

THE EXALTED CHRIST

Our Sanctification with Him
in His Exaltation

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION

“What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). Before it was, What should I like to do? or simply, What shall I do? But when the Spirit of God takes possession, all is changed. It is no longer, What shall I choose? but What shall I do, Lord? In conversion there is the yielding up of the independent human will to the guidance of God, and from that day forward to the end of the Christian’s life it must be the same thing. When the heart is true, the surrender of its own likings is always emphatic and manifest. The question, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? is constantly asked, for the will of God has become the pole-star of the new life.

My disciples, My brethren, My friends,
Can ye dare to follow Me?
Then wherever the Master dwelleth,
There shall the servant be.”

- Mrs. Pennefather

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?” (Joshua 5:13-14).

JOSHUA was by Jericho; behind him lay the river Jordan, the stream whose waters were now hidden from view; beneath him were the host of his people resting from their toil and travel; before him, and, I think, probably in the moonlight, lay Jericho, five miles in advance, almost hidden in its groves of palm trees, and right in the path by which the hosts of Israel must make their way into Canaan. There was no swerving to right or left. They must capture it, or fall back in defeat. It was a season of much heart-searching for the great leader of Israel.

He knew how the chosen people had repeatedly turned against God in the desert. He looked at the city before him, knowing its great walls, how straitly it was shut up, how mightily armed, how full of soldiers, and do you not think his heart for a moment misgave him?

As he stood there reconnoitering, walking to and fro, somewhat disconsolate, **“there stood a man over against him, with his sword drawn in his hand.”**

Now I do not know what your Jericho may be. It may be somebody at home whose temperament chafes you; it may be some class of rough, unruly boys and girls; it may be a district or parish hard to work; it may be some frowning bastion of the devil’s building; it may be your own flesh, some secret temptation. I cannot enumerate all, but before everyone surely frowns some Jericho. Yet there is never a Jericho without One with the drawn sword outside it, though too often we fail to lift up our eyes to see Him.

Now Joshua’s heart was bold, he was confident in God, and, therefore, after discovering this mysterious being, he challenged him. Who art thou? Specter or reality? Foe or friend? For us or against us? Israelite or heathen? And in reply came the answer, which revealed that, in addition to the host of Israel beneath, and the host of the enemy in front, there was a third host, whose serried ranks covered the country around, unseen by mortal eye, but real and present, **“Nay, but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.”**

This I will lead into the fight, and by it overcome Canaan, in order to give it to you. **“As captain of the host of the LORD host am I now come.”**

There is no doubt who this wondrous Being was; He was neither man nor angel, for, had He been either, He would have refused the homage Joshua offered. Paul forbade the Lystrians to worship a man like themselves. The angel of the Apocalypse forbade the apostle to worship him. But He who now stood before Joshua thought it not robbery to be equal with God, for He was God. The Angel of The Lord, the Commander and Captain of the host of God.

Now let us take this word, *Lrxhgoj*, and follow it out, especially in the New Testament. Isaiah tells us of the coming of a Prince the - Prince of Peace. Daniel tells us that the Messiah was to be a Prince. Coming to Hebrews 2:10 we learn something more about His story.

There we are told that **“it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”**

When we ask what was the mysterious lesson our Captain learned in the days of His flesh, we turn to chapter 5:8, where we are told, **“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience through the things which He suffered.”** So that before He became our Commander and Captain, He learned how to obey.

The keynote of His life here was that He came to keep the Father’s commandments.

His autobiography is prefaced in the spirit of prophecy with the words, **“Lo, I come to do Thy will, God,”** and as its “finis” we have the words, **“It became Him . . . to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering,”** or the words, **“He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.”** Because He was under authority, He is able to say to His servants, **“Do this,”** and they do it.

Again, in chapter 12:2, we are told that we must run our race, looking alway unto Jesus, the Author, Prince, Captain of our faith. He is not merely Author, in the sense of having created faith, and left it for us to use, but because He is Himself the Leader, as well as the object of faith, for all faithful hearts. We learn from this that He is our brother-man; He, as our Captain, has trodden our world, and has shown His brotherhood, not simply by tears, by hunger, by thirst and weariness, and even by death, but also because He has lived the human life of trust in God as His brethren do.

