Be Strong and of a Good Courage

I have been finding some openings (as the old Quakers used to say) in the book of Joshua recently. In the past when I’ve read the book, I always felt somewhat disappointed: not much life in it apart from the dramatic crossing of Jordan and the conquest of Jericho. But lately there’s been fresh illumination in my reading of it, and so I take it that we are entering the time in which our Lord is about to fulfill this long-desired concluding chapter in His purposes in His people—what He calls “the day of redemption,” the day when He brings His people into the purchased possession: our inheritance, with all the awesome implications of this.

Not that some in church history have not apprehended this... in a measure—the great saints we love to read about. But God’s ultimate objective has been a certain day in which He brings His people—all of us, the small as well as the great—into the fullness of this inheritance in the heavenlies, a realm now held by “the rulers of the darkness of this age.” Just as the land of Canaan was inhabited by the seven abominable nations of Canaan, so our heritage in the Spirit is held by these spiritual forces of darkness who from their heavenly vantage point are able to rule over the hearts and minds of men. But God is about to purge the heavens of these forces of wickedness by bringing His redeemed into this realm. Through the power of spiritual arms we are going to dispossess the forces of darkness there and rule in their place.

This is going to require the greatest perseverance on our part, and great courage and strength. And so to the Colossians Paul wrote, exhorting them to be:

“...strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all longsuffering and patience (or, endurance) with joyfulness;
Giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light,
Who hath delivered us from the power (the authority) of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love...” (Col. 1. 11-13).

And this is just what God ministered to His servant Joshua in order to prepare him for the great responsibility He had called him to.

I have been reading the first nine verses of Joshua over and over again of late, and want to quote them here:

“Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, saying,
Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Josh. 1. 1-9).

The first thing we want to note is that God sets before Joshua a guarantee of success. If Joshua will obey God, If he will do all that is written in the book of the Law, he and the people are guaranteed complete success.

**Courage and Strength to Obey**

But this will require great courage, and great strength. The Lord exhorts Joshua over again to be strong and of a good courage. This is going to take every ounce of strength and courage Joshua can muster... not only because of the formidable adversaries in the land, who are much greater than they are, but because of that ingrained tendency in man to go his own way and do his own thing. It would require unflinching courage to resist that temptation, and obey God. “Only be thou strong and very courageous...” To what end? “...That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest.” It would require great commitment, great courage, great strength, to adhere closely to the law of God in what lay ahead. Only thus would success be assured.
Translating that into New Covenant terms, we who are now on the border of our inheritance in the heavenlies must know at a very deep level that it is only by walking in obedience to the Spirit of the Lord that we can expect to know victory. But—to put it the other way around—if we are diligent to walk in the Spirit we shall know nothing BUT success and victory.

However, make no mistake: this kind of obedience will require great courage; we must set our faces as a flint to walk in obedience to the Spirit of God come what may. Let no one deceive himself. It is no easy thing to seek to be in the Spirit at all times so that we are ever attentive to our cue. But the outcome of doing so—the guaranteed outcome—is success beyond our wildest imaginings.

The thing we want to get hold of is that what the Lord is exhorting Joshua to do He is also ministering to him. He is strengthening him, encouraging him. I like that word encourage. God is en...couraging Joshua. “Be strong and of a good courage...” He is provisioning Joshua by the very words He speaks.

And with that in mind we want to make another observation.

_God’s Commandment is His Provision_

It was a formidable prospect that Joshua faced. And so it’s very encouraging to discover that God called Moses to “charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him, for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land...” (Dt. 3.28). Charge him... encourage him... strengthen him... Let us anticipate this ourselves in the day we are facing — and seek to minister more of it in the body of Christ. God will not thrust us into what is certainly going to be far beyond our own capacity to deal with without first doing all of these three things. He will encourage us. He will strengthen us. He will charge us, as he did Joshua.

Let’s look closer at this one. God said to Joshua, “Have not I commanded thee?” it’s the same word translated “charge.” And the implication is, this is not your own venture, Joshua. This is My thing, this is something that has originated in Me, and you are but My servant. So “be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” I have commanded you, I have authorized you to do this, and so I will be with you in it all the way, the Lord assures.

