

SO GREAT SALVATION

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Also by A. Paget Wilkes

The Dynamic of Redemption

The Dynamic of Faith

The Dynamic of Service

The Dynamic of Life

Chapter 1 – THE PROMISED LAND

Our theme will be “God’s so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3). What it is. How to experience it. The hindrances in our road; the way in and the way thereafter will be our subject.

Following the lead of the writer of the Hebrew letter, we shall take the Exodus of the Israelites and their entrance into Canaan as the type of this great experience.

St. Paul has told us emphatically that that memorable story was written for our example (I Cor. 10:1-12) twice repeated. The author of the Hebrew letter tells us the same. The entrance into the Promised Land was not merely a piece of history. It was written for our learning. The gospel of the entrance into Canaan, he says, was preached to us as well as to the Israelites of old. It is “today,” and not merely yesterday. It is “today” and not tomorrow. It is here in Time and not for Eternity. Hence the interpretation of Canaan as typical of heaven is ruled out: while the plea that it is merely an historical episode containing useful lessons is also inadequate. It was a real type of a present-day spiritual experience.

There is neither time nor necessity to unfold the exodus from Egypt as typical of the justification and the new birth of the soul. Every true Christian is familiar with that aspect of truth.

Our study this morning will rather be of the Promised Land as a type of that second work of grace in the heart known as (Entire Sanctification, The Fullness of the Spirit, an Indwelling Christ, His Rest, His Peace, a Pure Heart, abiding in Christ) -an experience as definite, as real, as sudden in reception as the new birth itself. Between the experience of the new birth or exodus of the soul from Egypt (Rom. 6) and that of the fullness of the Spirit, or the entrance into the Promised Land (Rom. 8) lies the story and the experience of the Wilderness Life (Rom. 7).

This morning let us climb with Moses on Pisgah’s height and view the Promised Land.

Later we shall descend again into the plain and seek to discover the cause of that sad and weary wandering in the sands of the desert.

“The land” is the constant theme of the Old Testament. It occurs nearly five hundred times in the Pentateuch and books of Joshua and Judges; eighty-four times in Genesis; sixty in Exodus; ninety in Numbers; one hundred and fifty-four in Deuteronomy; sixty in Joshua; twenty-five in Judges.

Yes! That little, tiny land -not as big as the Principality of Wales -has been and will yet be the center of blessing to the world. From its hills and valleys have flowed rivers of living water to all the nations of the earth. It is no wonder then, that it is taken as the type of the deepest and most blessed experience of the human soul.

We will consider this morning seven of its names or titles, and thereby get a view of what God has promised us in Christ.

A Land of Rest (Deut. 11:3-7)

This is how the writer to the Hebrews describes the land of Canaan.

The experience of Entire Sanctification or inward holiness is above all things a heart at rest. “The God of peace,” i.e., God the Holy Ghost – who descended as the dove from heaven -- “sanctify you wholly,” prays the apostle (I Thess. 5:23). “The God of peace . . . bruise Satan under your feet” in your conflict (Rom. 16:20). “The God of peace . . . make you perfect” in your work (Heb. 13:20,21). The God of peace be with you in your thoughts (Phil. 4:7) – all these suggest to us that, above all things, a supernatural rest or peace of heart is the hallmark of that second experience in the redeemed soul, of which we are thinking these days.

Certainly it will mean rest from conflict with inward evil; it will mean rest from inward wandering and deviation from God; it will mean rest in service and the bearing of responsibility; and it will also mean rest in conflict with the powers of darkness.

1. Rest from wandering. The Israelites traveled for one year and wandered for forty! Traveling means progress toward a definite objective. Wandering means constant movement without any progress. Alas! How many of God’s children must plead guilty to constant movement with but little corresponding progress in holiness.
2. Rest from inward evil. Though the people were out of Egypt, alas, the Egypt was not out of them. “Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not of the lusts that war in your members?” Not until the inward foe is evicted can there be abiding peace. Not until the Diabolonians in the walls of Mansoul (“man’s soul” -from Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress”) be discovered and destroyed can there be perfect peace within.
3. Rest in service. Not till the soul has discovered experientially that God is the worker and we but the instrument in His Hand: that the battle is His and not ours – not till we are made perfect in the doing of our good works, i.e., enabled to stand aside and watch the great Doer at work, is the rest of soul perfect and complete.
4. Rest in conflict with Satan. This is the conflict in prayer. Till the soul has learned the power of the blood of Christ, the intercession of the only Mediator, there can be but little rest in the warfare with the powers of darkness in dealing with the foe.

Yes! It is a land of rest – that repose of soul which He has promised we should find if only we would take His yoke upon us and learn of Him.

Lord, I believe a rest remains
For all Thy people known,
A rest where pure enjoyment reigns
And Thou art loved alone.
A Land That Floweth with Milk and Honey
(Deut. 11:9)

Here is another of its titles occurring no less than twenty times in the sacred page. Now “milk” and “honey” are two of the words employed continually to describe the Word of God itself.

Hence a “land flowing with milk and honey” is obviously meant to depict a spiritual state in which the heart overflows with delight in the Word of God: finding it to be its very meat and drink. How true is all this to experience. It has been the testimony of multitudes that when God has brought them into the fullness of the blessing, the Word of God is a new book, filling them with joy, speaking to their heart, enlightening their eyes, and they can truly say with Jonathan “Mine eyes have been enlightened because I tasted a little of this honey.” The desire for the “sincere milk of the Word” is abundantly satisfied. His words are more than their necessary food. To change the metaphor, when the Author of the sacred Volume comes to abide in our heart, surely it is but to be expected that He will make it live and speak and burn within.

A Land of Living Water (Deut. 11:11)

If the green pastures into which the Good Shepherd leads us and bids us lie down therein speak to us the Word of God, then the waters of stillness beside which He leads us represent the fullness of His Spirit. This was essentially the promise of Christ, “this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive.” “The water that I shall give shall be in you a spring of water.” “He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.”

Here is the experience of one who for many years wandered hopelessly in the wilderness and in whom Egyptianism was paramount indeed. Writing to me not long since, after entering the Promised Land, she says:

You ask me to write it down. I eagerly agree to do so, but now, pen in hand, I'm wondering what exactly that “it” covers. Is it the joy that is now mine? If so, it is utterly impossible to write it down. It is just there bubbling up and up and over very often, and seems to be compounded of many things -say, a clean heart, a wonderful new God dwelling in it, a new Bible, a new outlook, new feelings toward God and man, a new song, and fellowship with God. Such are the wellsprings in the Promised Land – promised to all who will “only believe” and enter in to possess what God has provided for us in Christ Jesus.

A Land of Deliverance (Deut. 11:23)

A very common phrase used by many Christians is victory over sin.” It is true that God has promised us in His Word, victory over death, the devil, the world, but He has promised us something better than victory, where the sin of the heart is concerned. He promises us “deliverance” from its indwelling and presence. Many terms are employed to show us that He has made us more than conquerors – through His blood.

There is no experience more blessed in the land of Promise than the consciousness of His presence to meet the foe for us. He is the Captain of the Lord's host. He deals with all our enemies.

One who had long – very long – been defeated by the inward enemy writes to me thus: I do want to thank you and to praise God for what He has done in my soul. It had seemed to me that nothing could change that evil nature right down in the depths within me, but then I grasped the fact that it died on the Cross when Christ was crucified. I thought again. And again of your words to me. “I do not think M-- that you have ever realized the power and efficacy of the blood of Christ.” well, God enabled me to believe -Praise God, down in the depths of my heart there is the power of God combating everything that is evil. I realized the other day what a lot of unbelief there is in me through infidel ideas I heard years ago, and I thought, how can I

combat all this awful unbelief? As I took it to the Lord in prayer, He seemed to say to me, “God fights your enemies for you when you are in the Land of Rest.” Isn't that blessed?

Yes, that is so! “Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you and that He will without fail drive out from you the enemies that are in the land.” It is repeated again and again by the Holy Ghost, that the Land of Canaan is a land of deliverance and victory through the power of an indwelling Saviour, who alone can deal with evil and destroy all our enemies, that so we may serve Him in righteousness and holiness all the days of our life.

A Land of Fruitfulness (Deut. 11:14-15)

Rejoicing now in earnest hope
I stand, and from the mountain top
See all the land below;
Rivers of milk and honey rise
And all the fruits of Paradise
In endless plenty grow.
A land of corn and wine and oil,
Favored with God's peculiar smile
With every blessing blest.

It is here described as a state of soul in which the Spirit of God is free to bear His fruit.

The wilderness and the solitary place are now said to blossom as the rose. Our struggle to produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, long suffering, etc., now gives place to His gracious working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. George Fox, the early Quaker, speaks thus of this experience: I knew Jesus and He was very precious to my soul; but I found something in me that would not keep patient and kind. *I did what I could to keep it down, but it was there.* I besought Jesus to do something for me: and when I gave Him my will He came into my heart, and cast out all that would not be sweet and all that would not be kind, all that would not be patient; and then He shut the door.

It is true he uses a different metaphor, but the experience is the same.

The biographer of that great man of God, William Bramwell, describing the work of God's Spirit in his own soul, writes thus about him:

“His character was free from all inconsistencies. I have known him intimately more than twenty years and have lived in the same house for twelve months together. I have seen him, therefore, in his seasons of relaxation, but I never saw him in such a temper as I could reprove. For the last two or three years in particular he was like a shock of corn fully ripe and fit for the heavenly garner, or to make use of a different figure, he was a tree of light whose vigorous and luxurious branches were weighted down with a diversity of the richest ripest fruit. There was an increasing degree of tenderness and affection in his spirit. His full soul was like a spring continually overflowing with the most amiable, heavenly and benevolent emotions. Never did I behold a fallen child of Adam whose moral renovation was so complete nor one who was so angelic and saint-like. He appeared to be everything his Lord designed him to be.”

