

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER TWO

THE DIVINE COMMISSION

(Joshua 1:7)

“Only when thine arm
In sense of weakness reaches forth to God,
Wilt thou be strong to suffer and to do.”
- Plumptre

AS Joshua stood on the threshold of his great work, he was repeatedly bidden to be strong and of a good courage. Some little time before the death of his predecessor, a great convocation of all Israel had been summoned, at which Moses had solemnly transferred his office to his successor, and had given him a charge, saying, “**Be strong and of a good courage; for thou must go with this people unto the land.**”

And now the voice of God reiterates the charge and repeats the injunction.

At first this startles us. What! must all they whom God uses be strong? Is it essential that there should be strength of limb and muscle in the physical and moral constitution of those who are called to do the divine biddings in the world? Because, if that be so, we who are like Ehud, left-handed; like Gideon, least in our father's house; or like Saul of Tarsus, painfully conscious of weakness, can never get beyond the rank and file in the army of the Lord.

And yet, may not this reiterated appeal indicate that the heart of Joshua misgave him, and that he was conscious of his utter inadequacy to fulfill the great commission that was thrust upon him? Probably he had never dreamt of so high an honor, so vast a responsibility. He had been content to be Moses' minister, satisfied to wait below while his master passed into the cloud to hold fellowship with God; staying in the tent to serve Moses if he were required, or in his absence to guard its contents; jealous for his master's honor, when Eldad and Medad prophesied; glad that all the glories of the conquest of Eastern Palestine decked with laurels the closing days of the great leader.

When Moses first received the sentence of death on the further side of Jordan, none could have been more deeply grieved than his faithful friend and attendant. But the thought of succeeding him never presented itself to his mind. Indeed, Moses himself does not appear to have thought of him in this direction; for we learn that he besought the Lord to appoint a man over the congregation, that they should not be **“as sheep without a shepherd”** (Numbers 27:17).

In that prayer Joshua may have joined, thinking all the while that Caleb, the lion-hearted, or Phinehas the priest, or one of the sons of Moses, might take his place; but not supposing that he would himself be called to it. His one aim had been to enhance the glory and lighten the cares of Moses; and he was too absorbed in his master’s personality to be greatly conscious of his own.

When therefore the call came to him to assume the office which Moses was vacating, his heart failed him, and he needed every kind of encouragement and stimulus, both from God and man.

- **“Be strong”** means that he felt weak;
- **“Be of good courage”** means that he was affrighted;
- **“Be not thou dismayed”** means that he seriously considered whether he would not have to give up the task.

He was a worm, and no man: how should he deliver Israel?

It is when men are in this condition that God approaches them with the summons to undertake vast and overwhelming responsibilities.

Most of us are too strong for him to use; we are too full of our own schemes, and plans, and ways of doing things. He must empty us, and humble us, and bring us down to the dust of death, so low that we need every straw of encouragement, every leaf of help; and then he will raise us up, and make us as the rod of his strength.

The world talks of the survival of the fittest; but

- God gives power to the faint, and increases might to them that have no strength;
- God perfects his strength in weakness, and uses things that are not to bring to naught things that are.
- If Ehud had been right-handed, he might never have judged Israel;
- If Gideon had been the greatest instead of the least in his father’s house, he would never have vanquished Midian;
- If Paul had been as eloquent in his speech as he confesses himself to have been contemptible, he would never have preached the Gospel from Jerusalem round to Illyricum.

Let us consider the sources of Joshua’s strength.

I. A FAITHFUL PAST

“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister.”

In his case, as always, the eternal rule held good, that faithfulness in a few things is the condition of rule over many things; and the loyalty of a servant is the stepping-stone to the royalty of the throne. Of the Highest it is said that he was obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and that, therefore, God highly exalted him, and gave him the Name above every name. We must learn obedience by the things that we suffer, ere we can be lifted from the dunghill to sit with princes.

The previous years of Joshua's past had been full of high and noble endeavor. For forty years, if Josephus be correct in his statement as to his age at the death of Moses, he shared the slavery and sorrows of a captive race. His childish eyes must have become accustomed to witnessing the brutality of the Egyptian taskmasters, even if his own shoulders were not torn by their cruel whips.

As a scion of one of the leading families of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8, 16), he may have taken some leading part in the marshaling of the Exodus, and there approved himself as worthy of all trust.

- His conflict with Amalek;
- His good report of the Land of Promise;
- His refusal to take any part in the disastrous attack on the Canaanites;
- His eagerness for the good name and fame of Moses;
- His patient endurance of the weary years of wandering all prove that his was no common character.

The aloe blooms but once in a hundred years; but every hour of all that century is needed to produce the delicate texture and resplendent beauty of the flower. The deed of a Grace Darling is not the sudden outburst of the moment that gives it birth, but the result of long years of self-discipline, courage, and ministry to others. And this summons of Joshua to the leader's place in Israel was the guerdon of more than eighty years of faithful service.

None of us can tell for what God is educating us.

We fret and murmur at the narrow round and daily task of ordinary life, not realizing that it is only thus that we can be prepared for the high and holy office which awaits us.

- We must descend before we can ascend.
- We must suffer, if we would reign.
- We must take the *via crucis* (*the way of the Cross*) submissively and patiently, if we would tread the *via lucis* (*the way of light*).
- We must endure the polishing, if we would be shafts in the quiver of Emmanuel.

God's will comes to thee and me in daily circumstances, in little things equally as in great: meet them bravely; be at your best always, though the occasion be one of the very least; dignify the smallest summons by the greatness of your response; so the call will come to thee as to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister.

II. A DISTINCT CALL

“Arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them . . . Be strong and of a good courage, for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I swore unto their fathers to give them.”