“Have not I commanded thee?” This is a reminder to Joshua of the day back there in the wilderness when God called Moses to commission him.
“And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation. And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses” (Num. 27. 18-23).

“Give him a charge,” the LORD had said. That is, “command him,” it’s the same word. And the Lord had done the same thing to Moses earlier on.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 6.13).

Would that all God’s servants were conscious of a divine charge in their lives, and would venture nothing apart from it. How this would change the whole face of things in the church of Jesus Christ. Many go, but few are sent. If God’s servants would cease trying to do God’s work for Him, and just obey Him, oh what a change we would see. Our part is to obey Him, however great or small that part might be. He is in charge of His own purposes. No man can take it upon himself. Human zeal, ambition, trying to accomplish God’s call in his life... this had all died in Moses somewhere on the backside of the desert. Bring the people out of Egypt? It was something he knew he simply couldn’t do. He actually told God He should get someone else. He wasn’t being disobedient. He just knew he couldn’t do it, and had no zeal for the prospect. Just the quality God was looking for. Now He had his man, someone who knew deep down he had no resources in himself. And so God refused to take no for an answer. He commanded Moses to do it—gave him a charge to do it. In the charge was the assurance of all the provision necessary for Moses to accomplish what God insisted was to be done.

And notice here, God delivered the same charge to Pharaoh, who nevertheless stubbornly resisted it. As we read the story we notice the contest all through was between Pharaoh and God, not Pharaoh and Moses. Moses did some very awesome things. But he was simply a servant doing as he was told, obeying his Master. Pharaoh was not. Pharaoh was fighting against God, refusing to obey Him, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge that it was God who was the supreme ruler over Egypt, not he.
Back to Joshua. Moses the servant of the Lord... Joshua the servant of the Lord. Just as Moses had done what God had charged him to do, so also with Joshua the son of Nun. And this is very encouraging to us. God laid a charge upon Joshua to bring the children of Israel into the land and divide unto them the inheritance He had promised them. The whole thing was God’s work, and He charged Joshua His servant to carry it out. With this repeated encouragement to be strong and courageous, we read between the lines that Joshua must have been feeling a certain amount of insecurity as to what was before Him. And so God gives him this reminder that He has authorized him to carry it out. “Have not I commanded thee?” That’s all the assurance Joshua needed. God was back of this. He would be there to back him up with whatever was necessary to accomplish it.

And so with us. In all we set our hand to do: is it because we are simply following through on something God has charged us to do? What a rest there is in that. For, God will be there to provide whatever is needed to carry out His will.

And there will be direction for every step. God charged Joshua, and so Joshua is not left to his own ingenuity and resources.

“And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.”

In all matters of decision Joshua is to stand before Eleazar the priest (whose name means God is help) and ask counsel of Urim before the LORD. Read very carefully here: “At His word shall they go out...” Notice that I’ve capitalized the word “His.” It’s from the mouth of the LORD that Joshua is to decide their every step. And notice this: “At His word shall they go out, and at His word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” Eleazar is to ask counsel “for him,” that is, for Joshua. But now we read, “they.” The counsel for Joshua includes all the people. They are moving as one man.

Courage and Strength to Divide the Inheritance

Now something further. The Lord has told Joshua, as we quoted earlier, “Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.”

These words are filled with import for our day. Joshua is to bring all Israel over Jordan and into the land, and divide the inheritance to each and every one of them. He is to see to it that each and every Israelite receives his allotted inheritance. And so if at one time it was an excercise in boredom to
read through all these pages in the book of Joshua devoted to a detailed laying out of the territory of the various tribes, with specific attention being given to all the borders... if at one time we judged it a waste of precious Bible space that could have been filled with something important... is it really any surprise that God is very careful to detail this? This is very important to Him. He is showing His care for each and every one Israelite. There is a portion with each one’s name on it, you might say. He starts with the tribes. Then narrows it down to their families (Josh. 15.1). There’s a great emphasis on the families being given their possession. God is very jealous for families. We come across this over and over again. “By their families...” “According to their families...” Oh, the burden in God for families. The families of Israel drive out the Canaanites from their possession, and possess their heritage.

