Joshua - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Short Papers, Stability and Peace

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

“ Save 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.”

Here lies the true secret of stability and peace, at all times, and under all circumstances. The authority of God for the ground we occupy, and His presence with us thereon—the word of the Lord, as the warrant for what we are doing, and the light of His countenance in the doing of it. There is no possibility of getting on without these two things. It will not do merely to be able to give chapter and verse, as we say, for a certain position which we have taken up; we must realize the Lord’s own presence with us. And, on the other hand, it will not do to say we have the Lord’s presence with us, unless we can give a divine warrant—a “Thus saith the Lord”—for what we are doing, and for the path we are treading.

Joshua could never have faced the difficulties of his day, without these two things; and, although we may not have to meet the same things that lay in his path, yet, we may rest assured of this, we shall never get on, in this our day, without the word of God as our authority, and His presence as our strength. Our lot is cast in a moment of special confusion. A multitude of conflicting voices fall on the ear. Men are taking sides. We see apparently the best and holiest, the most devoted and intelligent men ranged on opposite sides of the same question, and pursuing opposite ways, though professing to follow the same Lord. What are we to think? What are we to do? What do we want? We want to hear, deep down in our very inmost soul, these two weighty and imperishable sentences, “ Have not I commanded thee?”—“ Lo, I am with thee.” These are grand realities, which the very feeblest and most unlettered saint may enjoy, and without which none can possibly make head against the tide of evil at present rising around us.

Never, perhaps, in the annals of Christianity, was there a moment which more imperatively demanded the most direct personal dealing of the soul with God and His truth. It will not do for any one to pin his faith to the sleeve of another. God is testing souls in a very remarkable manner. The sieve is doing its solemn work in the midst of the Church. No doubt, those who are enabled to go through the sifting and testing, with God, will reap a rich harvest of blessing; but we must go through it. It is being made manifest, just now, in a very special way, whose faith is standing merely in the wisdom of men, and whose in the power of God. All that is hollow is being exposed, and will be so more and more; but God will keep those whose hearts are true to the name of Jesus. “ Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.”

This is the soul’s unfailing refuge, at all times. It was to this the apostle Paul directed the elders of Ephesus, at. the close of his touching and pathetic address, in Acts 20 “ And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace.” He does not commend them to any order of men; not even to apostles or their successors; to general councils or their decrees; to fathers or their traditions; to doctors or their dogmas. Ah! no; none of these would avail in the presence of the “ grievous wolves” which were about to enter in among them, and amid the “perverse things” which some from among themselves! would give utterance to. Nothing but God Himself and the word of His grace could stand,, in an evil day, or enable a soul to stand.

There is something perfectly beautiful in the jealous care of the apostle Paul lest any should lean upon him, or upon anything save the living God Himself. Hearken to the following glowing passage, “ For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thess. 2:13.) That devoted, single-hearted workman only sought to connect souls with God by means of His word. This is the object of all true ministry. Where the ministry is not true, not of God, it will connect souls with itself; and, in that case human influence will be brought to bear—weight of character—education—mental power—wealth—position—a thousand things, in short, which are all used to form a foundation for the soul’s confidence and shut it out from God. Thus the faith of the soul is made to rest in the wisdom of men and not in the power of God.

Christian reader, we want you to ponder this matter deeply. Be assured it demands your serious attention. See that your soul is resting on the deep and solid foundation of God’s word—that you have His direct and positive authority for where you are and what you are doing. And then see also that you have His presence with you. These two things will impart sweet peace to your spirit, and holy stability to your path, come what may. “ Have not I commanded thee?”—“ Lo, I am with thee.” It is your happy privilege to know the reality of these things, just as fully and just as distinctly in your day, as did Joshua in his day, Jeremiah in his day, and the apostles in their day. The measure of apprehension may vary—the circumstances may differ; but the ground or principle is the same always. Do not, therefore, we entreat of you, be satisfied with anything less than God’s authority and God’s presence. Be not troubled or perplexed about the conflicting opinions of men. You must expect these. They are nothing new. But remember that, far above all the din and confusion, the strife and controversy, the opposition of sects and parties—far above all these things, in the clear light of the divine presence, in the calmness of the inner sanctuary, faith can hear with distinctness those precious, soul-sustaining accents, “Have not I commanded thee?—“ Lo, I am with thee.”

