Joshua - Commentaries by William Kelly

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"So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, Fear them not." Why should they? yea, why should they not? "Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee. Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night. And Jehovah discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. And it came to pass, as they fled before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that Jehovah cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died; they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword."

"Then spake Joshua to Jehovah in the day when Jehovah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel." How truly the intervention of that day is all felt to be Jehovah's doing! He uses His people, and it was a gracious thing in a certain sense that He should; for He could now, as at the Red Sea, have done all without them; but He would employ the people of God according to the dispensation. Thank God, we have a better calling than this, even a heavenly; but still, in its own place it is shortsighted and irreverent folly to overlook the honor of being employed in doing the then work of the Lord-clearing the land of what was an ulcer and plague spot, not merely for that locality, but for the whole earth; and such the Canaanites were. If there was to be a people of God at all, what other way was open than sweeping the land clean from the world-polluting Canaanites? And so Jehovah then "delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel."

But mark the beauty of the truth. It was to Jehovah Joshua spoke, not to the creature; for Him only did he honor. How admirably clear of all creature worship even when creation was to be used marvelously! "And he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies." A memorable day it was in every point of view- the cavil no doubt of the infidel, but the joy of every believer. I grant you that the men of science have their difficulties, as they usually have in what is above them; and I am afraid that we shall not be able to help them much. The truth is that the main, yea, the only thing which lifts out of every difficulty, is confidence in God and in His Word. Let us not essay to measure God by difficulties, but measure difficulties by God. Alas! it is the last thing that man thinks of doing.

Another thing not a little remarkable is that on this occasion Joshua addresses not merely the sun (a bold enough thing to do, to bid the sun stand still), but the moon also. It was not that the moon could give any appreciable increase of light when the sun thus ruled the prolonged day. There must therefore have been some other and worthy motive why the moon should be joined along with the sun in Joshua's command, if, as I have not the slightest doubt, Joshua was guided by God in so singular an appeal to the sun and moon, when divine power was exerted to arrest the apparent course of the sun. We all know, of course, that it is the earth that moves; but Scripture does not speak in the technical language of science, which not only would have been unintelligible to those for whom it was intended, but unnatural in the ordinary language of the greatest philosophers. Sir Isaac Newton talked about the sun's rising and setting just as much as the simplest countryman, and quite right. The man who does otherwise has no common sense. Here then Joshua employed so far the only language proper to his purpose. But this does not explain his call to the moon. Not only was no knowledge then possessed by Jews or Gentiles, but one may doubt whether our men of science would have thought of it even now; at any rate one has never heard it from them. Yet, if there had not been an action of the power of God with regard to the moon as well as the sun, the whole course of nature must have been deranged. How could Joshua, or any Jew who wrote Scripture, have known this? There was no astronomic science for two thousand years afterward adequate to put the two things together; and mere observation of phenomena would certainly have been content with the light of the sun alone. But so it was. He whose power wrought in answer to the call guided his voice and the pen of the writer of the book. If there could have been an interference with the sun without the moon; if the moon's course had not been arrested as well as the earth's, so as to give this appearance to the sun, there would have been confusion in the system. It seems to me therefore that, so far from the sentence affording a just ground of cavil against God's Word, it is none of the least striking instances of a wisdom and power incomparably above science. So faith will always find in Scripture.

But there is one more remark to be made. Whenever you hear men talking about science against Scripture, fear them not. There is not a man of them that will stand before you if you only cleave to the Word of God. Do not dispute with them; there is no moral profit in it, and seldom anything of value to be gained by it; on the contrary, one may have the spirit ruffled if we do not try others by it. But God's Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, and can only be wielded aright by the Holy Ghost. And God will be with you if you trust in the perfection of His Word, and will deign to guide you if dependent on Him. Look the adversaries full in the face, and hear all they have to say to you; but confront them only with the written Word of God. Cleave to the Word in simplicity, and you will find that the difficulties urged against revelation are almost all due to wresting a passage out of its context. When they take this passage, they try to ridicule the voice of man telling the sun to stand still; whereas the moral truth is strikingly grand and beautiful. These scoffers never think of his including the moon in his command, still less of its force, as already hinted.

I merely use the instance that comes before us in this passage, but you will find that the principle applies to every part of the Word of God. Read it as a believer; read it not as one that doubts or that distrusts God; for you have known it, you have fed upon it, you have lived upon it, you have been blessed by it, you have been cheered in every sorrow by it, you have been brought into peace and joy by it, you have been delivered from all your fears by it, you have been set free from follies and sins by it, you have gazed on the glory of God in the face of Jesus by it. All this and more you have enjoyed thereby, and you have thus learned by it, what science never teaches, because it never knows, the reality of God's grace and love in Christ; yea, you thus know God Himself. Am I not then entitled to say, beloved brethren, confide in that Word in the smallest detail, in every difficulty, whatever arises? Take it, looking up to God, and He will be with you in all your need.

But what is the main purport of the wonder of that day? For there surely is no miracle without a divine or moral reason attached to it. I doubt that there is a mere display of power in the Bible. And here let me add a needed observation on the usual notion of a miracle. Men constantly lay it down that it means a suspension of the laws of nature. This is really defective and misleading. The laws of nature are never suspended as a rule; but God withdraws from the action of those laws either a thing or a person as to whom He wishes to show His special interest. For instance, to give an application of this by examples take n anywhere from the Word of God, when Peter was sustained upon the water, or when the iron was caused to swim, the laws of nature were not really suspended; they went on all the same. Everywhere else iron sunk; and had any other ventured to follow Peter, he must have failed to walk on the water. Thus it was no question at all of suspending the laws of nature. But Peter, by the direct power of God, was sustained, spite of those general laws. That is, he was exempted from their application; but the laws themselves were not suspended. Just so in the case of one raised from the dead before the day of Jehovah [or, the day of the Lord]. There is no change in the reign of death as a law, but unequivocally the power of God interferes for the particular person that is exempted from the operation of those laws-nothing more. So it is all a mistake to speak of the suspension of the laws themselves. This observation will be found to be of some use in meeting not a little sophistry that prevails on the subject.

But to what end was it that God interposed on this occasion? Why this singular intervention? It was the most wonderful sign of a manifest kind up to that moment of the direct interest of a God who was not only the God of Israel, but evidently the Lord of the heavens as well as of all the earth; and this was exhibited on that day particularly for man here below, but more especially in behalf of Israel. And what makes it so much the more surprising was this: it was not wrought when Israel had walked without mistake. Grace was much more apparent than when they were crossing the Jordan. It was in an hour of need, after they had erred and been defeated before the little city of Ai; and it was done after they had been thoroughly deceived by the great city of Gibeon. It was evident therefore that the people of God had no great might or depth of wisdom to boast of. They had been more than once at fault, but only so because they had not sought counsel of Jehovah. There is no enemy that can stand, and there is no defeat that can succeed, where the people of God wait in dependence on the Lord. But it is better to be defeated when we depart from the Lord, than it would be under such circumstances to gain a victory. If there could be victories gained at the expense of dependence on the Lord, I do not know that it is possible to conceive a greater snare. No, beloved brethren; far, far better to be broken, to suffer and be put in the dust, than to be allowed to triumph where we are really far from God and without His direction. The moral import of the wonder is thus plain; and God's part in it appears to me most wholesome, needed, and weighty instruction for the children of God now.

Note: Scripture quotations are as Mr. Kelly gave them.

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