But not just by families. Every individual in those families receives their portion of the inheritance. Every Israelite was to have their own portion. Two in particular are described to us. Faithful Caleb is given Hebron (Josh. 14.134). Joshua is given Timnath-serah (Josh. 19.50). These are recorded, no doubt, to show us God’s faithfulness to the faithful, these two who stood by Him in the day of temptation in the wilderness when all others turned back. These were two great ones in Israel.

But God is very jealous that every individual possess their God-given lot, the small as well as the great. Ezekiel tells us the Lord was still jealous for this centuries later when he prophesied the return of the captivity from Babylon. It’s a far-seeing prophesy that reaches down into our day, and up into a higher heritage than that earthly land. But the principle is the same. “And ye shall inherit it, one as well as another, concerning which I lifted up mine hand to give it unto your fathers...” (Ezek. 47.14).

And so God laid it on Joshua to divide the inheritance. It was his responsibility to do so. But not by his own mind. There could be no partiality here if he might have been inclined to show favouritism. It was all divided by lot. Meaning it was God’s decision as to who got what, and where, and how much. He was very jealous to see that each one received their divinely allotted portion.

And so, can we not rejoice with David that it is God who in His love for us chooses our inheritance for us? (Ps. 47.4). We want to have the kind of heart that agrees with David, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: I have a goodly heritage” (Ps. 16.6). Someone might look at our circumstances and afflictions and judge we really got the short end of the stick. But in the midst of it, unseen to them, we are driving out our enemies and possessing an eternal inheritance in the Spirit.

Once again we translate all this into New Covenant terms. (For all these things were written for our sakes upon whom the ends of the ages have come.)
I believe that this difficult hour we are in is the very hour when our Joshua, our Jehovah-Saves, our Lord Jesus Christ—for the Hebrew for Jesus is the very word Joshua—is going to see to it that each of His own enter into and apprehend their heritage in the Spirit. He is jealous for this on behalf of each one of us. Those of old had the promise of an earthly inheritance if they obeyed; ours is “the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9.15). And it is reserved for us, a portion with each one’s name on it, “reserved in the heavenlies for you,” as Peter says (1 Pt. 1.4). “Reserved for So-and-so,” an inheritance “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” It’s still there, even after our long wilderness journey. Even after our many failures and defeats. We who have known such a long wilderness journey, now in the power of the Spirit we drive out the Canaanites from our possession and possess our possessions (Obad. 17). Our Joshua, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been given a charge by God our Father to bring us in, each and every one of us, to our heavenly inheritance in the Spirit. It is His responsibility to do this. And so there is a Rest for us. We know He will be faithful to do this as we simply abide in His yoke. Let us believe Him for this.

Who is in Command Here?

This is a familiar teaching, but there’s something else here I’ve always missed.

When Joshua stood before Jericho sizing things up he was confronted by this One with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua challenged him. “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”

“No!” came back the loving rebuke. “I’m not for your adversaries. But I’m not here to bless and back up your own plans and strategies, either. I’m here as Captain of the host of the LORD. You must take your shoes off. You are on holy ground.”

We know the story so well. But do we? Entering into the Rest means ceasing from our own works, means giving the Lord His lordship in all things. He is the one with the strategy... the only successful strategy, actually. Go to your Bible and cross out the chapter division at the start of Joshua Chapter Six, the account of the conquest of Jericho. We have just read at the close of Chapter Five this confrontation we just described. Joshua is face to face with the Captain of the Lord’s host. It is He, not Joshua, who will set forth the strategy and lead into battle.

But now in Chapter Six—the chapter divisions were never there in the first place—Joshua and the Captain of the Lord’s host are still together. They are looking over Jericho, this time together now. First a note that Jericho is “straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.” The Captain of the Lord’s host draws Joshua’s attention to the fact
that their enemies are already petrified with fear. “And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour” (Josh. 6.2). And then He lets Joshua in on His strategy. He gives Joshua detailed instructions as to what Israel is to do.