The Land of Promise (Deut. 11:17)

It is above all things the promised land -the Promise of the Father -the Gift of God -an experience which He bestows. Our duty, then, is to possess. No fewer than sixty-three times does the word “possess” or “possession” occur in the book of Deuteronomy alone. “I have begun to give,” saith the Lord: “begin ye to possess.” It is by faith -- “the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Nothing is more humbling to our pride and self-righteousness, nothing more glorifying to God than this.

It is the experience of all who have crossed the Jordan, that the entrance into the experience of full salvation by faith and faith alone, humbles to the dust and fills us with praise and thanksgiving to God. One writes thus:

With me it was thus. I was humbled and self emptied and Jesus became my all in all. I felt myself all weakness (as I never did before) and He all my strength. I all nothingness. He all fullness. I all helplessness. He omnipotence. I flew from myself and escaped to Jesus. He received me graciously, freely, without money and without price, without worthiness or faithfulness, and became all my salvation and all my desire: humbled in lowest abasement at His boundless condescension and filled with love, I felt that I was one with God.

The Land of the Oath (Deut. 11:9)

As though the promise of God was not enough, He confirms it by an oath. Nearly fifty times is this remarkable fact recorded -- "I swear unto your fathers to give it to you." Thank God the oath was made not unto us but

Chapter 2 – THE WILDERNESS

Like Moses of old we have looked from Pisgah's top on the Promised Land and this morning we will descend into the plain and see the life in the Wilderness, though alas, all of us know it only too well from "experience.

Again, I would remind you from the passage I have just read, I Cor. 10:1-12, that St. Paul twice over declares that "These things (i.e., the experiences of the Israelites in the Wilderness) happened unto them by way of example" (verse 11) – and that "these things were our example" (verse 6) lest we should think and say that they were but historic incidents no more relative to us and our times than any ordinary historic event may be. In chapter 9 he gives us his own experience of the care and fear lest he should have run and fought and preached in vain. Passing from that he refers us to the experiences of the Jewish forefathers and their fall and failure and destruction in the Wilderness, concluding with the solemn words, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

"All" (five times repeated) had had, remarkable experiences – delivered from Egypt – baptized in the sea and in the cloud – under it and through it – baptized "into Moses" (R.V. Marg.); "all" partaking of spiritual food and drink, eating the bread from heaven and drinking from the Rock which followed them and that Rock was Christ; and yet they were overthrown in the Wilderness – so terrible was that place and the barrenness of soul of which it is the type.

The real Wilderness, however, lay within them. The Prophet Isaiah said long ago "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint." The writer to the Hebrews repeats it when he says "They do always err in their hearts and have not known My ways." To the casual reader it would seem that the cause of the trouble was the pathless desert and the wandering of their feet; with no highways of travel, how could they know the way? But the Holy Ghost tells us that the evil lay within! So it is with us! The real Wilderness is in our own hearts, and not in outward circumstances. "The whole head (we know not) is sick; the whole heart (we wander) is faint" (Isaiah 1:5).

Evil Lust

"That we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (I Cor. 10:6). The reference here is to Numbers 11:4. "And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" In Rom. 7 we read that indwelling sin (inherited or innate sinwardness) works in us all manner of lust -lust for praise, for power, for popularity, for pleasure as well as for possessions.

Deeper down than our will lies desire – the innate sinwardness that dwelleth within has poisoned all the springs of our being – our desires included. Even after we have been born anew – and our wills and consciences enlightened and brought into conformity with the Will of God, we discover a hankering after other and worldly things which brings again our renewed will into captivity to the law of sin and death (Rom. 7). Yes! After we have tasted of the heavenly bread and drank of the living water, how often do we say "who shall give us flesh to eat?" Christ has provided for us that which is meat indeed and drink indeed, and yet and yet!!! John Wesley said "Desire nothing but God." He is able to satisfy all the aspirations and longings of

unto our fathers. The promise and the oath were made to us in Christ. So it is eternally and irrevocably established. All the promises are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.

He must have a people to praise His name; "Some must enter in." Not for our sakes is it given and promised, but for His Name's sake alone! Well, then, may we take heed, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, we should come short of it and fail to enter therein. If we do, others will take our place; and we shall be the eternal losers, forever lamenting our loss; while others shall avail themselves of the glorious promise and so make up the accomplished number of those who "must enter in" in order that His Word be fulfilled, the number of the elect completed and His bride made ready for His appearing. May we learn these coming days the sin of unbelief; its folly and its eternal shame; and so make haste ere it is too late, to accept and enjoy His uttermost salvation.

the soul! But alas! As with the Israelites of old, the "mixed multitude" within us seems to set all our renewed nature awry; and we find that even the true Israelite also weeps again and says, "Who shall give us flesh to eat?"

Who is there among us that has not had to repent of such carnal weeping and confess with penitential tears the truth of this sinister diagnosis? Blessed is that man when he reaches Rom. 7:24 and cries aloud with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death."

Idolatry

"Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them" (I Cor. 10:7). The reference here is of course to the terrible story as told in Exodus, chapter 32.

God was intending to do a new and very wonderful thing. Hitherto He had led and guided them by other means. He now proposes to "come down and dwell among them." An indwelling God in His gracious purpose -Moses is called to the mountain top to receive the pattern of the Tabernacle wherein the presence of Jehovah was to be enshrined.

No wonder that Satan was aroused and hell itself moved to prevent such a purpose. This must be checked at all costs. Counterfeits are always the devil's specialty. Yes, the people must have an indwelling God -but it shall be one they can see -one that will remind them of Egyptian gold -one that will continually call to mind the way they relieved the Egyptians of their treasure. We know the rest of the terrible story!

The Apostle here only gives us the hallmark of all false idolatrous and carnal worship in the words "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." This is always so all the world over, whether in heathen India, China, Africa, and Japan on the one hand, or in the counterfeit Christian organization in so-called Christendom on the other – *sensuous worship combined with worldly amusement*. Some one has called modern Christianity "Religious worldliness, alias worldly religion."

Wherever ritualism invades the Sanctuary it is always so. Whenever Modernism lays its blighting hand on the Church of God – worldliness follows – the theater, the dance and bridge party come in and the meetings for prayer and spiritual devotion disappear.

Do let us beware lest we accept any of the devil's counterfeits of an "Indwelling Christ." The closing words of the Apostle of love were "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Can there be greater sin than despising the Holy One of Israel? If He has condescended to come and dwell within and make our heart His home -how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, seeking pleasure in all the idolatrous ways and fashions of our time, however attractive and full of merit they appear.

There is nothing so horrible as worldliness dressed up in religious garb, or religion walking hand in hand with the world that crucified the Lord of Glory!

Spiritual Adultery

“Neither let us commit fornication) as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (I Cor. 10:8).

The reference here is to the story told in Numbers 25, the sequel following in chapter 31, and a further reference and explanation occurring in Rev. 2:14, where we are told of “the way of Balaam.” We learn that the apostate prophet did not corrupt the people directly but instructed Balak the king, how to separate them from their God by introducing idolatrous worship through the means of social intercourse and then adultery.

The Israelites, we read, mixed in friendly social intercourse and then finally committed adultery with the very people who had called in the prophet to curse them.

The attempt to bring down God’s curse upon them had failed, but now a more terrible means is employed whereby the people bring a curse upon themselves – to their undoing and destruction.

The Apostle James tells us that friendship with the world is spiritual adultery; that it is enmity with God. I know not which is the more desolating of the two -love of it or fear of it. The world lays itself out to flatter and cajole, and with velvet glove leads to its dance of death. Let her devices be discovered and rejected: let her advances be resisted, and she makes haste to take off the glove and ‘show and use an iron hand. Alas! How many stagger and fall before the specter of social ostracism.

In the Wilderness these enemies stalk abroad; in the heart of the unsanctified Christian there is always either a response to the attraction of the world or a fear of its rebuff and scorn.

Thousands of saints have perished in the wilderness through worldliness and compromise; and the Lord of Glory, now as on Patmos isle, warns us again of those “who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication.”

Oh, let us not rest till all these evils are evicted from the heart and we are safe in the Promised Land.

Tempting Christ

“Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents” (I Cor. 10:9).

The passages to which the Apostle now draws our attention are two, for there seem to have been two occasions in which the people are said to have committed the sin of “tempting Christ” - a remarkable expression, since of Christ Himself they could obviously have known nothing! The two occasions are described in Ex. 17:2-7 and Numbers 21:5-6 respectively. The first was when they had no water to drink; the second occasion was when they had nothing but manna to eat. In the case of the former they said, “Is the Lord among us or not?” In the latter they cried out, “We loathe this light bread.”

In their lusting after evil things (Numbers 11:4) they had despised God’s promise; in their idolatry (Exodus 32) they had rejected God’s way; in their fornication (Numbers 25) they had rejected His authority; and now by their dissatisfaction they doubt and deny His presence. How true and consistent is all this to experience. The carnal mind has but little relish for spiritual food. It fails to see and understand that “the water from the rock in the wilderness” and “the manna from heaven” - the written Word – are blessed tokens of His presence. The one from whose heart the wilderness state has been removed, though outwardly he may appear to sojourn there for a while. Yet, like Joshua and Caleb, he has the promised land in his heart: he has eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to understand that the “living water” of His Spirit and the “living bread” of His Word are blessed and assured tokens of His abiding presence, and he is satisfied indeed.

Do we see as in a mirror a reflection from our heart’s condition in all this? Have we discovered there that hateful spirit which says in silence, though not in audible language, “Our souls are weary of this light bread”? Do we find a craving for spiritual food other than His Word – something more

exciting, more intellectual, more worldly. Wise? Or have we found the manna in the wilderness to be every bit as luscious as the milk and honey of Canaan and beyond all comparison more delicious than the leeks and onions and flesh pots of the Egyptian worldling – because we recognize His unseen presence with us by the living water He gives and the bread from heaven He bestows through the pages of His Word.

