

Joshua

And
The Land of Promise

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A VETERAN COMRADE

(Joshua 14)

“Simple lives, complete and without flaw . . .
Who said not to the Lord as if afraid,
Here is thy talent in a napkin laid,
But labored in their sphere, as those who live
In the delight that work alone can give.”
- Longfellow

IT was in Gilgal that the apportionment of Canaan took place.

There, where the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away, and where the main camp had stood - gathered around the Tabernacle during the years that the warriors had been afar from wives and children, fighting the battles of The Lord - it was fit that the rewards of victory should be meted out. It was a great epoch in Israelite story, as the tribes assembled around their veteran leader, before whom and Eleazar stood the urns, the one containing the name of each, and the other the name of some specified portion of that fair land, which lay all around, smiling from hills and vales to the blue Heaven above.

Judah, first in war and march, was the first to draw nigh.

It was a great people, and was destined yet to play a greater part in the history of Israel and of mankind. But an incident intercepted the casting of the lot which calls for earnest heed; for, after all, our religious life is a thing for ourselves, and we learn more from the act and word of individuals than from the movement of a tribe. Stand still, then, O Christian soul, and see some counterpart of thyself in thy best moments, in this demand of the gray-headed warrior, this lion's whelp, for that is the underlying thought in the name "**Caleb**." Strong, bold, heroic, there was a great deal of the lion in him beside his name. He had been the young lion of the tribe of Judah some fifty years before; but he was as strong as he stepped out of the ranks of Judah to claim his right as he was when Moses sent him to spy out the land.

I. THE PRIME CHARACTERISTIC OF CALEB'S EARLY LIFE HAD BEEN HIS ENTIRE DEVOTION TO God

Repeatedly we are told both of him and Joshua that they “**wholly followed the Lord.**” And there was some trace of this in the words of the old man, as he addressed the comrade of many a hard-fought fight, of many a weary march. The rest of the spies had turned aside, dismayed by the spectacle of giants and walled-up cities and vast battle array. They had ceased to keep the eye steadfastly fixed on the movements of God's will, and on the might of his hand; and instead of following hard after him, they had yielded to panic, and made the hearts of the people melt.

But there had been no panic in the heart of Caleb. He had only been considering that, when God delights in men, he brings them into the land of milk and honey, and makes it theirs by deed of gift. And as he thought in his heart, so he spake with his mouth. In his rough soldier's phrase he even dared to boast that the Canaanites were but bread waiting to be eaten by the hosts of Israel. And then in more thoughtful fashion he spoke of the shadow of God's protection as having passed from over the land, as if he had the consciousness of it being God-deserted.

He followed God wholly through the weary years that ensued. Amid the marchings and counter-marchings, the innumerable deaths, the murmurings and rebellions of the people, he retained a steadfast purpose to do only God's will, to please him, to know no other leader, and to heed no other voice. It was of no use to try and involve that stout lion's cub in any movement against Moses and Aaron. He would be no party to Miriam's jealous spite. He would not be allured by the wiles of the girls of Moab. Always strong and true and pure and noble; like a rock in a changeful sea, like a snow-capped peak in a change of cloud and storm and sun. A man in whose strong nature weaker men could hide, and who must have been a tower of strength to that new and young generation which grew up to fill the vacant places in the van of Israel. The Nestor of the Hebrew camp, in him the words of the Psalmist were anticipated, that he bore fruit in old age, and to the last was fat and flourishing. And two things lit the path of this Greatheart, amid the gloom of the wanderings and the chaos of the conquest.

There was, first, the consciousness that lay upon his heart, like sunshine on a summer ocean, that God delighted in him; that the outgoings of God's nature toward him were full of love and joy; and that the peace of God that passeth all understanding might be his inalienable possession. Walking in the light, as God was in the light, he had fellowship with God; and he bore with him the rest of the divine nature long before he entered into its transitory type in the Land of Promise.

There was, next, the thought of Hebron. Forty-five years had passed since he had seen the white buildings of that ancient and holy city nestling beneath its terebinths. Probably he had only dwelt there for a single hour or two, whilst his comrades were bartering for pomegranates and oranges and the rich produce of its vales and hills; but it left an ineffaceable impression upon his heart. He had seen the Vale of Eshcol where they cut down the bunch of grapes; but it had no attractions to him beside the city on which he had fixed his desire.

He had beheld Jerusalem, beautiful for situation and girdled by its mountains; but to his lover's eye it had no glory by reason of that greater glory that excelled. And even the Plain of Esdraelon, watered by the Kishon brook, could not steal away his fond attachment to Hebron.