Foolish instructions, we would say. No need to repeat them here; we know them so well. The point is, oh, the victory that this foolish strategy wrought!

And oh, the lesson for us to learn! If we will only learn to walk in Rest, to walk in the Spirit... if we will set our faces as a flint to walk in obedience and let the Captain of our Salvation lead, we are going to see unfolding before our eyes this “great Salvation” the Scriptures talk about and anticipate, this “Salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Impossible victories... with these “foolish” strategies of the Lord. And walls that have been there forever falling down flat before us!

But this kind of walk will take great trust, implicit trust. And great courage. What, you mean commit to obeying a Commander who implements strategies like this? Have you no idea what we are up against? There are giants before us in this Land. But what about our God? Have we no comprehension at all as to the greatness of our God? We are not to be intimidated by the size of the giants. We are not to be dismayed by the fact that they are far, far greater than we, and stronger. We are told—and it’s something that is emphasized again and again and again—that if we simply walk in obedience, if we simply OBEY, we will see astonishing victory. Faced with overwhelming circumstances and an Adversary who for so long has held the high ground, we are to KNOW that as we simply walk in faith, walk in Rest, walk in the Spirit, and resist the temptation to fall back on our own strategies and pick up carnal weapons with the arm of the flesh... we are guaranteed great victory.

Courage and Strength to Drive Out the Enemy

“There remaineth therefore a Rest to the people of God.” Entering into the Rest of God does not mean some kind of idyllic idleness. Crossing Jordan—a type of the death of the Cross and resurrection, a type of entering into Life—does not mean we have arrived, and all there is to do now is sit down on the grassy bank and write our memoirs. I said at the start that the book of Joshua foretells a great concluding chapter in the purposes of God. But it means another beginning. A new beginning. We have entered into the Rest, but there is a work to be accomplished in this Rest. A warfare. We are to walk in the Spirit, abide in the Spirit, obey the leadings of the Spirit... and find ourselves in great conflict with spiritual powers of wickedness.
But at the same time, we war against those forces in a Spirit of rest. In the yoke of Christ. If we move out from the flesh, the carnal mind, if we employ carnal weapons... if we don’t in a very determined way leave all that at the bottom of Jordan, and walk in the Spirit, we are in for a sorry and humiliating discovery.

But turning that around—which is the emphasis of the Spirit in my own spirit at this time—if we do walk in the Spirit and Rest of the Lord, we shall see impossible victory in the many situations that we face in this hour, things which time and again we have despaired of ever seeing changed. We must know—surely by now we know this—we are not going to see real change in the earth, whether in the world around us or closer to home—apart from entering into this heavenly realm and dealing with the forces of darkness there. That’s where the solution is.

God is saying to us that if we just catch on to what He’s saying to us: if we will simply walk in the Spirit... if TODAY we will hear His Voice, and OBED implicitly—and let not the immensity of the problems overwhelm us, nor the fear of man or spirit confound us, nor the size of our foes, nor their heavenly advantage... the whole formidable prospect of it all—He assures us we will see victory on a scale that will utterly astonish us. I know the Lord has been patiently saying and emphasizing this for some time. And He will not stop saying this till we have learned this, till the word He sends forth has laid hold of us, has become part of us, has become “truth in the inward parts.” Victory is guaranteed if we learn this. Nothing can separate us from victory once we learn this...

...That is, if we do not “fall after the same example of disobedience” Heb. 4.11).

For Christ is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb. 5.9). It is His responsibility to bring us into this, as we said. Ours to obey Him. There is a rest for us because of His responsibility. How we must lean on that, there is great comfort in that. But we too have a responsibility. We must obey Him. But oh for eyes to see: that is part of the very Rest.