“Neither murmur ye as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”(I Cor. 10:10).

We come now to the last and most awful of all the carnalities of the unsanctified soul. The reference is to the story as told in Numbers 14.

Jehovah laments thus: “These men have tempted me these ten times and have not hearkened to my voice.” The Apostle only selects five of these occasions: and the worst of them is the terrible story of unbelief. The people had at last come to the Promised Land. The long looked for day is at hand -the day which for centuries the Lord had looked forward to. Moses also was to see, as he thought, the fruition of all his labors. He had lived and labored for one grand purpose. He had but one dream and ambition, i.e., to bring the people into the Promised Land. And now they are at its border: only a step and they will be at home! Alas! Alas! It was not to be. All his hopes were dashed to the ground. They turned back on the eve of victory. Disaster followed.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us the cause -- “an evil heart of unbelief.” The trouble was a radical one – it was a heart of unbelief. It was a state of infidelity -an evil entity -a disposition of distrust breeding fear and suspicion, and a pessimism of the most evil kind. All the sinnings, aberrations and idolatries of the past were fruit from this corrupt tree. The carnal mind is enmity against God. Its names are many: its nature is desperately varied, but unbelief is the most savagely entrenched of all its horrible attributes.

The Word of God gives us seven pictures of this evil thing.

- A beam in the eye (Luke 6:41).
- A veil on the heart (II Cor. 3:13-14).
- A stone (Mark 16:14; Ezekiel 26:26).
- A clinging robe (Heb.12:1).
- A mountain barrier (Matt. 17:20).
- An evil bias (Heb. 3:12).
- A knife that severs (Rom. 11:20-22).

It is damnable, devilish sin – the root of all evil – the fountain head of all our transgressions and iniquities. It was this and this alone that tied the hand of God and made it impossible for Him to bring His people into the Promised Land.

Moses had sent forth twelve spies. They had returned with a good report. Two of them, Caleb and Joshua, alone declared that it was possible to possess the land at once. The remaining ten, while agreeing that the country was all that God had declared it to be, pronounced it utterly impossible to take possession. These two reports are graphically set forth in a pregnant but terrible dialogue:

- {The ten. We are not able. Numb. 13:31.
- {The two. We are well able. Numb. 13:30.
- {The ten. It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants. Numb. 13:32.
- {The two. They are bread for us. Numb. 14:9.
- {The ten. The cities are walled and very great. Numb. 13:28.
- {The two. Their defense is departed from them. Numb. 14:9.
- {The ten. We were in their sight as grasshoppers. Numb. 13:33.
- {The two. The Lord is with us. Numb. 14:9.
- {The ten. All the people that we saw are of great stature. Numb. 13:32.
- {The two. If the Lord delight in us He will bring us in. Numb. 14:8.

Alas! Evil counsels prevailed. The unbelief of the ten ran like wildfire through the host and did its desperate work.

Let us turn from the story of long ago and look at our own hearts. Has the Holy Ghost convicted us of this evil thing? When He is come He will convict of sin . . . of sin because they believe not. As I have set forth in the little booklet, "Unbelief," this terrible evil is not in the "Will," at least in the case of the Christian: it dwells in the imagination, in the mind, in the thoughts of the heart diffusing a horrible miasma: blurring the spiritual understanding: paralyzing the springs of moral energy. It is the sinwardness of original sin causing us to depart from the living God, in our affections, our desires, our memory, and our imagination. Till this is dealt with and cast out of the soul, we shall be forever wandering and moaning and forever be defeated.

The purpose of our subject is to disclose the evil and then disclose the blessed remedy at hand. May God give grace to every heart to come unto Him who alone can dispossess the foe, evict and destroy all the evil within our nature, and so lead us into the promised Land of Rest and victory and joy.

One who has recently written to tell me of a glorious entrance into the Promised Land speaks thus of the wilderness experience: . . . "Before the Lord brought me into the Land of Promise, the rest of heart, the rest of faith, how often in the sleepless hours of the night has there been a crying within me, unutterable sometimes, at others audibly crying to God, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." The Holy Ghost took the written word concerning the heart and compared it with mine and the two agreed: not one word in the Book was too strong nor in the least degree overstated. How hard; how unforgiving; how unlovely – nay more – how hateful, how mixed its motives; how false and stubborn. I

Chapter 3 – THE WAYS OF FAITH

The study of that melancholy chronicle given us in I Cor. 10:1-12 revealed something of the fearfulness and sin of unbelief. This morning, we turn to a happier story to study the ways of faith.

If I asked those present how many of you could tell me offhand the names of the first five women mentioned in the New Testament, I wonder how many could respond. Well! You will find them all in the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel in the genealogy of the Lord. The first is Tamar, a harlot; the second is Rahab, a harlot; the third is Ruth, a heathen; the fourth is Bathsheba, an adulteress; the fifth is the Blessed Virgin Mary. These are the only women recorded in the Saviour's genealogy. It is about one of these that I propose to speak that she may teach us how to believe God -I refer to Rahab. After I have finished you will not, I think, wonder why she became an ancestress of the Lord and was finally put into the Westminster Abbey of the Bible – I mean of course the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We saw in our last study how Moses sent twelve men to spy out the Promised Land and report to him. He selected the very best from each tribe; each one was a prince. His name and genealogy are recorded. Alas! We know how disastrously they failed, and after leading the whole host astray, perished miserably at the hand of God.

A second time the land is reached: and now Joshua – himself one of the two faithful spies – is leader. He too prepares to spy the land; but this time he takes no chances! Only two shall go, and nameless ones at that. They speedily return. No grapes of Eschol are in their hands – no detailed report either of the land, its cities, or its people is handed to Joshua. The only thing they present is the testimony of a poor heathen harlot. So mightily were they impressed, so strangely moved is Joshua, so assured and satisfied is the whole waiting host, that without delay they move forward to conquest and victory.

The single testimony of a poor woman, the most degraded of her kind, brings the whole Israelitish people into the Promised Land. We may well linger over the story and let her speak again across several milleniums to our hearts this morning, for truly God delights to take the base things of the world and therewith confound the mighty.

If you will open your Bibles at the second chapter of Joshua, you will there see the story of the faith of Rahab that did such mighty things.

was wretched. The good I wanted to do I did not: the evil I did not want to do, that I did! Oh! This body of death, who shall deliver me from it? I wanted to love God with a whole heart and an undivided heart, but I couldn't.

I had a wandering heart, a stony heart, an evil heart of unbelief. And then, with all this, the Holy Spirit continually and unceasingly turned my eyes to the Lord Jesus to consider Him . . . the meek and lowly heart of Jesus in contrast to my own! And what a contrast! Oh! What a contrast. I longed and prayed for a heart like that – a true heart, truly humble, truly loving, truly forgiving. Truly lowly, and truly meek. And my heart so false, so deceitful, so desperately wicked, so proud, and so self-seeking. Truly the heart knoweth its own bitterness.

Last Sunday someone said something to me that I bitterly resented . . . before the day was out I found something in me that wanted to hate that person. It seemed as though it came from below my own heart, it wanted to come up from underneath . . . and then I found a battle raging, a battle as it seemed to me, with which I had nothing to do. In that state of mind I fell asleep in the early hours of Monday morning, but when I woke about seven o'clock the Saviour was there in the person of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly by faith I saw the Risen Glorified Saviour – the Lord Jesus. I can say Hallelujah! I'm over Jordan – and right in the Land of Promise; the rest of heart; the rest of Faith."

Oh, that the world would taste and see
The riches of His grace,
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace.

(1) *The Work of Faith*

"The two men went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there and the woman took the two men, and hid them" (Josh. 2:1, 4).

True faith always acts. It was as much as her life was worth to receive two spies from the enemy! But she believed God! She was so deeply convinced of God's way that she was prepared to risk her all on that and so express her faith in action.

Here too is faith's beginning. God sends to us His searching words. Shall we receive them? They are the sworn foe of all that is carnal and all that is God's enemy within us! Shall we take sides with God, and "receive His words"? In the last great prayer of the Saviour, He said to His Father about His disciples, "They have received Thy words." He sendeth forth His Word to search our hearts. Only the faith which believes in a God of righteousness and love will welcome it and let it do its work. By nature we shrink from His fiery glance, His searching Word, and His diagnosis and analysis of our true condition. But if true faith has convinced us not only of His mighty power but of the blessedness of His will and of His saving power, we shall welcome the Word which He has sent to spy out the nakedness of our needy hearts.

Oh! for courage to do the works of faith. And this is its primal work, to receive His words.

A young man who came to me not long ago in deep distress of soul, was led to see that the first step in believing God was to receive the Word of God into his heart. Writing a few days later he says:

Oh! the wonderful grace, love, and power of the Lord Jesus! I love those words "dare to believe God." Hallelujah! But I said (when I left you) "Though He slay me. Yet will I trust Him." And He has been slaying me; but I heard His voice saying "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten," so I say "Hallelujah" anyway! I'd rather have His slaying than be in the miserable failure of a sinful Christian life.

Like Rahab of old he dared to receive the spies in peace.

(2) **The Understanding of Faith**

"She said I know that the Lord hath given you the land" (Josh. 2:9).

