

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

REST IN THE HEAVENLIES

(Joshua 11:23)

“He saw with Faith’s far-reaching eye the fount
Of life, his Father’s house, his Saviour God;
And borrowed thence to help his present want . . .
And so his eye upon the land of life He kept.”

- Pollok

THE Book of Joshua naturally divides itself into two parts, the first of which deals with the conquest, the second with the partition of the Land of Promise. The junction of these two is at the close of the eleventh chapter.

There the story of the conquest ends, and that of the partition begins.

And just there we have the significant record, “**And the land had rest from war**” a note of blessed tranquility and peace, which is repeated in the fourteenth chapter. But even that is not all; for in the twenty-first chapter we are again told that “**the Lord gave Israel rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers.**”

Now, all this is in precise keeping with the spiritual analogy that we have been tracing throughout this book; and indeed the symbolism is so close that we are certain that we are not following cunningly devised fables, but are tracing the patterns of things in the heavens, sure anticipations of the plans and designs of God. He who embodied anticipations of Calvary in the sacrifices and offerings of Leviticus, embodied anticipations of the empty grave and the Ascension Mount in the conquest and apportionment of Canaan by Joshua.

In the case of the glorious Antitype there was also a pause of blessed rest. Between the completion of his victory and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are told that he sat down at the right hand of God. And in her noblest song the Church has repeatedly addressed him thus: “**Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the Glory of the Father.**”

The session of our Lord Jesus at the right hand of God is a graphic and beautiful metaphor, pregnant with food for holy thought. Obviously, it asserts the glorious honor of his majesty, that he is one with God in his divine nature. With equal clearness, it indicates the oneness of the Lord Jesus in the divine Unity of Being, albeit that he now wears our nature. But with similar force, it teaches us that he rests. The sitting posture naturally suggests repose. And we may reverently ask what was the nature of his rest, that we too may enjoy the Sabbath, which he keeps through the ages.

I. OUR SAVIOUR'S REST

It was not the rest of over-weariness. When a man has wrought with vigor, he throws himself into a sitting posture to recruit his exhausted energies. Now it is true that Jesus never spared himself. The intensity of his love and pity consumed prematurely the lantern in which they had been kindled. There had been the strain of unceasing toils, unsleeping vigils, and bitter sorrow; there had been the anguish of the Garden, and the weight of human sin; but none of these had availed to exhaust the divine energy of his being.

On the morning of the resurrection he awoke, as a sleeper from refreshing slumber, He had not fainted, neither was he weary. And whatever else it meant, his session at the right hand of God did not imply that the Saviour had overspent himself, and needed rest.

Did it mean that he had entered on a period of inaction, and that there would be a pause put on his redemptive energies? The supposition has only to be stated to be dismissed. The evangelist Mark, who ends his Gospel on the high note of the Saviour's session at the right hand of God, instantly and in the same breath tells us that when his disciples went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. The descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, the government and maintenance of the Church, the perpetual communication of life and power from the Head to the members of his body, prove that behind the veil, which trembles as each spirit whom we have loved enters behind it, Jesus is at work. For Zion's sake he does not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake he will not rest.

The Rest of the Lord Jesus, symbolized by his session at God's right hand, was therefore not that of weakness or inactivity. What was it?

Surely it meant that he had finished that which he rose up to do. He arose from the throne, emptied himself of his glory, stripped himself of much that was his by inherent right, and became flesh that he might finish transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness. All these things he had done.

On the Cross, he said, "**It is finished**"; from the throne, he could say, "**It is done.**" As it was said of Joshua, so it might be said of that greater Joshua, "**He left nothing undone.**" And therefore, as the Father entered into his rest, when he had ceased from the work of creation - a rest, not of weariness or inactivity, but of a completed scheme; so did the Son enter into his rest when he ceased from laying the foundations, both of his redemptive work and of the future triumphs of his Church.

Not weary; not inactive; but so far satisfied. He had done all that he essayed to do, all that could be done, and he sat down the attitude of completion; of contentment; of calm expectancy for an inevitable result.