As the Holy Spirit says in Hebrews:

“There remaineth therefore a Rest to the people of God.
For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.
Let us labour (be diligent) therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (or disobedience)” (Heb. 4. 9-11).
As we enter into the Land, we are to be very diligent to cease from our own works and obey Him. And we are not permitted the excuse of fear. When the people heard the evil report the ten spies brought back about the giants in the land they howled in fear. God called it disobedience. He knew all about the giants. He would deal with them if the people would simply obey Him. In other words, the only thing that can keep us out of the land is not the giants. It’s not the size of these formidable principalities and powers of darkness in the heavenly realm.

It’s our own lack of faith—our own disobedience. Of course we can’t go in unless He is speaking the living word of command. But when He is speaking that word, we can go in!

And so the call. “Be strong and of a good courage.” Let nothing deter us from entering and possessing this heritage. It’s our own land, this realm in the Spirit, as God reminded Ezekiel. “I will bring you into your own land” (Ezek. 37.14). It’s the heritage in the Spirit that Christ purchased for us in the Cross. We are to enter and dwell in it, not just claim it as ours. It’s inhabited by forces that God has decreed are to be evicted, and which we must cast out. We must dispossess them. God says He is the one who is doing it. And that’s why He says you and I are to do it.

“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 Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites” (Josh. 3.10).

“Hereby...” He is referring to the ark of the Lord going before them into Jordan, and the waters of Jordan parting before the ark. The moment the priests that bare the ark dipped their feet in the water, the waters of Jordan parted, making a way where there was no way. It was a clear sign from God to the Israelites that none of this was to be accomplished by their own ingenuity and resources.

And when the inhabitants of the land heard about this their heart melted in them.

God says He is the One who without fail will drive them out. He has repeated this to them all through the wilderness journey. And again now. But at the same time, all along the wilderness way He has exhorted them that they are to drive them out. (Ex. 23.31, Num. 33.52, Dt. 9.3, etc.) They are to drive them out. I assure you, He says, I will drive them out. So drive them out!

And the sad testimony later in Joshua, and in the first chapter of Judges, is that they failed to do this. They failed to drive them out. How can it be? God had said He would “without fail drive them out.” Yet read Judges Ch.
1. “And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem... Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites... Neither did Zebulun... Neither did Asher... Neither did Naphtali...”

There can only be one reason why this sad discrepancy. Back there in the wilderness it was lack of faith—or to put it better, lack of the obedience of faith—that caused a whole generation to turn back from the inheritance God had promised to give them. The same here. In the generation that had entered the land, the same thing. It was a failure to follow through to completion the promise of God that if His people would simply believe Him, and continue believing Him, and cast fear out of doors and walk in obedience to His commands, He would assure a complete conquest.

Their failure does not necessarily mean our failure. Those things that happened unto them are written for our admonition (1 Cor. 10.11). There is still a TODAY for us... while it is called “today,” that is.

“TODAY, if ye will hear His Voice, harden not your hearts...”

Even so, many of us have known failure. Overwhelming failure at times. Failure that has taken the heart out of us at times. It doesn’t have to be the end of the road for us. If we have become a broken people, and come before our Lord with a a broken and a contrite heart, and a great desire to go on... God is still our God. How precious, to have such a loving God. He is still committed to us. He is still saying that He will bring His people into this heritage in the Spirit. If we are a broken and bruised people now... so much the better. To Him be all the glory. Like the bride in the Song of Solomon. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?” (Song 8.5). She’s been through the wilderness, through some hard and crippling things. She has to lean on her Beloved now. Like Jacob, she can’t walk on her own anymore. It doesn’t mean she’s weak and harmless: the kind of church that has taught the world it has nothing to fear from her. Far from it.

She is “terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6.10).

This is what the book of Deuteronomy is all about, which is a record of what Moses spoke to the people in the plains of Moab in the wilderness just before the conquest of Canaan. It’s the “second giving of the Law.” God hadn’t changed His mind. He gives them the Law all over again, this time also rehearsing in their ears their failures and mistakes. They had learned some wisdom through it all. They know themselves now, how faithless they have been. And they know their faithful Lord and God.