True faith is not either sentiment or emotion. It is an "understanding" thing. "By faith we understand that worlds were framed by the word of God." So it was with Rahab. There was true knowledge, that was more than merely deductive or intuitive! It is true that she had learned of the victorious progress of the Israelitish host; but behind all the facts and figures, behind the tales of exploit and deliverance, she saw and believed and knew that it was all God's handiwork and the result of divine power. She said, "I know that it is God and God alone that has not only brought you thus far, but has given you this land. When God gives, who shall take it away? I know, yes, I know, that God and none other has given it to you!" What faith! What understanding! Truly it might have been said of her, as it was of another heathen woman in later days: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Beloved, as we read the facts and figures of our own past histories and those of other saints, are we not able to read between the lines in faith and so boldly declare, I know that it is all the Lord's doing and marvelous in our eyes.

Can we say in the face of all that seems to contradict it "I know that God has given us the Promised Land." Are we deeply and spiritually convinced that it is not our holding on to certain doctrines, not a strong mental attitude to the Cross of Christ, not any work of consecration or anything that we can do or grasp or struggle into, but that the work of Sanctification is God's and His alone: that He really does something in us of the Holy Ghost, just as really as Christ did something for us on the Cross: that it is God and God alone that must do the work within, or nothing will be done at all.

Blessed is the man that has the understanding of faith.

(3) **The Hearing of Faith**

"We have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red sea for you" (Josh. 2:10).

Where did she get that knowledge? What is the inwardness of the understanding of faith? I have said it is not merely inferential or deductive, neither is it wholly intuitive.

"Faith cometh by hearing," saith the Apostle, and adds, "hearing by the Word of God": and yet there is another hearing -the hearing to testimony. Such was Rahab's. She says, 'We have heard how the Lord dried up the Red sea for you.' And yet the mere hearing of such testimony may not produce faith. Others had heard the same story: all the other Jerichoites had heard of the deliverance, but their hearing had not resulted in faith. It produced only terror and despair. No! No! The hearing of the Word must accompany the hearing of testimony. Beyond the miracle and the wonder she looked and saw God. "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath," she cries.

She heard and dared to believe God, not as the devils believe and tremble but with something of that confidence in Him that whether in heathen or Christian alike makes it possible for God to respond, arise and do and save and bless. Hallelujah! And so "the Word was mixed with faith" in Rahab that heard it and she profited unto her deliverance, her eternal salvation and everlasting honor and glory.

Oh! to take time and so hear the Word of God spoken to our souls – confirming the words of testimony from the lips of men.

(4) **The Prayer of Faith**

"Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord . . . that ye will save alive my father, and my mother and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death" Josh. 2:12-13).

Where faith is true and living in the soul, that soul always prays – not merely the prayer of desire but the prayer of faith. Such prayer is bold, is

definite, is large, and such was Rahab's.

So convinced was she of the certain victory of God's host and that there was no way of safety other than the way of surrender, that she at once after testifying of her faith in God's power and its reasons, now boldly asks to be allowed to share in God's goodness and grace. Oh! Yes it is faith such as this that is well pleasing unto Him, who "has gifts for the rebellious also that He may dwell among men."

It is well to observe the order: not first prayer and then faith but faith issuing in prayer. We do not believe because we pray but we pray because we believe.

True prayer is the expression of a believing soul. It was so with Rahab. She believed in God, His mighty power, His sure promises, His certain victory, His unalterable will and in some measure surely His abundant grace; therefore she prayed and obtained answers to her large petitions.

Oh! what a moving, making thing is faith! A propelling power! An upholding, inspiring force.

(5) **The Risks of Faith**

"Then she let them down by a cord through the window" (Josh. 2:15).

Faith always takes risks. It was at the risk of her life that she thus sent the spies away, but so assured was she that in the pathway of God's will is absolute safety, that without fear she was quite prepared to venture.

Taking risks without faith may be pure fanaticism. But the more deeply we are assured of God's will and purpose, the more assured are we of His protection even in hazardous undertakings, and so can we intelligently launch out into the deep and let the shore lines go! When others even have failed and foundered in the very same enterprise.

We do well to remember that those who intend to walk with God will find it a very narrow and sometimes a lonely way.

Opposition will come from those whom we least expected to treat us so; misunderstandings and taunts of being "sinless perfectionists" will come our way. It always costs to walk with the Lord, but let it be done in faith. Let our confident assurance that we are in His will be the motive power and all will be well.

The spies while searching out the land had brought to her a promise of a sure and perfect and uttermost deliverance – to such she must be loyal – they, like the Word of God itself, had conveyed to her anxious soul exceeding great and precious promises.

She will risk all for their protection. Oh! That we may ever do likewise: we shall, if faith makes the promises precious to our souls-knowing that our very salvation depends upon their protection and fulfillment.

(6) **The Patience of Faith**

"It shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head . . . and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head" (Josh. 2:19).

When we have exercised some definite asking of faith, and taken some risk therein, we think that at once some remarkable change will take place, or that we shall experience some spectacular deliverance! It may be that we shall be disappointed; nothing follows just immediately.

It is very easy at such times to get disturbed and unsettled. Not so Rahab. She was quite content to wait there in the place of peril till the day of deliverance came. She did not take the matter into her own hands and plan and scheme and rush out of her house and out of the city into the plain towards the Israelitish camp. No! She stayed where she was calmly awaiting the promised hour, when she and her household would be saved in and from the destruction and carnage all about her. She believed God. She rested in faith.

There is nothing more important in the way of faith than patience. "By faith and patience" we read, the patriarchs of old "inherited the promises." This

is a very different thing from easy-going careless indifference and sloth.

How many of God's children have testified that after stepping out on the promises of God they are kept waiting for "seven days" ere they begin even to experience the fulfillment. They had to dip seven times ere there was any trace of the cleansing efficacy. But a true and living faith will always persevere, be patient, and prevail.

One whom God recently brought into a very gracious experience writes as follows: "The meetings came to an end and you went away. I felt no different, but I just clung on "believing into God." Then ten days after I got the assurance that the Holy Spirit had come. My heart was filled with joy and still is, and something deeper than joy to which I can put no name."

She patiently endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

(7) *The Testimony of Faith*

"She bound the scarlet line in the window" (Josh. 2:21).

"I have believed; therefore have I spoken" said the Psalmist. True faith will always testify and tell out what the Lord hath done.

In Rahab's case it was not otherwise. She testifies to God, to Joshua, and to all the Israelitish host that she was trusting in Jehovah as her deliverer, and in the promises vouchsafed to her by His two representatives.

Surely the reverent believing mind will see still more: to it the scarlet line suspended from her window sill will be a blessed emblem of the Redeeming Blood.

True faith will do all it can to consolidate and confirm the step taken by the believing soul.

Rahab burned all her bridges behind her and like Esther of later days -no doubt, she said, "'If I perish I perish,' but I will die believing God."

I like to think that when Joshua a few days later stole out alone to survey the city and prepare his plan of attack, he saw the scarlet thread dangling from the window on the wall and he murmured to himself, "Plucky little woman. If my imagination has not run away with me, then I am right in concluding that the silent speaking testimony of Rahab's faith was a mighty confirmation to the leader's heart.

The philosophy of testimony is very simple:

Chapter 4 – FOUR STEPS CANAANWARD

Hitherto we have sought to display a panorama of the Promised Land, depict the misery and sorrows of a wilderness experience, and unfold for our encouragement the mighty victorious faith of a heathen heroine.

This morning I wish to take a further move and consider four steps Canaanward.

Will you turn with me to the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4. Here, as you know, the writer applies the story of entering the Promised Land to the people of God here and now.

I want you first of all to notice the expression "enter in." It occurs no less than eleven times in these two chapters. Again and again the Holy Ghost endeavors to impress on our minds that the rest of God is a place prepared – a blessing secured and assured – an experience already prepared as well as promised – something that we have to "enter into" -- a city of refuge already built – a land already lying at our feet – not something we have to create or make or labor to secure. It has to be "entered into." Oh! That this may sink deep into our hearts as well as our understandings.

If we are persuaded of this blessed fact, we may turn and look at four of the steps that lead us into that gracious experience.

(1) "Consider the Apostle . . . of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1) This word "consider" occurs three times in the English version of the Hebrew Epistle, though in the original three distinct and different words are employed.

a) It strengthens our own faith and burns all the bridges behind us; it commits us: and some of us need just that very thing.

b) It is a blessed advertisement to the One who has healed us. We owe it to Him to tell out His praises. Testimony should always be to Christ and what He has done.

c) It will bring a blessing to someone else, it will encourage others to go and do likewise, or it will make some hungry for the blessing which God has given to us.

(8) *The Victory of Faith*

"They said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land" (Josh. 2:24).

And now for the victory! The account of her faith rewarded appears in later pages of the Old and New Testaments, the story of the deliverance of herself and family, and marriage into the royal Messianic line, the epitaph in the Heaven's Westminster Abbey were all part of the great reward. But here we read of the victory. So mightily did her faith impress the two spies – such a fire did it kindle in their imagination and their hearts – that with haste they return to Joshua and say, "Truly the Lord hath delivered all the land into our hands." They wanted no more evidence: the faith of the harlot was so in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost that it carried with it an overwhelming conviction.

The flame thus kindled in the mind and hearts of the two took fire at once in Joshua's soul.

The people were summoned: the report (if such it can be called) was passed on to the people and like a prairie fire it blazed a pathway through the host and carried all before it till all were convinced and assured that victory was theirs and all they had to do was to go up and inherit the promised land.

We must believe God. "All heaven," says Brengle, "is free plunder to faith." "All things are possible to him that can in Jesus' name believe." Do we not well, therefore, to take heed to the two solemn warnings of Scripture:

a) "Examine yourself whether ye be in the faith or no."

b) "Take heed lest there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

The first is here "Consider Christ how faithful He was (Heb. 3:1). The second "Consider how great he was" (Heb. 7:4) and thirdly "Consider how patient he was" (Heb. 12:3).

This morning, however, we are only dealing with the first, keeping in mind that it is the first step toward the Land. The word in the original is the very same word as the Septuagint uses in Numbers 32:8-9, when the spies were sent out to see the Land.