When a man knows that he has been called to do a certain work, he is invincible.

- He is not unconscious of his own deficiencies whether they be natural or intellectual.
- He is not insensible of difficulty; none so quick as he to see the great stones, the iron gates, the walled cities, the broad and flowing rivers;
- He is not invulnerable to the shafts of ridicule and adverse criticism:
- But for all these he looks steadily away to the declared purpose of God, and yields himself to be the channel through which it may operate.

Joshua's task was a very difficult one.

The people of Canaan were well versed in the arts and sciences of the time, acquired from commerce with the Phoenicians on the north and the Egyptians on the south. One of the most interesting discoveries of recent years has shown that the Hittites were a great people, highly cultured, and of sufficient importance to rival Assyria and Egypt.

It seemed preposterous to suppose that a nation of a few years existence was so soon to dispossess nations that had gained the country by conquest and were prepared to fight for every inch of territory by the most approved methods of warfare.

The Jewish legend says that when Joshua, appalled at the greatness of the task, rent his clothes and fell on his face, weeping to think of his incompetence, Moses lifted him up and comforted him with the assurance that God had foreseen and provided for all. Whether it were so or not, it is at least clear that the reiterated assurance of God to settle Israel by means of Joshua must have been a great source of strength to him.

The supreme inquiry for each of us, when summoned to a new work, is not whether we possess sufficient strength or qualification for it, but if we have been called to it of God; and when that is so there is no further cause for anxiety. If it is in his plan that we should march through a river, or attack a walled town, or turn to flight an army, we have simply to go forward. He will make the mountains a way. Rivers will dry up; walls will fall down; armies shall be scattered as snow in Salmon. There is no such thing as impossibility when God says, “Forward, soul: arise, go over this Jordan!”

III. THE SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OF God

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”

There was one particular in which Joshua would always come far behind his great predecessor.

Both were in necessary and constant communication with God; but Joshua had to seek counsel through the high-priest, whereas Moses had enjoyed direct intercourse with God, “**speaking unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.**” Still, Joshua the son of Nun was equally sure of the personal companionship of his great Ally, though he lacked the direct vision.

There have been generals whose presence on the field of battle has been the presage and guarantee of victory. Not only have they inspired the soldiers with a sense of confidence in their leadership, but they have encouraged them by their personal prowess and bravery.

There is a marvelous sense of security and courage when a Christiana, a Mr. Fearing, or a Miss Much-Afraid is assured of the presence of a Great-heart, who has never turned his back on a foe. And a lonely, trembling soul dares to step bravely across the margin of life into the unknown beyond to go down unabashed into the chill waters of death, because it can sing, “**Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**”

All through the arduous campaign that followed nothing could daunt Joshua’s courage whilst that assurance was ever ringing its silver tones in the belfry of his memory, “**I will be with thee.**”

Ah, it is well when we can so encourage ourselves in God!

- The fire is heated seven times; but he is with me, and no smell of fire shall pass upon my flesh.
- The river is deep; but he is with me, and its waters shall not sweep me off my feet.

Mine enemies are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred; but he is with me, and no weapon that is formed against me shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise in judgment against me he will condemn. Who can wax faint-hearted whilst he holds the right hand, saying, “**Fear not, I am with thee!**”

The Lord Jesus ever lives to save unto the uttermost, and is with us all the days, even unto the end of the age.

IV. THE INDWELLING OF THE WORD OF God.

“**This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.**”

Words pass on to men the heroic thoughts which thrilled the souls of those who spake them first.

There are words, as there are strains of music, which cannot be uttered without nerving men to dare and do, to attempt and achieve.

- A woman will be strong to wait and suffer for long years in the strength of a sentence spoken by her lover as he parted from her.
- An army has before now forgotten sleepless nights and hungry marches in the stirring harangue of its general.

And is not this what the prophet meant, when he said, “**Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart**”: and what Jesus meant when he said, “**The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life**”?

We must meditate on the words of God, because it is through the Word of God that the Spirit of God comes in fullness to be the mighty occupant of our inner man. This, after all, is the secret of strength to be possessed of the strong Son of God, strengthened by his indwelling might, and filled by his Spirit.

We can do all things when Christ is in us in unthwarted power.

The only limit lies in our faith and capacity; or, in other words, in our absolute submission to his indwelling. Little children can overcome when there is within them a Stronger than their foes. Weaklings may do exploits when the Mighty Conqueror who travels in the greatness of his strength makes them the vehicle of his progress. Nobodies, nonentities, broken reeds, bleached jaw-bones, quills plucked from the wild-fowl, and arrows that a babe could snap, accomplish marvels, because they are the channels through which the mysterious current of divine power and Godhead flows forth to the world.

Our risen Lord is charged with power.

It is stored in him as in a cistern for us. As the force of the brain is communicated to the members by the energy of the vital current flashing along the nerves, so does the power of Jesus come to us, his members, by the Holy Ghost. And if we would have that blessed Spirit, we must seek him, not only in the fervid meeting or in the great convocation, but through the Word, wherein his force is stored. Meditate on it day and night, till it yield to thee strength and good courage, drawn from the nature of the glorified Redeemer. Thy God hath commanded thy strength: claim it from Jesus, through faith, by his Spirit, and in his Word.

Be strong in your weakness through the strengthening might of Christ. Take weakness, weariness, faint-heartedness, and difficulty, into his presence; they will melt as hoar-frost in sunbeams. Give yourself wholly up to him, to do or die, as he shall choose. Then anoint your head, and wash your face. You shall have your inheritance in Timnath-heres (*the portion of the sun*); you shall make your way prosperous, and have good success; and you shall lead a nation to inherit the Land of Promise.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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