These things can never fail, they are imperishable. See that you possess them, just now. Be able, in the calm dignity of a faith that rests only in the power and on the authority of God, to give a reason for the path that you tread, the work you do, the niche you fill. This is not high-mindedness or haughtiness, dogmatism or pride, self-confidence or vain-glory. It is the very reverse. It is self-abnegation and confidence in God. “ With the lowly is wisdom.” Precious truth 1 May we all remember it! It is the lowly mind that really possesses heavenly wisdom. It is not the learned, the astute, the long-headed, or clearheaded among men that can thread their way through the labyrinths of the present moment; no, it is the lowly, the simple, the self-distrusting, the childlike, the unpretending. These are they who will have wisdom to guide them, in darkest times—these are they who will possess peace in their souls and stability in their ways. May God’s Spirit lead us into these

things!

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 3, Gilgal: Part 3

Having glanced at two of the leading points in our subject, namely, Israel under the shelter of the blood; and Israel on the shores of the Red Sea; we have, now, to contemplate for a few moments, Israel crossing the Jordan, and celebrating the paschal feast at Gilgal, in which they represent the true position of Christians now.

The Christian is one who is not only sheltered from judgment by the blood of the Lamb, but delivered from this present evil world, by the death of Christ, and associated with Him where He now is, at the right hand of God. He is blessed with all spiritual blessings, in the heavenlies in Christ. He is, thus, a heavenly man, and, as such, is called to walk in this world, in all the varied relationships and responsibilities in which the good hand of God has placed him. He is not a monk, or an ascetic, or a man living in the clouds—fit neither for earth or heaven. He is not one who lives in a dreamy, misty, unpractical region; but, on the contrary, one whose happy privilege it is, from day to day, to reflect, amid the scenes and circumstances of earth, the graces and virtues of a heavenly Christ with whom, through infinite grace, and on the solid ground of accomplished redemption, he is linked by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Such is the Christian, according to the teaching of the New Testament. Let the reader see that he understands it. It is very real, very definite, very positive, very practical. A child may know it, and realize it, and exhibit it. A Christian is one whose sins are forgiven—who possesses eternal life and knows it—in whom the Holy Ghost dwells—He is accepted in, and associated with a risen and glorified Christ—He has broken with the world, is dead to sin and the law, and finds His object, and His delight, and his spiritual sustenance in the Christ who loved him and gave Himself for him, and for whose coming he waits every day of his life.

This, we repeat, is the New Testament idea of a Christian. How immensely it differs from the ordinary type of Christian profession around us, we need not say. But let the reader measure himself by the divine standard, and see wherein he comes short; for of this he may rest assured, that there is no reason whatsoever, so far as the love of God, or the work of Christ, or the testimony of the Holy Ghost is concerned, why he should not be in the full enjoyment of all the rich and rare spiritual blessings which appertain to the true Christian position. Dark unbelief, fed by legality, bad theology and spurious religiousness, robs many of God's dear children of their proper place and portion. And not only so, but from want of a thorough break with the world, many are sadly hindered from the clear perception and full realization of their position and privileges as heavenly men.

But we are rather anticipating the instruction unfolded to us in the typical history of Israel, in Josh. 3-5 to which we shall now turn. " And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. And: it came to pass, after three days, that the officers went through the host. 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. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for we have not passed this way heretofore." Josh. 3:1-4.

It is most desirable that the reader should, with all simplicity and clearness, seize the true spiritual import of the river Jordan. It typifies the death of Christ in; one of its grand aspects, just as the Bed Sea typifies it in another. When the children of Israel stood on the wilderness side of the Bed Sea, they sang the song of redemption. They were a delivered people—delivered from Egypt and the power of Pharaoh. They saw all their enemies dead on the seashore. They could even anticipate, in glowing accents, their triumphal entrance into the promised land. " Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them: by the greatness of thine arm they shall be still as a stone; till thy people pass over, Lord, till the people pass over which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever.'

All this was perfectly magnificent, and divinely true. But they were not yet in Canaan. Jordan—of which, most surely, there is no mention in their glorious song of victory—lay between them and the promised land. True, in the purpose of God, and in the judgment of faith, the land was theirs; but they had to traverse the wilderness, cross the Jordan, and take possession.