The etymology of the word "consider" in the English language seems connected with the Latin word "sidus," a constellation, and we may well therefore use it as such. The Holy Ghost bids us to take up the telescope of the Scriptures and through the lens of faith see the Lord Jesus in the person of that great apostle of the Hebrew race – Moses, the one who was God-appointed to lead the people into Canaan.

That was his consuming ambition. He had no other thought night or day; he lived for one thing and one thing only, viz., to bring God's redeemed people, carnal and worldly and murmuring as they were, into the Land of Promise. May we see Jesus thus. May we be assured that it is the all consuming desire of the Lord Jesus to bring His redeemed people into the land that flows with milk and honey.

Let us note, however, the actual wording of this exhortation, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider..."

The word "wherefore" takes us back to the preceding chapter and links the "heavenly calling" with the words: "He is not ashamed to call us brethren."

It is this blessed consideration that encourages our hearts and recalls those wonderful words of Moses himself, when, in speaking of the promised Messiah, he was told of God to say, "The Lord will raise up unto you from among your brethren "a Prophet like unto me." Can we imagine any human being daring to stand up and say, "When Christ comes He will be like me"; and yet Moses was bidden so to speak. Yes! Like unto Moses – very man – human, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh – nigh unto us indeed, a man of like passions with ourselves, albeit spotless, stainless, sinless humanity.

Oh, to consider Him faithful as Moses was in all his house, to pray and suffer and toil in order that we might enter in – all ye that are partakers of that calling wherewith He calls us brethren (not merely servants, friends, and sons). Consider the Lord Jesus in this capacity. We may well consider Him in many other ways, but for the purpose of entering into the Second Rest, we must through the telescope of the Scriptures and the story of Moses . in the wilderness, consider the Lord Jesus thus and thus alone, nigh to us, our Elder Brother, not ashamed to call us brethren, declaring the name of His Father and ours unto us, and above all made like unto us. Yes, like unto that Moses, who, tender and compassionate, was determined at all costs to lead the people in, agonizing in prayer, pleading with God, fasting, day and night. Yea, for forty of them on the mountain top, using every argument with Jehovah that He would go amongst them and bring them triumphantly into Canaan. Let us fix our eyes on this picture painted for our learning. Oh, let us gaze upon a Christ such as this, till something of the glory enters our hearts and we cry aloud, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Until we are assured that Christ waits, longs, is ready and abundantly able to lead us in, we shall not seek with all our hearts. This then is the first step Canaanward. "Consider Jesus Christ the Apostle of our profession.

(2) "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3:7-8) If the first step towards Canaan is to look steadfastly through the telescope of the Word at your Great Leader, Christ Jesus, then the second is to turn to the telephone of heaven, and hear what God the Holy Ghost shall speak.

He speaks in these verses of a "wandering" heart (verse 10), of a "hardened" heart (verse 13) and above all, an evil "heart of unbelief" (verse 12). He tells us of God's "works," "His ways," "His rest," and "His wrath," and laments the failure to enter, depicting as the reason that though the people had seen all God's "works," they did not know His "ways" (see Ps. 103:7), and so could never "enter into His rest." He leaves with us the solemn warning of "God's wrath" -- manifested against one thing and one thing alone -unbelief. All the idolatry and lust and sin could be pardoned.

These things shut none out of the promised land. No, it was only "unbelief" that barred the gate and tied the hands of God. Against this awful sin is the wrath of God declared. This is the voice of the Holy Ghost. Have we heard it? Have we seen "unbelief" to be not merely a hindrance, but the *fons et origo* of all evil: the essence of indwelling sin -the poison injected by the Serpent – a fearful, reluctant, suspicious, distrustful attitude towards God, springing from an "evil heart of unbelief." Only the Holy Ghost can show us this. Our natural intelligence may detect other forms of evil in our nature, but without the aid of the Holy Ghost, we shall never see or understand the exceeding sinfulness of unbelief.

Oh, to wait upon God, the Holy Ghost, to hear His voice. The heavenly telephone will speak. There is the voice of the Spirit in the soul as well as that of Christ in the Word; and these two witnesses ever agree.

(3) "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering in . . . " (Heb. 4:1) If I may continue to use the simile of mechanical aids to our senses, let us turn to the heavenly gramophone. I need hardly observe that the word "phone" is a Greek word meaning voice. A "telephone" is a voice from afar or a voice at the other end. A "gramophone" is a written voice.

The third chapter of the Hebrew Epistle speaks to us of the voice of the Spirit or the heavenly telephone. In the fourth chapter no mention is made of the Holy Ghost at all; its entire subject is the Word of God -the "written voice." It is important throughout Scripture to note the double voice. In John 3 the Lord Jesus in speaking to Nicodemus suddenly changes from the first person singular to the first person plural. "We speak that we do know

and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." In the preceding verse He had introduced beside His own voice and utterance, the voice and utterance of the Holy Ghost.

So too in Rev. 3:20. There we listen to Christ's voice, "If any man hear my voice" . . . and in His next sentence He says, "he that hath ears to hear let him hear the voice of the Spirit".

The voice of the Holy Ghost in the soul -- (the heavenly telephone) -- and the voice of Christ in the Word -- (the heavenly gramophone) -- ever agree. There is no disharmony. One ever confirms the other. And so here in the Hebrew letter after speaking of the voice of the Spirit the writer at once confirms it by the Word and by applying the story of the Israelites' entrance into Canaan. He reiterates again and again that it is "God's rest" -- a rest -- an experience -- a state of heart created and prepared by God the Holy Ghost: it is not merely an attitude of faith on our part -it is the real state of heart, as real as the land of Canaan itself which God has prepared for us and given to us as definitely as He gave the Sabbath as a day of rest for the people of God -- a land of rest and a day of rest: both were ordained, prepared, and given of God and not demanded of the people. The Sabbath rest was a gift to them and not a demand from them.

The warning in the third chapter was to take heed lest the Holy Ghost should speak in vain.

The warning in the fourth chapter is to fear lest the "word" has been given in vain.

Those who would gladly enter in must fear lest the promises of the Word fall upon deaf ears or lazy hearts and slothful minds.

Oh! to stir up our sluggish hearts and lay hold of the written promises of God. We shall never enter into the rest that remains for the people of God unless we pay the deepest attention to the Word and hide its promises in our hearts for only so shall we kill the unbelief which lurks in every corner of our being.

(4) "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16)

We come now to the last of our four steps. With our eyes upon Christ Jesus -- the "faithful" Prophet like unto Moses -- with our ear attentive to the voice of the Holy Ghost, and our hearts encouraged by the Word of the living God -- let us draw near to Christ, our High Priest -- the Throne of Grace, to obtain "mercy" first of all and then "grace to help." The work of Christ as High Priest, the way through His Blood into His presence, is all most wonderfully unfolded for us in the following chapters. I have not time today to speak of these things. The point we need to emphasize here is the need and way of drawing nigh.

It is not enough to "consider" Christ Jesus, not enough to listen to the voice of the Spirit, not enough to take heed to the promises, unless with humble, bold, appropriating faith we draw nigh to the exalted, ascended Christ who in heavenly places is ready and willing to bestow upon us the blessing.

Our first need as we draw near to Him is to "obtain mercy." Many seek and seek in vain for "grace to help in time of need" because their proud hearts are unwilling to own their need of first of all "obtaining mercy." How hard it is for the experienced Christian worker, the cleric, the minister, the professional evangelist to come a second time as a little child -- a poor leper -- a semi-blind beggar. How hard is the "repentance of believers"! How stiff and stubborn are the remains of our Christian Pharisaism and self-righteousness! How difficult is it to own except in general terms our need! How humiliating to admit that during all these years of Christian service we are still in the wilderness! How hard to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God! And yet here is the condition, not, be it observed, of consecration, but a humble, lowly repentance in His presence -- bringing nothing but our need and our inbred sin; just as at first we brought nothing but our guilt and our transgressions.

Oh! let our hungry tired hearts come boldly to the Throne of Grace, for He waits to bless! How many witnesses could I call to testify of these things! How many have I seen humbling themselves under God's Almighty hand and by a bold appropriating faith allowing the Lord Jesus to bestow upon them His most precious gift.

Two or three must suffice. One, a business man, had been attending our gatherings for a few days – Superintendent of the Sunday School and Leader in Bible Class, one of the Church officials, he was considered the most earnest and most spiritual member of the Church.

I think I shall never forget the unutterable agony of soul when the Holy Ghost convicted him as Isaiah of old of his “undone” condition. He wept before God in the greatest distress -but there and then as we sought the Lord together – he found Him to be not only a “sin forgiving Saviour” but a “Cleanser of hearts” and “mighty Deliverer” from indwelling sin. He sought in true humbleness of spirit to “obtain mercy.

Some time later he wrote as follows:

“I came, drawn by His love and grace, led by the Holy Ghost. And confessing my sins to Him, looking to the Cross and believing that His precious Blood cleanseth from all sin: He did cleanse me . . . and now I have the blessed consciousness of His abiding presence. Oh how wonderful it is! I can’t describe it! Oh, the joy and peace which fills my soul when I awake in the morning. Immediately I am aware of it and I start praising my Lord and say, “I thank Thee, dear Lord, Thou hast done it all.” Oh! The joy to feel Thy presence within me! Sometimes I can hardly contain the joy This blessed fellowship goes on all during the day and while I am working at my office desk, I tell Him how I love Him and my eyes are often dimmed with tears of a joy that passeth all understanding I simply can’t help telling everybody, and how anxious I am for others to have this blessing also.”