And from the same verse we learn certain conditions in which His trust was put under great strain. **“He endured the Cross,”** that is, He stood steadfast beneath it, and in full knowledge of its bitterness and woe. It is a great comfort to soldiers in the hour of battle to know that their captain has been under fire before. So we rejoice to know that our great Captain has Himself known thirty-three years of human life, and all the while He anticipated the Cross, had the shadow of it on His soul, and was resolved to endure it. **“Lo, I come to do Thy will.”**

As men traveling in Switzerland may see and admire the lowland hills, but will despise and forget them when, by-and-bye, a puff of wind disperses the mists, and reveals the snow-capped Alps behind the lower range, so Jesus endured the Cross for the joy set before Him, and the glory behind it. And once more, in Acts 5:31, we are told, **“Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.”**

Stand with me for a moment on that dew-besprinkled sward on Olivet, and see His outstretched hands, and hear His parting blessing, as He begins to rise. We cannot discern it, but the right hand of God is there lifting Him. Mark as He ascends how that cloud becomes like a fiery chariot, bathed in the rays of the morning sun, whilst He passes above and beyond it.

Think of the blessed contrast.

- Here rejected, there welcomed;
- Here, a few peasant companions, there, an innumerable company of adoring angels;
- Here, a whispered, feeble farewell, there, a multitudinous and praiseful salutation.

Behold Him passing up and on, through all Heaven, beyond all the ranks and orders of heavenly beings, and taking our nature where no created thing had ever gone before to the very throne of the Eternal. God has exalted Him Prince and Saviour.

These steps were foreshadowed in prophecy.

He came, as our Captain,

- To learn obedience by suffering;
- To be put to death by the Jews,
- Going down into the grave,
- Rising from the dead,
- Ascended and seated at the right hand of God a Prince and a Saviour.

The mistake countless Christians make is, that they reverse God's order, and begin by owning Him as Saviour, and then at some time or other take Him as their Prince and Head. But God has laid down His invariable order; first Prince, then Saviour. Accept it. Enthroned Him in your hearts, there is none mightier, and He will save you from the power of sin. Such is our Prince and Commander. Such is He who is come as Captain of the Lord's host.

What then should be our attitude towards Him? Humility, that of course - "**Joshua fell on his face.**" The man who to-morrow would lead the assault against Jericho, in this moment of privacy is on his face. And you will never be able to stand in the breach and lead the Lord's host, unless you have times when you fall on your face humbly before God.

True holiness, true strength, is learned in humility. The man who knows most of God thinks least of self. You may gauge the depth and intensity of a man's nearness to God by his lowliness, prostrate before God. What is your attitude? Does the holiness you dream of make you proud, and cause you to lift up your head?

- Abraham, in God's presence confessed himself "**but dust and ashes.**" (Genesis 18:27).
- Isaiah, seeing the King in His beauty, said, "**Woe is me . . . I am a man of unclean lips.**"
- Simon prayed, "**Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man.**"
- John, the beloved John, in Patmos, seeing the King, "**fell at His feet as one dead.**"

If you have caught a glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ in His purity, majesty, and glory, you too will have fallen in the dust before Him.

But, moreover, we must worship, we must learn to worship as Joshua did. He asked, "**What saith my Lord to His servant?**" And what was the reply? "**Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy.**" A little thing. Yes; but to an Oriental it implied deeper worship than before. There are times, it seems to me, when we ask, "What next?" And we are not bidden to do some great deed, but to worship more intensely, to get deeper down, to be more absorbed in adoration, to assume the attitude in which we may read God's deepest lessons. Do we worship enough? In worship such as this we do not necessarily pray, or even praise, or confess sin; this is a worship in which the whole being lies prone, emptied, adoring at the feet of God. He thinks more of this spirit of worship than even of our running to do His errands. We will serve and fight better when we have been on our face before the King.

So our attitude must be that of humility and worship; but my third, and main, and last point is obedience. "**What wilt Thou have me do?**" "**What saith my Lord unto His servant?**"

Every Christian is chosen to be a soldier. The moment life begins the fight begins. As soon as the new life is born within us, we are conscious of conflict. The spawn of the salmon has to fight a hundred foes to reach the sea. Directly you pass the Cross, you must go to the House Beautiful to be armed for the fight. We are soldiers; and what is the primal duty of a soldier? To obey.