How constantly we see all this exemplified in the history of souls. When first converted, there is nothing but joy and victory and praise. They know their sins forgiven; they are filled with wonder, love and praise. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, and they can rejoice in hope of His glory, yea and joy in Himself through Jesus Christ our Lord. They are in Rom. 5:1-11; and, in one sense, there can be nothing higher. Even in heaven itself, we shall have nothing higher or better than "joy in God." Persons sometimes speak of Romans 8 being higher than Rom. 5 But what can be higher than "joy in God?" If we are brought to God, we have reached the most exalted point to which any soul can come. To know Him as our portion, our rest, our stay, our object, our all; to have all our springs in Him, and know Him as a perfect covering for our eyes, at all times and in all places, and under all circumstances. This is heaven itself to the believer.

But there is this difference between Rom. 5 and 8 that 6 and 7 lie between; and when the soul has traveled practically through these latter, and learned how to apply their profound and precious teaching to the great questions of indwelling sin and the law, then is it in a better state, though, most assuredly, not in a higher standing.

We repeat, and with emphasis, the words, " traveled practically." For it must be even so, if we would really enter into these holy mysteries, according to God. It is easy to talk about being "dead to sin " and " dead to the law "—easy to see these things written in Rom. 6 and 7—easy to grasp, in the intellect, the mere theory of these things. But the question is, have we made our own of them?—Have they been applied practically to our souls, by the power of the Holy Ghost? And are they livingly exhibited in our ways, to the glory of Him who, at such a cost to Himself, has brought us into such a marvelous place of blessing and privilege?

It is much to be feared that there is a vast amount of merely intellectual traffic in these deep and precious mysteries of our most holy faith which—were they only laid hold of in spiritual power—are calculated to produce the most marked results in practice.

But, we must return to our theme; and, in doing so, we would ask the reader if he really understands the true spiritual import of the river Jordan? What does it really mean? We have said that it typifies the death of Christ. But in what aspect?—For that precious death has many and various aspects. We believe the Jordan sets forth the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, not so much in its application to that from which we are delivered, as to that into which we are introduced. The Red Sea delivered Israel from Egypt and the power of Pharaoh. Jordan brought them into the land of Canaan.

We find both in the death of Christ. He, blessed be His Name, has by His death on the cross—His death for us, delivered us from our sins—from guilt and condemnation—from Satan's power, and from this present evil world.

But, more than this, He has by the same infinitely precious work, brought us, now into an entirely new position, in living union and association with Himself, where He is at God's right hand. Such is the distinct teaching of Eph. 2 "But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Verses 4-6.

Note the little word " Hath" He is not speaking of what God will do; but of what He hath done—done for us and with us in Christ Jesus. The believer is not one who is waiting to go to heaven when he dies. He is there already in the Person of His living and glorified Head—there, too, in spirit and by faith.

Is all this real and true? As real and true as that Christ hung on the cross and lay in the grave. As real and true as that we were dead in trespasses and sins. As real and true as the eternal truth of God can make it. As real and true as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the body of every true believer.

Mark, reader, we are not, now, speaking of the practical working out of all this glorious truth in the life of Christians, from day to day. This is another thing altogether. Alas! alas! if our only idea of true christian position were to be drawn from the practical career of professing Christians, we might give up Christianity as a myth, a sham and a fable.

But thank God, it is not so. We must learn what true Christianity is from the pages of the New Testament; and, having learned it there judge ourselves, our ways, our surroundings, by its heavenly light. In this way, while we shall ever have to confess and mourn over our shortcomings, our hearts shall, ever more and more, be filled with praise to Him whose infinite grace has brought us into such a glorious position in union and fellowship with His own Son—a position, blessed be God, in nowise dependent upon our personal state; but which, if really apprehended, must exert a powerful influence upon our entire course, conduct and character.

(To be continued, if God permit.)

Note. We would entreat the reader to study prayerfully Rom. 3-8 and Eph. 1, 2. The former in connection with the Red Sea, the latter in connection with the river of Jordan. This will be a profitable exercise, until we meet again.

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 3, Gilgal: Part 4

The more deeply we ponder the typical instruction presented in the river Jordan, the more clearly we must see that the whole christian position is involved in the standpoint from which we contemplate it. If Jordan means death, and we have to meet it, then, verily, our prospect is a gloomy one. Death is the wages of sin, and sin is death's sting; and, most surely, if we have to encounter death, there can be but the one terrible issue.