Here is the testimony of another, an Army officer, an earnest Christian and yet among other things a slave to tobacco. Deeply convicted, not of this at first, but of the trouble deeper, more tenacious and widespread -indwelling evil itself, and, hearing of the way of deliverance through the Blood of the Lamb, he was enabled by the Holy Ghost in deepest humility to come to the

Chapter 5 – CROSSING THE JORDAN

Our studies have given us a picture of the promised land: The wilderness too with its wanderings of heart and ignorance of God’s ways has been depicted: The triumph of Rahab’s faith in contrast with the tragedy of unbelief has encouraged our hearts to believe that God can bring us – even us – into the land which flows with milk and honey.

Today we are to consider the crossing of Jordan, that great barrier which keeps so many shut out of it. His presence alone can effect that crossing – for, as the Psalmist bids us consider, it was at the presence of the God of Jacob, in Judah His sanctuary and Israel His dominion, that “the sea fled and Jordan was driven back” (Ps. 114).

The river Jordan is perhaps the most remarkable stream in the world. It rises 1,000 feet above the level of the Mediterranean and after running in an almost straight line for 150 miles it empties itself into the Dead Sea – 1,500 feet below sea level. Its course is straight; its current swift; it is hardly navigable and has been little used for irrigation purposes. Unlike any other river on earth, it does not empty itself either directly or indirectly into any ocean. The Dead Sea is its goal. Its history is full of striking incident; it stands as a remarkable type of crises in Jewish history. All through the ages it has been held as a figure of death.

As we watched the Israelitish host, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, separated from the world of Egypt by the Red Sea, now standing on the brink of Jordan’s stream, after their long and weary wanderings through the wilderness, once more called upon to cross the waters ere their promised haven can be reached -we see in type the redeemed soul about to enter into “the rest which remains for the people of God.” Death of the old man, or Crucifixion with Christ is the only portal – Mors Janua vitae. It means destruction, not of our own individuality, but of that other and strange personality -- “the old man,” “the body of sin,” “the body of death,” “the body of sins of the flesh,” not to mention its many other synonyms and titles – so close to us that at times St. Paul almost identifies it with our very self (Rom. 6:1-10) though, as a matter of fact, he is very careful to differentiate the two (Gal. 2:20).

Let us turn then to the chapter which follows the story of Rahab’s faith, Joshua 3, that we may learn our lesson there.

Throne of Grace and there confessing his sins, one by one, believed in a sin-destroying Saviour.

Not long after he writes as follows:

“Oh! the amazing effrontery to imagine that the Blood of the Lamb is not efficacious for that “indwelling sin”! Oh, the blindness of never having seen all this before but praise the Lord He has come and spoken to me the second time! The Lord has so wonderfully transformed my whole outlook and being, that I now think of almost nothing else but Him. What amazing preciousness I find in Him. No wonder it is written that He is far above all. What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord.”

Still another who discovered that the secret of entering God’s Land of Promise was seeking mercy at the Throne of Grace writes thus:

“I am at rest, absolute and sublime rest: I never dreamed any such rest could be ours in this life. When I came and had a chat with you I saw it all as clear as daylight. I thereupon confessed and believed and from that moment I spent the most miserable month I have ever had in my life. I see now why it was. I had not got to Rom. 7:24, and was not willing if sanctified, to surrender all.

Well, after a month of agony I came to the place where I was willing to do anything the Lord wanted, if only He would cleanse my heart and fill me with all His fullness. Thereupon He enabled me to believe and filled me with rest. Now I am willing to do anything He wants.

Seeing we are compassed about with these and many other witnesses to God’s faithfulness, let us lay aside the sin (of unbelief) which doth so easily beset us, and looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith come boldly unto the Throne of Grace where we may obtain mercy and there find grace to help in time of need.

As we read the chapter the outstanding feature of the story is the place which the “Ark of the Covenant” occupies. The secret of that miraculous crossing is found there. Let us trace its place and purpose.

(1) *The Vision of Faith*

“And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it” (Joshua 3:3).

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher [Perfecter] of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

“And John bare record saying . . . I knew him not: but he that sent me said . . . Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:32-33).

The story of Israel’s wilderness wanderings following on their redemption from Egypt is replete with the richest typology. There are seven illuminating types of the Lord Jesus – the Burning Bush, the Pascal Lamb, the Serpent Uplifted, the Smitten Rock, the Manna from Heaven, the Tabernacle, the Rod That Blossomed.

While in the Tabernacle itself there are seven more: The brazen altar, the golden altar, the table of shewbread, the candlestick, the veil, the mercy-seat, and the Ark of the Covenant also speak to us of Christ and His saving, sanctifying, redeeming work.

Of all these we cannot speak. The one, however, to which the Holy Ghost directs our attention is Christ, the Ark of the Covenant. This is the selected type to lead us over Jordan.

Neither the Lamb, nor the Serpent, nor the Rock, nor the Rod are in the picture. No! The one that led the people in was the Ark of the Covenant. But what a type it is – The Word made flesh – God’s covenant broken indeed by man is enshrined in Christ incarnate. “The promises of God are all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus” our Lord.

The Israelites were bidden to look upon the Ark of the Covenant. Always hidden behind the veil and seen only by the High Priest, it is now brought forth. To it was the gaze of all now directed. So must our eyes be upon Him – the Faithful Promiser – for He is that (I Thess. 5:24) as well as the Faithful Witness (Rev. 3:14). He is our Surety; it is He that must lead the way over Jordan. The Word – the Promise in Christ – is our only stay as we step into the water of our Jordan. He has pledged that they shall not overwhelm. He has declared that when we go through the waters He will be with us. We are crucified with Him. The nails pierced His sacred hands and feet, not ours, the thorns His head, not ours, the spear His side, not ours. Through His stripes we are healed. We died in Him – the suffering was His and not ours. The sting of death was felt by Him, not by us. The waters overwhelmed Him that we might be delivered.

Our first step, then, is to look upon Christ, the faithful Promiser. He is for us the Ark of the Covenant. The devil will tempt us to ask of what avail is a promise to bring us through. Oh! Beloved, remember the Covenant is in the Ark. The Word of promise is in Christ Jesus. Beware lest we despise the Word of Promise, because in so doing we despise the Promiser. Let us not look for some spectacular experience. Let our eyes be only unto and upon Jesus; for He is faithful that promised.

(2) *The Appropriation of Faith*

“Joshua spake unto the priest saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people” (Joshua 3:6).

Here we read that the priests were bidden to take up the Ark and bear it upon their shoulders.

In the typology of the Tabernacle – representing as it does not only Christ himself but the believer also (“Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?”) the priests will represent all the faculties of our nature – the conscience, the will, the affections, the desires, the memory and the imagination, etc. If this be so, do we not see here the meaning of our lesson. Every faculty of our soul has to appropriate Christ, the faithful Promiser.

The Ark had to be taken up and borne upon the shoulders of the priests – so too there has to be an appropriating faith. It is not enough merely to fix our gaze upon Him. Every faculty of our nature must go out in faith to lay hold of Christ and His Word. Let our memory remember His promise, let our affections be centered there, let our desires fasten upon Christ the living Word, let our will be determined to believe God.

Christ is made unto us Sanctification – He is the pledge of God’s presence and power to bring us in; He is the Ark of God’s covenant.

With what assurance the priests stepped forth as they felt the pressure of the sacred Ark upon their shoulders. So shall it be with us, if we lean upon Christ and Christ alone.

Shall we confess like John the Baptist of old, “I knew him not,” yea though standing close at hand -but shall we like John also listen to the word which bade him look and see and believe, and like John the Divine, say “we have heard . . . we have seen with our eyes . . . we have looked upon . . . our hands have handled the Word of Life” -- yea, the very Ark of the Covenant.

Oh, for the boldness of a humble, lowly, and yet determined faith.

(3) *The Reassurance of Faith*

“And Joshua said, Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the enemy Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan” (Joshua 3:9-11).

“John answered them, saying there standeth one among you, whom ye know not . . . the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:26, 33).

As though the presence of the Ark among the people were not enough the Lord still further reassures by His servant and guarantees His mighty

wonder-working presence.

As John the Baptist of old bore witness to Christ – the prototype of this very Ark, before he went down into the waters of this very same Jordan -- “There standeth one among you, whom ye know not . . . the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost and fire.” So Joshua cries to the people, “Come hither and hear the word of the Lord your God . . . Behold the ark of the covenant . . . hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you” -- yes, you the feeble, carnal, unsanctified, restless, wandering ones – and this living God, it is He who will without fail drive out before you all the enemies in the land – yes, even the Jebusite, the last one always mentioned, the last one to be dethroned and cast out by King David, dwelling as they did in the very citadel of the Holy City.

Let it not trouble us that as yet we see not His beauty, that we have to say, “I know Him not”: let us look in faith and only believe, but let us be sure that our faith is not in a theory, a truth, a doctrine, nay, nor even in our own faith itself. Let the Ark of the Covenant be the foundation of our hopes, our faith, and our assurance. If Christ be dwelling in our hearts by faith, if He be our only plea, then without fail will God himself do the rest.

“The sea saw it, and fled, Jordan was driven back” (Ps. 114:3). It is He that rebuked the wind and the waves at Jordan’s bank as well as on the lake of Galilee. “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.”

“He turned the sea into dry land and they went through the flood on foot, there did we rejoice in Him.”

(4) *The Courage of Faith*

“As the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water . . . the waters . . . were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho” (Joshua 3:15-16).

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending . . . and lighting upon him” (Matt. 3:16).