- Hebron, beneath whose oaks Abraham had pitched his tent;
- Hebron, whose soil had been trodden by the feet of the Incarnate God, as with two angel attendants he visited the tent of Abraham;
- Hebron, where Sarah and Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, lay buried; each in a little niche, holding the land in trust, as the graves of the dead always hold the land for the living, until the promise of God was realized, and the seed of Abraham could return to claim its heritage.

God had read his secret, and had arranged that what his heart loved best his hand should take, and hold, and keep. It was one of the things which God had himself prepared for those who love him.

He had taught him to love it, and immediately on his return to the camp the divine order was promulgated, **“My servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him I will bring into the land whereinto he went, and his seed shall possess it.”**

That promise fell into his heart as water on a thirsty soil, or like a lover’s last word cherished through long years. Often, as he lay down to sleep beside the camp fire, his last thought would be of Hebron; and amid the noontide haze, when the mirage gleamed on the horizon, it would sometimes seem to him as if the green hills of Hebron were beckoning him across the waste. What though his comrades were carried out to die day after day - plague could not touch him; pestilence could not harm him; and death itself must drop the point of its spear when it came near his heart.

We have trace of the attitude of Caleb’s heart through those long years in the words he spake at this memorable juncture, when he said: **“Behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as He said . . . Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; . . . as the Lord said.”**

The promise of God was his stay and comfort and exceeding great reward. He had to wait for its fulfillment, and it seemed long; as waiting times always do, especially when man waits for God. But God was working for him whilst he was waiting (Isaiah 64:4).

II. SUCH DEVOTION AS CALEB’S HAS MARVELOUS RESULTS

(1) It is the soil from which such a Faith springs as can claim the realization of Promise.

“Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day.”

No common faith was needed to make so large a claim.

Think of the time that had elapsed! Think of the greatness of the bequest, such a possession! Think of the Anakim that held it in their giant hands!

But faith triumphed; and if the words, “**It may be,**” come into his speech, words with a falter in them, the tremor, as it were, of fear, we must understand that they did not spring from any doubt of God; but of that mistrust of self which is a trait in all moral greatness. No man of noblest mold is ever self-confident. Whilst he reckons infinitely on God, he always answers the charge of impending treachery with the whisper, “**Lord, is it I?**”

The weakness of your faith is due, not to any inherent incapacity for faith, but because you have not yet learned the meaning of the words, “**He wholly followed the Lord his God.**” There is waiting for you an inheritance - some promised Hebron, some blessed gift of God’s infinite love in Christ. It is for you to say, with the faith of a Caleb, “**Give me this mountain.**”

(2) It leads to Fellowship.

Hebron stands for friendship, fellowship, love. The old word means that; and perhaps that is why Caleb was so eager to strike out the recent giants name of Kirjath-arba, and to bring back the word that Abraham had often had upon his lips. It spoke to him of that communion with his unseen Friend that he had enjoyed through the wanderings and vicissitudes of his long life, and which was not to end now; because in the seclusion of his estate, beneath the shadow of his own vine and fig tree, he would speak with him as a man with his friend, and anticipate the experiences of Nathanael in the days when the Gospel walked incarnate on our earth. So is it ever. You must give yourself away to God, and follow him, as the novice in Alpine climbing does his guide; or you will never be able to live in the Hebron where God gives himself to the soul in passages of love which it is not lawful for man to utter.

“If any man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.”

The world wants love. It is full of tired faces, and aching limbs, and breaking hearts. Only through man does the love of God come to men. This is the reason that the Word became flesh, so that God might be able to pour the full exuberance of his love not only over them, as in sunshine and fruitful seasons, but into them. And now redeemed men who are one with the divine Man must through him become the channels by which that blessed love may flow. But if any of us aspire to this, he must take up his abode in Hebron, to leave it never. His must be its balmy air, its terraced slopes, its sunny warmth.

Like the beloved apostle whose first epistle might fairly have been dated from the sweet calm of Hebron rather than from the strife of the heathen Ephesus we must live in the love of God. His love must dwell unhindered in us. But the only gateway into such an experience is the obedience that counts not cost, and makes no exceptions, but follows fully its highest convictions of the will and law of God. Those who follow God know God.

He turns and sees them following, and hears their inquiry to know his secret place, and bids them “**come and see.**” Oh, bliss of bliss! They tarry with him in such friendship as Moses had on the Mount. Their hearts burn and glow as the hours pass unheeded, uncounted, by. They come forth with the light of love transfiguring their faces, and making their common dress shine with lustrous beauty, as though they, too, had made light their vesture.

