Lamb's wife.**"

What wonder, then, that the world, and sometimes the professing Church, supposes that the Lord's prayer is not fulfilled, and that the unity has yet to be made? The unity is made; but only the spiritual with spiritual discernment can detect its symmetry.

III. WE DISCOVER THE NEED OF PATIENCE IN DEALING WITH THE ERRING AND FALLEN

When first the tribes of Israel heard of the erection of the altar, their impulse was to go at once against their brethren to battle. Shiloh was the mustering place; for it seemed as if an offence had been perpetrated against that holy shrine. But wiser counsels prevailed, and it seemed best to depute Phinehas and ten princes, men of note, to go as a deputation in the name of the whole congregation of the Lord. They found the warriors in the land of Gilead on the point of dispersing to their homes, uttered their remonstrance, and quoted the warning instances of Achan and Beth-peor as reasons for fear lest the sin of one should be visited in judgment upon all. Their contention was, that none of the tribes of Israel, or even of individual members of the commonwealth, could sin without involving the whole in judgment.

“Rebel not against the Lord, nor rebel against us.”

So deeply had the spirit of love wrought in their hearts, that they even proposed to share the land of western Canaan, wherein the Lord’s Tabernacle dwelt, with their brethren.

“If the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the Lord, and take possession among us.”

There was a gentleness, a winsomeness, a desire to attract back the erring, which are quite beautiful, and in striking contrast to much that had been, and was yet to be. And it had its desired effect in eliciting a frank disavowal of any desire to turn away from following the Lord, accompanied by a simple explanation of the motives which had actuated them. Thus the whole episode resulted in a tightening of the bonds of brotherhood, and in glad protestations of thankfulness and praise.

So is it always. The fiery persecutor ends by beseeching men by the mercies of God. The sword is laid aside for the olive-branch. And we who had commenced life full of harsh judgments and impetuous heat, whilst not relaxing our steadfast allegiance to truth, learn to deal gently with the erring; restoring them in a spirit of meekness, bearing one another’s burdens, and counting it a greater gain to win a brother than to overcome him in argument or destroy him by sarcasm.

Thus, in the golden autumn, the fruit which had been acrid enough in its first inception becomes mellow and luscious. The fierce beams that struck like swords fall slanting in softening radiance; and Peter, the vehement disciple, administers consolation to suffering believers out of a heart softened by years of a tempering trial.

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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