At last the waters are reached -there is no Moses with his rod outstretched as at the Red Sea. No! There is something far better, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord... pledge, not only of God’s presence, but of His faithfulness and power, that, as He is going to stay the waters, so He will drive out the enemy before the face of His people. When the waters are crossed, they will flow back again . once more and shut the people in with their enemies, but God -- ! A miracle is needed to convince them that all will be well, even under circumstances such as these! As I have already pointed out, the waters of Jordan symbolize death – the death of the “carnal mind.” Oh! How we shrink from that experience. The old man hates to die. We fear that this will mean almost the dissolution of our very self. If the world and its ambitions, its pleasures and fashions, its wealth and name and fame, if these be taken from us, will life be worth living? The waters are cold and turbulent and impassable. We need not fear! The death of the old man means only the destruction of the body of sin; *God takes nothing from us but what is harmful.* And again I would repeat it, the power – the willingness to die – is not ours but His. He has borne all the pain, the suffering, and the sting of death. It is not that we are crucified, but we are crucified with Him. It was not the feet of the priests that stayed the waters, but God; the flood was stemmed: it did not overwhelm: the people went over dry-shod.

There is no suffering in this death, terrible as it seems likely to be. When in faith we dare to believe – all the terror disappears and we find that He has died and borne all the pain – we pass over on dry land. “We cross the flood on foot and there do we rejoice in Him.” Oh! Let us not fear to take the plunge. Like Naaman of old let us dip seven times in its waters. Like Elisha of old let us take the mantle of our Elijah and smite the stream. Like the Lord Jesus himself, let us enter the Jordan and submit to the Baptizer. Like the priests of old let us step into the swelling flood.

Oh! now I see the cleansing wave,
The fountain deep and wide.
Jesus. My Lord, mighty to save,

Points to His wounded side.
The cleansing stream, I see, I see,
I plunge, and, oh, it cleanseth me.
Oh! praise the Lord, it cleanseth me.
It cleanseth me, yes cleanseth me.

(5) **The Patience of Faith**

“The priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan” (Joshua 3:17).

Jordan was driven back. The waters stood in a heap; and as the waters below rushed on in their course to the Dead Sea, an ever widening way was formed between its banks; and the people hastened across – a hundred – two hundred – five hundred abreast, while the priests stood right under the ever heightening wall of water unafraid, awaiting the signal to move on.

No doubt their faith and courage were tested, but they encouraged themselves in God, and stayed their faith on His abiding presence. The Ark of the Covenant was on their shoulders while still ringing in their ears were the words, “Hereby ye shall know the living God is among you . . . behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you”

How true is all this to experience. One mightily used of God in leading souls into the promised land writes thus of her own entrance:

“When I rose from my knees, Satan once more assaulted me with “Thou art going to face various trials and a cooling world, thou wilt lose the blessing.” But instantly that scripture was given me, “He that keepeth Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, the Lord Himself is thy keeper.”

The Covenant in the Ark – the promise – was brought to her remembrance and so she overcame. The waters did not overwhelm her. She passed clean over Jordan into the promised land and the very waters which had kept her out, now shut her in; she could not go back.

Stayed upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blest,
Finding as He promised
Perfect peace and rest.

(6) **The Outward Testimony**

“Take you up every man a stone upon his shoulder . . . that this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask) What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant . . . when it passed over Jordan” (Joshua 4:5, 7).

Stones still speak -the stone at Bethel, the tables of stone in Moses’ hand, the stone in David’s sling, the stones of the temple buildings, the stone at Lazarus’ grave, the stone at the Saviour’s tomb -these and many others preach everlasting sermons to us. And so here, where the Ark of the Covenant containing the tables of stone within, rested upon the shoulders of the priests, now stones of testimony are to be borne, and placed upon the

river bank overlooking the once more turbulent tide of Jordan’s waters, now flowing back in their accustomed course. What mean these stones? The enquirer asks; swift comes the answer, They are tokens of God’s power. No engineer built bridges across the swelling flood; no shipbuilders plied their trade to make them boats; no strong swimmers helped the people across. No! It was God that brought them through. It was the Ark of the Covenant that stayed the wave. It is Christ and Christ alone that sanctifies the soul and stays the overwhelming waters. He tasted death for every man, and enables us to go over dry-shod. In other words, He saves; He does not help us to save ourselves – He does it all – He does the saving. Let this ever be our testimony. Let us see to it that the stones of remembrance are set up – that we testify not of our own engineering, nor shipbuilding, our valor or consecration, or good works, or strong endeavors. Let us ever say “the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.” As the stones upon the shoulders testified of the Covenant written on the stones within the Ark, so let it be with us.

Blessed stones of testimony, visible to all! May the token of testimony in our lives be so plain, that they shall constantly provoke the inquiry, “What mean these stones?” And then let us hasten by our lips to tell of His power that stayed the proud waves of fear and unbelief, while we crossed over into the land of rest.

(7) **The Inward Testimony**

“And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day” (Joshua 4:9).

That place was a very sacred spot. The standing firm, unafraid and unmoved, enabled the whole host to go across dry-shod.

Here too are stones of witness placed. I often wonder if these stones across the Jordan submerged at high tide, were not used as stepping stones for some perplexed and harried fugitive, seeking to get across the stream.

As in Pilgrim’s Progress, there were stepping stones across the Slough of Despond; and rightly instructed travelers could get through without sinking into the mud and slime of despair. So too, has many a defeated soul been enabled to cross the Jordan through the testimony of those who have gone before.

The inward testimony is as important as the outward. God delights to plant these stepping stones within the soul – to mark the footprints of those who have stood firm, bearing the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders – so sacred in His eyes is the standing ground of faith and courage.

Is this our experience? Are the words He planted within our heart – those wonderful words of assurance when we crossed the Jordan – are they “there till this day”? Hallelujah if they are! May we like Mary of old “keep them and ponder them in our heart” while the people “wonder” and the shepherds “glorify and praise.”

May it never be said of us, “Thou shalt be dumb . . . because thou believest not,” but rather may we hear the “Well done” of our Lord, when in our soul He sets up the stone, “Blessed is she that believeth for there shall be a performance of those things which are told her of the Lord.”

Chapter 6 – AFTER THE JORDAN, WHAT?

Jordan has been crossed, the promised land is theirs -full of fruit, of hope, and of enjoyment; and yet difficulties abound; the enemies in the land have to be conquered and destroyed. No quarter is to be given. There has to be an utter destruction of all that opposes God and is carnal.

The task is great and yet God is greater.

The River Jordan as we have seen is a type of death. Its crossing sets forth in parable our Crucifixion with Christ, the death of the old man and destruction of (Romans 6:6), deliverance from (Romans 7:24), a putting off

(Col. 2:11) of this body of sin, death, and the flesh – an experience at once both real, definite, and instantaneous.

We naturally inquire when such an experience has become ours, when we have by His grace crossed the swelling flood with the wilderness and its weary wanderings are behind us – with our Promised Land waiting to be possessed in front of us, what may we expect as the next step, or shall we say the first step in our new pilgrimage? After the Jordan, what?

There are four pictures of the coming out of Jordan presented to us in the

pages of Holy Writ. In each of them we discover some aspects which are the same in all. In each of them also some that are different from each other, and yet full of profit to our souls.

(1) Naaman came out of this Jordan (II Kings 5)

We know the story well. The great general proud of his position, his name and his fame and yet a leper, being led through the testimony of a little child to seek salvation from one of his natural enemies, an Israelite. Turned down by the King and compelled to come to the door of an insignificant servant of the Lord, he received a further shock to his pride, when Elisha merely sends him instructions through a servant, instead of appearing in person; and what instructions! To wash in Jordan's stream! His anger, his right-about-face for home, the dismal reception he would have received from his king, are familiar to us. The gentle rebuke of his aide-de-camp, his repentance, his obedience, the patience of his faith as he goes on dipping seven times, and then the blessed cleansing of his poor leprous body, and with it the still more blessed cleansing of his heart from pride and anger, and we may believe from all his sin, until his flesh becomes as pure as that of the little child whose testimony had started him on this journey to Jordan's river. Now he comes up from the stream a new man in body and soul. After Naaman's Jordan, what? There are two outstanding things from which we may learn most helpful lessons.

a) He meets Elisha himself. It is not necessary to remind ourselves that Elisha is here a type of the Lord Jesus, the Cleanser of hearts, as well as the Forgiver of sins.

When Naaman had first appeared at the Prophet's little cottage his presence was not honoured. There was no spectacular healing. No, he was given the word only, "Go wash in Jordan seven times." How true is this to experience! How we long for a vision of Christ, how we wish that He would come forth and in some miraculous, emotional, or spectacular fashion to perform the cleansing of our hearts and the satisfying of our souls! This is never God's way. He gives us the Word of Faith through one of His servants -- "Go wash in Calvary's stream" and only as we humble our proud hearts and obey in faith is the cleansing touch of God experienced.

But now as he comes up from the river in humble joy he goes back to render thanks. At once the prophet himself appears! There is not a word of condemnation of the silly pride that nearly wrecked his chance of healing! No mention is made of the natural national enmity between them. No, he communes with him as though he were his own son.

Does the picture speak to our hearts? Yes, after the Jordan, after the obedience of faith, after we have plunged into that cleansing stream and we are made whole, the Lord himself will appear and speak with us, face to face.

b) The second lesson learned on Jordan's other bank is the presence of an unsuspected, or at least a forgotten foe, for immediately there come to his grateful mind the vision of his place by his royal master's side in the idolatrous temple. How can he ever bow down to an idol again? And yet how can he dare disobey his king? There must always be such a testing to our obedience. The prophet replies "Go in peace." It is as if he said "Sufficient unto the day is the trouble thereof: by the time you have reached your home the difficulty will have disappeared", or "the Lord will make your way of duty plain." And so it was -- it would seem likely that he was never required to take his master to the idolatrous shrine; for we read of the king's death at a date not long after Naaman's return to his place.