But, thanks be to God, it is not so. The great Antitype of the ark has passed over before us into Jordan, to stem its torrent for us, and make it a dry path for our feet, so that we might pass clean over into our heavenly inheritance. The Prince of life has destroyed, on our behalf, him that had the power of death. He has taken the sting from death; yea, He has made death itself the very means by which we reach, even now, in spirit and by faith, the true heavenly Canaan.

Let us see how all this is unfolded in our type. Mark particularly the commandment given by the officers of the host. " 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." The ark must go first. They dared not to move one inch along that mysterious way, until the symbol of the divine presence had gone before.

“Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore” It was an unknown, an untrodden way. No mortal could tread it with impunity. Death and destruction are linked together. "It is appointed unto men"—not to all men, thank God—" once to die; but after this the judgment." (Heb. 9) Who can stand before the king of terrors? Who can face that grim and terrible foe? Who can encounter the swellings of Jordan? Poor Peter thought he could; but he was sadly mistaken. He said unto Jesus, " Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterward."

How fully these words explain the import of that mystic " space'' between Israel and the ark. Peter did not understand that space. He had not studied aright Josh. 3:4. He knew nothing of that terrible pathway which his blessed Master was about to enter upon. " Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake."

Poor dear Peter! How little he knew of himself, or of that which he was—sincerely, no doubt, though ignorantly—undertaking to do! How little did he imagine that the very sound of death's dark river, heard even in the distance, would be sufficient so to terrify him, as to make him curse and swear that he did not know his Master! " Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice."

"Yet there shall be a space between you and it." How needful! How absolutely essential! Truly there was a space between Peter and his Lord. Jesus had to go before. He had to meet death in its most terrific form. He had to tread that rough path in profound solitude—for who could accompany Him? " There shall be a space between you and it: come not near to it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore."

"Thou canst not follow me now: but thou shalt follow me afterward." Blessed Master! He would not suffer His poor feeble servant to enter upon that terrible path, until He Himself had gone before, and so entirely changed its character, that the pathway of death should be lighted up with the beams of life and immortality. Our Jesus has " abolished death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light by the gospel."

Thus death is no longer death to the believer. It was death to Jesus, in all its intensity, in all its horrors, in all its reality. He met it as the power which Satan wields over the soul of man. He met it as the penalty due to sin. He met it as the just judgment of God against sin—against us. There was not a single feature, not a single ingredient, not a single circumstance, which could possibly render death formidable which did not enter into the death of Christ. He met all; and, blessed be God, we are accounted as having gone through all in and by Him. We died in Him, so that death has no further claim upon us, or power over us. Its claims are disposed of, its power broken and gone for all believers. The whole scene is cleared completely of death, and filled with life and incorruptibility.

And hence, in Peter's case, we find our Lord, in the last chapter of John, most graciously meeting the desire of His servant's heart—a desire in which he was perfectly sincere—the desire to follow his beloved Lord. " Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God." Thus death, instead of being the judgment of God to overwhelm Peter, was turned into a means by which Peter could glorify God.

What a glorious fact! What a stupendous mystery! How it magnifies the cross, or rather the One who hung thereon! What a mighty revolution, when a poor sinful man can, in death, glorify God! So completely has death been robbed of its sting—so thoroughly has its character been changed—that, instead of shrinking from it with terror, we can meet it—if it does come—and go through it with songs of victory; and instead of its being to us the heavy wages of sin, it is a means by which we can glorify God.

All praise to Him who has so wrought for us!—to Him who has gone down into Jordan's deepest depths for us, and made there a highway by which His ransomed people can pass over into their heavenly inheritance! May our hearts adore Him! May all our powers be stirred up to magnify His holy name! May our whole life be devoted to His praise!

But we must proceed with our type.

"And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Joshua stands before us as a type of the risen Christ, leading His people, in the power of the Holy Ghost, into their heavenly inheritance. The priests bearing the ark into the midst of Jordan typify Christ going down into death for us, and destroying completely its power. " He passed through death's dark raging flood, to make our rest secure;" and not only to make it secure, but to lead us into it, in association with Himself, now, in spirit and by faith; by-and-by, in actual fact.

" And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, 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 Canaanites.....Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan."