Okay then, He says, now let’s go forward.
So... let’s go forward. The Day of Redemption is at the door. It is staggering what God is about to unfold—the immensity of this great redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus. What is this all about? It’s all about “the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1.14). What is the purchased possession? The psalmist said, “He brought them to the border of His Sanctuary, even to this mountain, which His right hand had purchased” (Ps. 78.54). Moses said, “Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established” (Ex. 15.17). And so “this mountain” speaks of the whole realm of the inheritance, of our heritage in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That realm in the Spirit is ours. It does not belong to the “seven abominable nations of Canaan,” the principalities and powers of darkness that dwell there. Does that not make us jealous for what is our own?

Looking at it from another perspective, we ourselves are the purchased possession. “...Thy people... which Thou hast purchased” (Ex. 15.16). We are not our own, we are “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6.20). It was a very high price, even “His own blood” (Acts 20.28). What objective does He have in making so costly a purchase? Certainly not to leave us more or less as we are, and then, with the old Egyptian bondages still holding us fast, carry us off to Heaven some day. No, He has purchased, redeemed us from Egyptian bondage to bring us into a liberty that, really, only He Himself knows the full beauty of; we’ve only had glimpses so far. Yes, we are redeemed from Egyptian bondage the moment the blood of the Lamb is applied to the doorposts of our heart. But we have not yet entered into the fullness of the liberty for which this blood of the Lamb has purchased us—has bought us, made us His own, to release us into. Like a man who buys a bird captive in a cage with the intent to let it go free, God’s intent is to release us into a realm of the Spirit in which we are a new creation totally living and abiding in the Spirit... the way a fish abides in the sea... the way a bird flies in the sky... so that we are walking with Him upon the wings of the Wind totally free... so that we are moving in His currents of the Spirit as Ezekiel when he entered those waters to swim in.

That’s what the Canaan realm is all about. It’s our heritage in the Spirit. And He has given us “the earnest of the Spirit”—the guarantee, the pledge, that He will make good on the whole possession in due time. That’s where He is leading us. But to get there He leads us through this “great and terrible wilderness” we are all so familiar with. Maybe at times we think this is all the Christian walk has to offer us. But no. In the wilderness He is teaching, disciplining, preparing us for the “day of redemption” when He finally makes good all that the blood of the Lamb has purchased.
Paul talks in Romans of having “the Spirit of adoption (of sonship) whereby (or, wherein) we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8.15). This is the same as the “earnest of the Spirit” he talks about in Ephesians (Eph. 1.14). We have this earnest, this Spirit of sonship in us crying, Abba! Father! I am an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ: this Spirit in me wants to search out the depths and heights and lengths and breadths of God my Father—all the fullness of God. And so, let me not hinder Him, let me not grieve Him in any way! As we begin the journey we discover that this same Spirit leads us into the wilderness to be tested and tried. Let us not grieve Him, and turn back in the wilderness, as they of old did. Let us continue on! If we continue on, the Spirit of sonship will lead us into the fullness of sonship: “the adoption, the redemption of the body” (Rom. 8.23).

What is the redemption of the body? In my present measure of light—and I welcome any with greater light who can help me increase this light—I believe that Paul, in speaking of the redemption of the body in Romans 8 is referring back to what he has just said in Romans 6.12,13. It is still a mortal body. “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body... Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin...” but yield them to God as those alive from the dead. And so the redemption of the body is the total release of all the members of the body from the bondage of the old nature to walk in the full liberty of new creation life. Now, all we say and do is the natural outflow of the impulse of the Spirit of Christ. Gone are the days of Egyptian bondage when we were bound in sin; gone are the days of wilderness wanderings when we struggled with the flesh; we walk now in the fullness of the liberty of the Spirit, as totally free as the Son of God Himself was when He was on earth. The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death. It is “the glorious liberty of the children of God” that the whole creation is groaning for (Rom. 8.21).

And we who have the “firstfruits of the Spirit,” oh how we ourselves groan for this liberty, that we might be released to fully search out our heritage in the Spirit that Christ purchased for us, and purchased us for. Paul has this heavenly heritage in view through the whole of Ephesians, and concludes by calling us to put on the whole armour of God and contend with principalities and powers in heavenly places that would keep this heritage from us.