There is always a testing after we are over Jordan. It has never been otherwise. Let us be prepared for it; let Naaman be our teacher. Only yesterday I heard a remarkable illustration of this very story. A young man -- a university teacher -- had long been burdened with inward sin. Lust had long held him in its fearful grip. He sought earnestly for victory, but alas in vain. A servant of the Lord showed him something better than victory, even a complete deliverance, such a cleansing as Naaman the leper found. He, too, sought and found, when he sought it in the way of faith; that deliverance was accompanied by no emotional experience, no feeling that the Holy Spirit had come to abide, no consciousness of an indwelling

Saviour, no ecstasy of joy or peace, but he did have what was far better for him at that time, he found a real deliverance from sin. The leprosy was gone, the fetters were broken, he was free, and then with a humble, grateful heart he sought the Lord himself, spending not a few days in fasting and prayer. Like the dawn, gradual, silent, beautiful, the Sun of Righteousness arose in his soul, and suffused his consciousness with the joy of His presence.

(2) The Israelitish host comes up out of Jordan (Joshua 3)

We come back to our original story.

a) They come up over against Jericho. The crossing was planned of the Lord that it should be so. Nor was it an unexpected obstacle in their path. Joshua had prepared them for it. The strongholds had been investigated and reported on. The Israelitish host knew that Jericho lay just ahead. But the miracle of the crossing had been so great; the Ark of the Covenant had done such wonders that so long as this was fresh in mind and memory -- they were prepared to believe in God's strange way of deliverance from, and destruction of the foe in their path. If the Ark of the Covenant could raise up a wall of water to let them go through on foot, surely that same ark would be able to bring down the walls of stone. But the walls of Jericho were very real, mighty, impressive, frowning down upon their puny efforts. So it will always be after we have come up out of our Jordan; but if we know it is God who has brought us through by the Word of His promise, and that He has done it, our Jericho will only give God an opportunity of another greater deliverance, and we shall go forward trusting in our Ark of the Covenant.

b) And yet to the waiting soul, as to Joshua -- He of whom the Ark was but a type, the Lord Jesus Himself will appear -- reminding us that He is the Captain not of our host merely, but of that invisible army of Heavenly Powers, which with invisible hands was to send the walls of Jericho crashing about the ears of their foes, while we do the believing and praising our God. As Elisha gave his presence to the humbled and obedient Naaman, so now the Lord himself in the guise of an angel reveals himself to the waiting Joshua.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this truth the Lord Jesus himself revealed to us and in us. This is our need, and this is the blessedness which He promises to those who diligently seek Him. With that revealed Presence there is always the obstacle of testing, or perhaps it is better to say with the obstacle of testing there is always His presence revealed to them who seek and wait and believe. He comes as our Captain not to help but to take control -- to direct and command, and He promises not a victory over our Jericho once a month, but a total destruction once and for all of the entrenched foe, if we will but believe and obey.

(3) Elisha comes up out of Jordan (II Kings 2)

The third picture in Scripture of the coming up out of the Jordan is as vivid and graphic as the two preceding. We are familiar with the story. Elijah is to be taken to heaven, a type of the Saviour's ascension to His Father's right hand. Elisha, who had been his faithful servant, is to be left behind.

The vision of his master's life, his power with God and man had made Elisha long above all else for a similar endowment from on high. He determined to seek and obtain it. They start together from Gilgal on Elijah's last journey. They came together to Bethel that place of very holy memories of visions of God -- now alas become Bethaven -- a "house of vanity" -- devoted to idolatry and sin, and yet not forsaken of the Lord; because it was here we read that one of the schools of the prophets was established. Reminding him that his master was to be taken away they thereby hint that he should enter their college for a prophet's qualifications. But Elisha knows of a better and surer way. He hastens on with his master. "They two went on." Jericho is reached, reminiscent, as we have just seen, of faith's glorious victory, now alas the place of a curse rebuilt in defiance of God's command and yet not God-forsaken; for here too we read of a school of the prophets. They, too, like their confreres, came forth to remind Elisha that

his master is to leave him, and they, too, seem to suggest a college course for the would-be prophet. Again he waves them aside and although tested once more by Elijah himself, he presses on his way and "they two went on." And now Jordan is in view. There is no Israelitish host, no Ark of the Covenant, but alone with Elijah he faces the waters. Once again a miracle is done, before the flail of the prophet's mantle the waters divide and together they cross dry-shod to the other side.

And now, but not till now, comes the question, "What shall I do for thee?" A double portion of thy Spirit, let it be mine, cries the young and eager spirit of the servant. Thou hast asked a hard thing, replies the prophet, hard for me to grant, but harder still for you to receive. Do you know that this may mean suffering and toil, poverty and pain? That is ever the portion of a faithful prophet. But Elisha quails not at the prospect. He longs to follow in the steps of his master and so be a blessing to his apostate people so ripe for judgment.

I am penning these words on Ascension Day, the day when the Apostles of old saw the ascending Christ. Here in miniature and in type we get the same scene. It was the ascending Elijah that threw his mantle on the waiting Elisha. It was the Ascended Christ who poured His Spirit on the waiting disciples. Looking at, and unto the Ascended Christ, looking for the promised gift is our need as we step out of Jordan. How indispensable is the seeing of Jesus. This was the message to John the Baptist. "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending" "So too says Elijah, "If thou shalt see me it shall be so." Then the mantle fell on the lonely, waiting, seeing servant.

And now he has to return to the sons of the prophets and a hostile world. Has he really got the power as well as the mantle of Elijah? He has rent and cast aside his own garments, yea, and more, he has cast aside his own righteousness, trusting only in the promised spirit of his master; but has he the Divine Substitute?

Retracing his steps he finds the swift waters of the river obstructing his way. In an instant his thoughts fly heavenwards – It was Elijah's God that he needed, not merely his mantle. "Where is the God of Elijah?" he cries as he smites the stream with the fallen garment. Straightway the Lord responded to his faith, the waters divided once more and he knew that God was with him, and the Spirit of the Lord was resting upon this now satisfied soul.

What are the lessons for us? Do they not teach us the lessons of a persevering spirit? Do they not suggest a lonely walk, a resisting the temptation to seek for worldly promotions. Do we not see that after the blessing we may find the very same difficulties in our way that prevented our first crossing. Like Elisha we who called Christ our Master, now exclaim "my Father, my Father" -- we find a living, mighty faith, an assurance within our soul, that as God was with His Son, so is He with us.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
And looks to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities
And cries it shall be done.

But above all, it reminds us that it is not until the Jordan is crossed, that God's loving question reaches our hearts. "What shall I do for thee." Not until Solomon has dealt with the Adonijah, Joab, Abiathar and Shimei; could the Lord appear and say, "What shall I give thee." Not until Abraham had resisted the tempting offers of Sodom's king could Jehovah come in a vision and promise him a Land, a Person, and a People. Not until with Christ on Calvary we have crossed our Jordan – can He whisper within our hearts, "Ask what I shall give thee." Not till He is risen and ascended, and we have seen Him go, can His promise, "Lo, I am with you always," be realized in our hearts. Not till our hearts have been made clean by His precious Blood, and the body of sin been destroyed through His own broken body on the tree, can His blessed Spirit enter to abide with us forever.

(4) *The Lord Jesus comes up out of Jordan (Matt. 3-4)*

Here is our fourth and last picture as painted by the Spirit of God. Oh, let us look and learn and worship.

To fulfill all righteousness, to be reckoned as a sinner, the Lord Jesus enters Jordan's stream, and submits to the baptizer. Here is a humbling of himself indeed. But now as He rises from the waters, the Spirit of the Father descends upon Him like a dove. The voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," yet further seals the Spirit's sealing. And so He sets forth to do His Father's will and glorify His name.

After the Jordan, what? At once He is led into the wilderness, led by the Dove from Heaven, there not to rest but to fight, and to be tempted of the devil. There, too, the Lord is to win the victory in that wilderness where His people had failed and fallen.

The Israelitish host coming up from Jordan stepped into the Promised Land. Christ with that land in His heart steps back into the wilderness. The fight is the same – the fight of faith.

When the tempter came to Him he said, "If The blessed sealing of the Father's voice is to be challenged -- "This is my beloved Son." "If thou be the Son." Christ to be an example to His people will fight only with the weapons He has given us – the Word of God – He makes no reference to His Father's voice, but only to His written Word. He never reminds the adversary of His wonderful experience of a few days before. He resists him only with the naked sword of Scripture. Oh! What an Example to us His people. This, too, is what we may expect. There will always be an attack of the enemy to wrest from us the blessing we have received, we may be thrust into circumstances which are a veritable wilderness, when all around is a sandy desert – where there is naught to comfort or feed the desires and aspirations and longings of our heart. But the Word of God remains. This is to be our food as well as our weapon. With these we can be satisfied, and with these we can defeat the foe.

Before we can go forth to break the fetters of others and get them delivered from the Great Adversary, we have to meet him and defeat him alone. Yes, says the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ" -- i.e., I have crossed the Jordan and "Christ liveth in me," i.e., I am in the Promised Land, but he adds, "The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God," i.e., there will always be a fight of faith with the Word of God as our weapon.

And so we draw our studies to a close. After our Jordan, what? Let the Word speak to us again.

Always there will be this testing and always the foe to be met, but always the Risen Christ, and always the Written Word. Always the reaction, but always the supply; always the need of waiting on God – but always the certainty of promise.

Oh! that if we have not yet crossed our Jordan, we may make haste and dare to believe God.

Like Naaman, let us humble our pride and dip seven times in the cleansing flood.

Like the Israelitish host let us dare to step down into the waters, assured that Jesus, our Ark of the Covenant .. will stay its overwhelming flood and see us through.

Let us like Elisha go on with our Elijah. We have but to look on while He smites the stream and we get over dry-shod.

Like the Lord Jesus himself let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and submitting ourselves to the Baptizer, dare to be buried with Christ and so rise in newness of life.