There is therefore great doctrinal significance in this vision of Christ, which perhaps has not been sufficiently considered. To quote words from the last charge of Dr. Wordsworth, the late lamented of St. Andrews:

“It must, I am afraid, be said that the doctrine of Christ’s session at the right hand of God, though stated plainly and repeatedly not less than a dozen times in the New Testament, and embodied in each of our three creeds, is not receiving from us the attention it deserves. It has been obscured by the undue prominence given to the doctrine of the other character in which he not only intercedes for us, but is supposed to be continually pleading in our behalf the merits of his precious death and sacrifice offered once for all upon the Cross.”

And then he quotes with approval the words of the Liturgy, in reference to our Lord’s sacrifice: “He is the very Paschal Lamb which was offered for us, and Hath taken away the sin of the world.”

When once the believer apprehends the meaning of the Lord’s session at the right hand of God, he is not only assured of the divine majesty of Jesus, and of the Father’s acceptance of His mediatorial work, but he goes further to realize that there is nothing to be added to that finished work.

Since Jesus sits in the heavenly places, his sacrifice is sufficient and complete; His Blood can avail for sins of crimson dye, and for a race of sinners; His obedience unto death has satisfied the demands of law, and its sword is sheathed; and through the universe, like a peal of marriage bells ringing in Heaven, there goes the announcement that there is now no condemnation.

But there is an experimental significance also in the repeated affirmation of Scripture that our Lord sits at the right hand of God.

We must never fail to bear in mind that the work of Jesus, since he took our nature into union with himself, is as the representative man. As such he died, and rose, and reigns. And just in proportion as we are one with him by a living faith, we also shall die, and rise, and reign.

Such thoughts were burning in the heart of the Apostle, when he said, God “**hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**”

As the cathedral dome rears itself above the roar and strife, the smoke and mist, the slush and dirt of the streets above the lounge of the idle, the hurry of the business men, and the cry of the huckster and city Arab so it is the purpose of God that we should sit with Christ and in Christ; that we should share in his triumph, his reign, and especially his rest; that we should drink deep draughts from the crystal depths of that river which washes the foot of the eternal throne.

II. IN WHAT RESPECT MAY WE SHARE CHRIST’S REST?

It is a very needful question. Some of us have been men of war from our youth; we must see to it, lest, like David, we should be debarred from building the Temple of God. Only Solomons, whose names bespeak their peace, are competent for that.

It is only when we are at rest that we can do our best work. It is said that it is impossible to get the highest results of workmanship, when the workers are perturbed by the fever and rush of our modern life. The masterpieces of art come from days when the strain and pace were less, or from workshops where the roar of the tide is hardly heard, and the rush of life's hurricane is almost unperceived.

So our best work for God cannot be done unless we have learned to be quiet; still, that God may mold us; tranquil, that the tremor of our nerves may not interfere with the thrill of his energy; calm, that we may drop the silt and mud, which make our hearts so dull and so inapt to mirror the deep blue of the heavens above.

The restful heart lives above the storm and strife, with Christ; sensitive to human sorrow and to its own, but able to discern the purposes of divine wisdom; to await the unfolding of the divine plan; and to trust the love of the divine heart. It keeps silence for his word. Its daily tasks are holy. It is not disturbed by emotional change. Such is its acquiescence in the divine will that it is content with whatever comes. Its winters are always going, its springs always coming; the turtles call softly within its woods, the flowers deck its soil. "I felt," said Fletcher, "the will of my God like unto a soft pillow, upon which I could lie down and find rest and safety in all circumstances."

There is no unnatural quietism in this life rather the most intense earnestness and activity. When the nature is yielded up completely to the Holy Ghost, it attains to a speed of movement and a strength of endeavor, which can only be accounted for by remembering that when once a man has surrendered himself to the current of the divine nature, he will acquire something of its velocity and force. But in the midst of the most rapid and vehement movement there is rest deep rest, sweet rest.

There is the Rest of Reconciliation.

The soul no longer works up toward the Cross to obtain justification. It is assured that all that needed to be done to win it had been done when Jesus said, "**It is finished.**" Thus standing at the Cross-foot, conscious of his acceptance through the precious blood, the redeemed sinner cries, "**Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?**" And he does not wait for a counter-challenge, because he is so sure that there can be none.

There is the Rest of Assured Victory.

Before we understand the meaning of our Lord's ascension, we oppose Satan by the armory of our own resolves, and efforts at amendment. We fight and strive, and vow and fail, and start again.