...And so, those who have His Spirit, we must know it’s just “the earnest of the Spirit” that we have. Yes, it is a sure guarantee. But let us not put the part for the whole. Many there are who consider that in having the earnest they have it all. They boast they have “the baptism,” they have the gifts... What else is there? But the earnest of the Spirit is not the fullness of the Spirit. The earnest is just the down payment of the purchased possession, the pledge, the guarantee, of all that God purchased for Himself and for us in the Cross of Christ. We have the earnest of that now, and we are exhorted to “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph.
4.30). How could we grieve Him? The same way they grieved God in the wilderness by refusing to believe Him when He wanted to lead them further on. They had made a good beginning. But they did not hold steadfast to the end. “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation...” They looked upon their enemies, and then upon themselves, and quailed at the prospect of enemies greater than themselves. They left their God entirely out of the equation. And He was grieved with that generation for forty years, and swore with an oath, “They shall not enter My Rest” (Heb. 3. 10,11).

And thus Paul admonishes the Ephesians, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the Day of Redemption.” He has earlier in the same letter told them that in Christ we have “obtained an inheritance...

“...Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:
That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.
In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,
Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1. 11-14).

God’s assurance to us is that if we obey Him fully, He will bring us in. The size of the enemies? Doesn’t matter. The immensity of the situations we face? Yes, we are all in situations that are extremely difficult, and very complex... utterly beyond our own capacity to deal with and resolve. But that’s what entering into this inheritance in the Spirit is all about: finally dealing effectively with them once and for all!

And God has chosen this very time to bring us in and do just that. Let us not be dismayed at the messy, muddy situations all around us. “For Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the days of harvest” (Josh. 3.15).

Yes, but even so, right there, right then, the Living God has a Way whereby we may cross over on dry ground—and MUST cross over—the only way there is, THE ONLY WAY, to deal once and for all with these forces of darkness.

**Victory Over Darkness**

They seem so formidable, so terrifying, these forces of darkness. But that’s part of their armour of darkness. Fear, intimidation. They don’t have any real power. Their power is the power of darkness. It’s all smoke and mirrors: lies, deception, deceit, doubt, fear, torment, intimidation—the power of darkness. It’s very effective, obviously. Just approach someone who is held captive to it. You will weary yourself trying to set them free with mere talk.
These “rulers of the darkness of this age” are able by their power of darkness to rule over the hearts and minds of the family of man, and keep them in darkness. Poor, innocent man, right? Don't forget disobedient rebellious man has his part in it all, and gives them their part. It's because of the sin in the heart of man that these powers of darkness are able deceive him... so that he walks in darkness, puts on the armour of darkness, and does Satan’s fighting for him.

But that’s where we come in. “For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3.2). Notice the progression there from disobedient to deceived. But—thank you, Father—in the Cross and resurrection You delivered us from the power (the authority) of darkness. In giving us Your Spirit You translated us into the kingdom of the Son of Your love. We’ve been made meet to be partakers of that inheritance of the saints in the light (Col. 1.12,13). And so if we have been made meet, fit, competent to be partakers of it, let us not shrink back. Let us enter into and apprehend this inheritance! It is we who are to be the Light of a world held captive in darkness.

I saw on a news clip one day some men raging at one another, hurling threats at one another, and rocks, rushing out and throwing rocks at one another... then running to hide. One of those situations from the Middle East that we see so often. And as I watched, in a moment of illumination suddenly I realized... this was not where the real action was. This was all just the evidence of forces of darkness holding the high ground in the heavenly realm. Oh how it grieved me. No, he’s not innocent, but... poor blind man! If only he could see! And, oh, I cried within... oh the need for the Gospel of LIGHT. Only the Gospel of LIGHT can penetrate this darkness!