You think it is to fight, to be strong and courageous in battle. These are good qualities: but they avail not without obedience. Is not the Church of to-day in the state of Israel, when, in the time of the Judges, it is said, "**Every man did that which was right in his own eyes?**"

Why? Because there was no king. Must we not confess we have given Christ much trouble? Oh that we could learn to do as we are told! Would that henceforth we could look up and see the Great Captain standing over us, and say, “**What saith my Captain to His servants?**” Does not Christ demand such obedience? Does He not deserve it? By His bloody sweat, and cross, and passion hath He not surely purchased us and secured the right to obedience, the right to hold us as His slaves to do His will? Because He has chosen us to be His soldiers, because we have chosen Him to be our Captain, ought we not to give Him our hearts allegiance?

There must come in the life of every true Christian a moment, it may be the moment of conversion, or some subsequent moment, when the Christian heart deliberately elects to obey Christ, come what may.

Many Christians live in a divided state: doing what He bids them now, and forbearing presently. They pick and choose, what they will and what they won't. This is borne in on them and they do it; that is not borne in on them and they leave it. They are in the drifting state anarchy shall I call it? in which they suit themselves how far and how much they obey. But there must come a time when this indecision reaches an end, when they quietly kneel before their Captain, and choose and elect in the very depths of their being to obey Him in everything. Have you done it?

I charge you to do it now. Enter into the silence of your own spirit, and say to Him, “From this solemn hour, Christ, my Captain, I definitely choose, in Thine own strength, to obey Thee utterly, and entirely, and forever.”

When this is done, Christ will put into your life some little test, as small, it may be, as that He put into the life of Joshua. See, Joshua is on his face, he is ready to do anything and everything the Captain bids him, but the command is a very little thing. In that sublime moment there is an ocean of mystery and wonder pouring its tides into his heart; but there comes from this august Being such a small command, “**Take thy shoe from off thy foot.**”

Might not Joshua have said at such a time, “Is there not a command more worthy of me and of Thee? Some great action, which shall be a perpetual memento? Some city to take, some battle to fight, some warriors to overthrow? Only this? Only this? The Master seems to say, “I only ask this of you; if you will not do such a little thing, what pledge have I of your submission and obedience in doing this and that?” He that is faithful in the very little is faithful in the great, and Jericho shall fall before him.

“Loose! “ Do you hear the voice? Loose! loose! loose!

- Loose that practice of years standing in your business which your conscience condemns.
- Loose that unholy friendship which is sapping, ruining your better life.
- Loose that habit, that unbelief, that practice of secret sin.

Christ does not ask a great thing, it is only a very little one. Will you not do it? If you will not, the teaching of this story will be largely lost upon you. But if you dare to do that, I cannot tell the blessing which will come into your soul.

Only beware of one thing in all this dealing with conscience. It is a great and glorious step to exercise ourselves to have a good conscience void of offence toward God and man: but be very careful to distinguish between various sorts of conscience.

For instance, the unenlightened conscience is the snare of many who are weak, because untaught. The only way to deal with a conscience like that is to bring it under the power of God's Spirit.

Then there is the over-scrupulous conscience; the trouble about which is, that it is concerned mainly with ourselves, and the mint and cummin of observances, rather than with the will of God in Christ.

Beware of these, and seek to have a good conscience, a purged conscience; enlightened by the truth, filled with the Spirit, washed with the Blood, and accustomed to exercise itself in daily discipline. Let us so live that there may be nothing between our Saviour and ourselves which is not instantly translated into obedience. When that is so, Jericho will fall, and not till then.

“Joshua did so,” he took his shoes from off his feet and worshipped. After that he went back to the host, and presently he was bidden by God to lead it against the walls of Jericho. The host of Israel gathered itself and marched to those mighty ramparts which stood against them stoutly, but fell before them and their invisible allies. Then the way into the bright land of promise was opened.

Do you want the land of promise, the rest, the victory, the holy ecstasy and joy, where you may sit satisfied under the vine and fig tree, none daring to make you afraid, the land and life of blessed promise?

Do you want it? Then I say, Wait on your face at the feet of Jesus, your Captain and Commander, till He tells you what He would have you do, and do it. Do not invent something; do not get flurried, nervous and fearful. Learn to wait only and patiently for God. Then will be borne in on your soul a command which when obeyed shall flood your soul with exceeding blessedness and rest.

So may it be for Christ's sake. Amen.

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