But when we realize all that Jesus has done, we come to see that Satan is a conquered foe; that his weapons cannot reach a life hidden with Christ in God; and that so long as we maintain our standing in our risen Lord, we need not dread his attacks, nor be perturbed in the affray.

There is the Rest of a Surrendered Will.

When our wills move off the pivot of self on to the pivot of God, then our lives become concentric with the life of God; our hearts are allured to his love, our feet keep step to the marching music of his divine purpose. Oh, the bliss of living when our wills blend with his, like perfect words married to perfect music! Then trial and sorrow are treated as our Father's messengers, but in their winter costume. Then our very infirmities indicate the direction into which we should send our energies. Then disappointment becomes impossible, because all is God-appointed. Then we always have our way, because God's and ours are one. Then prayer is the discovery of God's plans, and a taking hold of his willingness. Then the heart keeps Sabbath, like a valley encircled by the great mountains on which the storms expend themselves.

There is the Rest of Unbroken Fellowship.

For as Jesus is one with the Father, so we become one with him, and through him one with the Blessed Trinity, according to his own prayer: "**I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one.**" What pen can describe the blessed fellowship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the serene tranquility of the divine nature? Yet something of that may be realized by those who claim that they shall be admitted to enjoy all that Jesus has purchased for his Church.

There is the Rest of Perfect Love.

Our affections have sorely troubled us, straying far away to forbidden things, and allying us to many drifting islets, lovely to the eye, but unstable as the tide. But when we enter into the life of the Ascended Jesus which is the life of Pentecost we find that our hearts become pervaded by the love of God. There is no longer the murmur of the babbling brook; because the great ocean has poured its waters up, filling its bed. There is no longer the yearning and jealousy and bitterness of unsatisfied desire; because the heart has found in God all its desires more than met. It hungers no more, neither thirsts anymore; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne satisfies it with the green pastures and still waters of eternal love. It is silent in its love.

There is also the Rest of the Holy Heart.

It is not occupied with inbred lust, not tossed to and fro on seething passion, or driven by every gusty whim. The flesh is crucified, the self-principle is quelled, the empire of the Holy Saviour is supreme. Emmanuel has taken the throne, and all discordant elements are still.

It may be that some who read these lines are passing through great suffering, and in that suffering are tempted to feverish restlessness. They expend themselves as the imprisoned songster from the woods that beats itself passionately against its cage bars.

It is almost useless to bid such to rest and be still.

They must learn the source of rest. Let them see that Jesus has entered into his rest that they might enter it too. Let them open their hearts for him to breathe in his gentle resurrection message, “**Peace be unto you.**” Let them reverently and believingly claim this also as part of their inheritance, of which they are co-heirs with Christ.

III. HOW TO ENJOY THIS REST

But these blessed experiences are only possible through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The ascension of Jesus is mystically and inevitably connected with the descent of the Holy Spirit. As the one Advocate passed up into the glory, the other came down into the heart of the Church, that he might realize in our experience that which is ours in the purpose and intention of God, creating within us the faith that shall be able to claim our share in that inheritance of rest which Christ has won for us.

You cannot divorce these two thoughts; or, if you do, you will bring inevitable disappointment into human hearts. If you magnify your rights in the glorified Saviour, and fail to unfold the willingness of the Holy Spirit to make them your own in daily and living enjoyment, you set souls the impossible task of climbing inaccessible heights, and they abandon hope.

Or, if you always dwell on the Pentecostal fullness, apart from the Saviour, whom the Holy Spirit has come to glorify, you drive souls into a self-analysis, an introspection, a spiritual self-centeredness, which is fatal to their true development.

Teach men the meaning of Christ's session, and that they have a right to all it means of the rest of God; but tell them also that the power to claim that right is through the grace of the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

We must not anticipate the teaching of the remaining chapters. For what student of the analogies of this wonderful book can doubt that “**the much land to be possessed**” of the following chapters refers to the gracious fullness of the Holy Spirit which awaits our quest? But as we close this meditation on the rest that awaits all the people of God who sit with Christ in the heavenly places, let us lift our hearts to the Blessed Spirit, asking that he would reveal to us that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, but which God hath prepared for those that love him.

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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