And oh, how I grieved to realize it: how often have these rulers of darkness succeeded in defeating the saints, never mind men of this world! Satan knows what he’s doing in tempting the saints of light to put on the armour of darkness and throw rocks at one another. Oh, let us humble ourselves! How duped we have been ourselves, how blind, how slow to understand! We need to see a turnaround, family of God. So desperately, we need to see a turnaround. And if we come before our Captain acknowledging our failures and disobedience, we will see it. He will lead us in the Way that sees things turned around, so that there is fear where no fear was, and confusion, and defeat, and a scattering... not in the camp of the saints, but in the camp of the enemy, and his forces fighting against one another now, and destroying themselves. How awesome is this prospect! Who is able to produce this kind of thing? But as the Spirit of Christ illumines us as to just what, specifically, He would have us do, and as we trust Him, and obey... we shall see great victories.
This cannot be accomplished by the arm of the flesh, it goes without saying. We are to cease from our own labours, and walk in Rest, something that requires great courage. Those who have known years of wilderness... we realize now, don't we, the implications of obeying God. Obeying God is no easy thing. It's very costly to obey God. Now when we hear His Voice it causes a trembling in us. This is something we don't take lightly, or with an over-confident attitude, as those who didn't know themselves were once inclined to do. Obeying God in this hour... as we see the implications of obeying Him, it is going to take great courage and great strength, selfless commitment to Him, and great faith. But... if we have come to this kind of heart, the wilderness has succeeded in doing what God intended, in dealing with the root of unbelief and selfishness in the heart.

We read what happened to Achan. It seems the wilderness dealings failed in his life. That root of selfish ambition had not been dealt with in the wilderness. No doubt God had provided ample opportunity for him to part ways with it. Couldn't he trust the love of God to divide him an inheritance far, far greater than anything he could clutch in his fist? But now it is too late. They're in the midst of the invasion of Jericho, and in the flush of the action, suddenly right before his eyes... this wedge of gold, and this prestigious Babylonian garment, and some silver! And he covets them. He looks this way and that, and... Puny things compared to what God certainly had for him. And they cost him, ultimately, his life. What all along he had been unwilling to surrender, now he must forfeit. He would not pay the price of obedience, and ended up paying the price of disobedience.

And.... where was the love in what Achan did? Where was his realization that we are members one of another, and that what he did would put others in harm’s way?

_Courage and Strength... to Love_

And so Paul, again to the Ephesians—and again in the same Spirit in which God exhorted and ministered courage and strength to His servant Joshua—he says:

''Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.
For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;
That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
May be able to comprehend (that is, apprehend) with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;
And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with (that is, unto) all the fulness of God (Eph. 3. 13-19).

The whole sweep of Ephesians is this great heritage in the Spirit “in the heavenlies.” And here Paul speaks of it in terms of love, the measureless love of God that He wants us to enter into and explore. But notice. Paul first prays that God would grant us to be strengthened with power His by His Spirit in the inner man. Do we have His Spirit in our inner man? Paul tells us why, tells us what God’s objective in that is. It’s not so we can advance our own ambitions, or just safely go to Heaven. It’s because Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith—by this mystery of faith—this is the root and ground of love. His Spirit in the inner man is to empower us with the strength and courage we need to search out all the dimensions of His love. How can we walk in love without the selfless Spirit of Christ motivating us? Love is a very, very demanding thing. Himself has shown us: the love of God is a sacrificial love. He wants to involve us in this love. So Paul prays God to grant us this great Strength from the storehouses of His glory, all the Strength we need to enable us—fully enable us, as the original implies—to explore and walk in and abide in this realm of the love of God.

God wants to grant this, says Paul. His Spirit in the inner man is there to equip us with the all the courage and strength we need to search out together—“with all saints,” as I said at the start—this great realm of the inheritance: the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Let us humbly open our hearts and receive of Him, then. The waters of Jordan are rising in this hour, rising, rising... and increasingly we don’t know what to do about the overwhelming situations we all face. But the God of love knows what to do, and what it will take to see the victory. Love. Love that never faileth.

Nothing less than love will meet the hour that is upon us. But walking in love, we are going to see Him do... “exceeding abundantly above all we can ask... or think.”

...But don’t just quit reading there. Finish the sentence. “...According to the power that worketh in us.”

“How now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

Allan Halton
February 13, 2011