(3) It leads to Strength.

“Lo,” said Caleb. “I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now for war, both to go out and to come in.”

Consecration is the source of undecaying strength; because it allows the soul to draw on the strength of God. Just as the sap flows through the tender vine branches in spring, so does the strength of God pass into those that believe; who are not only united to Him, but fully surrendered and given up to his indwelling.

It is this point that Isaiah emphasizes in his sublime contrast between the respective strength of youth and of those that wait on The Lord. He says that under circumstances that sap the vigor of early manhood, so that youths faint and are weary, and young men utterly fail, those **“that wait on the Lord renew their strength. They mount up . . . they run . . . they walk.”**

It is the last of these that is so difficult.

It is not so difficult to soar. When the day is young, and the deep blue heavens tempt the exploring wing, and the breeze is soft, it is hard to linger by the few twigs on the top of the bare rocks.

It is not very difficult to run. When the sunbeams are still aslant, and the dew has not left the grass, and the dust is not stirred, there is a feeling of exhilaration which compels us to substitute our quickest pace for the more sedate walk.

But to walk! To go forward in the sultry heat! To have patience, and bear for his name’s sake, and not grow weary! To resist the temptation to lethargy and indolence and luxurious ease! This is the greatest task of all! But for this, which had been Caleb’s experience for forty-five years of desert wandering, no human energy can suffice.

The soul must learn to take the power which God gives to the faint; and to receive the strength he increases to such as have no might.

But this strength is accessible only through obedience. God cannot and will not bestow it except where there is a thoughtful and deliberate purpose to do his will, to follow his path, and to execute his work. But if you are set on this, then adequate strength for body and soul, mind and heart, will and spirit, shall most certainly be forthcoming. The outward man may decay; but the inward man will be renewed day by day.

(4) It gives Victory.

Of all the Israelites that received their inheritance in the Land of Promise, Caleb appears to have been the only one who succeeded in perfectly expelling the native occupiers of the country.

The Israelites generally seem to have made but poor headway against their strong and mighty foes, with their chariots of iron and fenced walls. Repeatedly we encounter the sorrowful affirmation, they were not able to drive them out. But Caleb was a notable exception.

What though Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim! (Joshua 14:15). What though his three grandsons, Sheshai and Ahirnan and Talmai, the sons of Anak, were prepared to yield their lives rather than give up possession! (15:14). Yet Caleb drove them out - not he indeed, but the Lord, who was with him, and gave him a victory that must have otherwise eluded even his strong hands.

The man who wholly followed the Lord was alone wholly victorious.

How precious and searching is the conclusion! Our failures in expelling the giants of the heart, in dealing with inbred corruption and the assaults of Satan, are almost entirely due to some failure in consecration. We have not wholly followed the Lord. There has been some secret flaw, some leakage, some draining away of strength.

This must be put right before the other can be secured. But when, so far as we know, we are entirely yielded to God, then no sin can stand before us, because nothing can stand before him. We humbly and trustfully put the matter into his hands, and believe that he will go forth against our foes in the chariots of salvation.

(5) It enables us to give blessings to others.

Twice we are told how Achsah - who was such a prize, as well to repay Othniel for his risk of life in taking Debir, the city of the books - lighted down from her ass to ask a blessing from her father's hands.

As dowry he had given her a field that lay toward the south, but which was destitute of springs. To water it entailed the conducting of irrigating streams from a distance. The newly married pair talked over the matter between themselves, and felt how desirable it was to be possessed of springs; and as Othniel shrank from asking, she took it on herself to obtain the boon from Caleb.

“Give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper and the nether springs.”

In the Epistle to the Galatians the Apostle speaks of men who supplied or ministered the Spirit to them (3:5).

It is a remarkable expression, as though through the **“hearing of faith”** men were able to become channels through which the Spirit was supplied to others. What a marvelous power!

Is this the spiritual reality of which the laying on of hands was the sacrament and sign? May we say that even now there is a spiritual contact with men and women who are living in the Hebron of fellowship, through which the upper and nether springs of spiritual grace are communicated?

Follow the Lord fully:

- So will you dwell in the land;
- So will your heart become as a watered garden, and a spring of water that does not fail;
- So will you be able to obtain promises, not for yourself only, but for others;
- So shall rivers of living water flow through you, and those who know you best;

The Othniels and Achsahs of your home circle will gather round you to ask a blessing, and you shall have power to open springs of spiritual blessing in the heights of the heavenly places, and in the depths of daily practical ministry, in the valley of human life.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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