The passage of the ark into Jordan proved two things, namely, the presence of the living God in the midst of His people; and that He would most surely drive out all their enemies from before them. The death of Christ is the basis and the guarantee of everything to faith. Grant us but this; that Christ has gone down into death for us, and we argue, with all possible confidence, that, in this one great fact, all is secured. God is with us, and God is for us. " He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The difficulty of unbelief is, "How shall he?" The difficulty of faith is, "How shall he not?"

Israel might wonder how all the hosts of Canaan could ever be expelled from before them; let them gaze on the ark in the midst of Jordan, and cease to wonder, cease to doubt. The less is included in the greater. And hence we can say, What may we not expect, seeing that Christ has died for us? There is nothing too good, nothing too great, nothing too glorious, for God to do for us, and in us, and with us, seeing He has not spared His only-begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all. Everything is secured for us by the precious death of Christ. It has opened up the everlasting floodgates of the love of God, so that the rich streams thereof might flow down into the very depths of our souls. It fills us with the sweetest assurance that the One who could bruise His only be-gotten Son, on the cursed tree, for us, will meet our every need, carry us through all our difficulties, and lead us into the full possession and enjoyment of all that His eternal purpose of grace has in store for us. Having given us such a proof of His love, even when we were yet sinners, what may we not expect at His hands now that He views us in association with that blessed One who glorified Him in death—the death that He died for us? When Israel saw the ark in the midst of Jordan, they were entitled to consider that all was secured. True they had, as we know, to take possession: they had to plant their feet upon the inheritance; but the power that could stem death's dark waters, could also drive out every foe from before them, and put them in peaceful possession of all that God had promised.

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 3, Gilgal: Part 5

In closing this series of brief papers on Gilgal, we must turn our thoughts to the practical application of that which has been engaging our attention. If it be true—and it is true—that Jesus died for us, it is equally true that we have died in Him, as one of our own poets has sweetly put it:

Now this is a great practical truth—none more so. It lies at the very foundation of all true Christianity. If Christ has died for us, then, in very deed, He has taken us completely out of our old condition, with all that appertained to it, and placed us upon an entirely new footing. We can look back, from resurrection ground, into the dark river of death, and see there, in its deepest depths, the memorial of the victory gained for us by the Prince of Life. We do not look forward to death; we look back at it. We can truly say, " The bitterness of death is past."

Jesus met death for us, in its most terrible form. Just as the river of Jordan was divided when it presented its most formidable appearance—"For Jordan overfloweth all its banks all the time of harvest"—so our Jesus encountered our last great enemy, vanquished him in his most terrific form, and left behind, in the very center of death's dark and dreary domain, the imperishable record of His glorious victory. All praise, homage, and adoration to His peerless name! It is our privilege, by faith and in spirit, to stand on Canaan's side of Jordan, and erect our memorial of what the Savior, the true Joshua, has done for us.

"And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man. And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones; and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging-place where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the Lord your God, into the midst of Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel. That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 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 of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel forever." Josh. 4:1-7.

The great fact was to be seized, and practically carried out, by the whole assembly—" of every tribe a man"—" Every man of you a stone upon his shoulder"—a stone taken from the very spot where the priests' feet stood firm. All were to be brought into living personal contact with the great mysterious fact that the waters of Jordan were cut off. All were to engage in erecting such a memorial of this fact as should elicit inquiry from their children as to what it meant. It was never to be forgotten.

What a lesson is here for us! Are we erecting our memorial? Are we giving evidence—such evidence as may strike even the mind of a child—of the fact that our Jesus has vanquished the power of death for us? Are we affording any practical proof in daily life that Christ has died for us, and that we have died in Him? Is there aught in our actual history, from day to day, answering to the figure set forth in the passage just quoted—" every man of you a stone upon his shoulder?" Are we declaring plainly that we have passed clean over Jordan—that we belong to heaven—that we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit? Do our children see aught in our habits and ways, in our spirit and deportment, in our whole character and manner of life, leading them to inquire, " What mean ye by these things?" Are we living as those who are dead with Christ—dead to sin—dead to the world? Are we practically sitting loose to the world—letting go our hold of present things, in the power of communion with a risen Christ?

These are searching questions for the soul, beloved christian reader. Let us seek to meet them honestly as in the divine presence. We profess these things, we hold them in theory. We say we believe that Jesus died for us, and that we died in Him. Where is the proof? Where the abiding memorial? Where the stone on the shoulder? Let us judge ourselves honestly before God. Let us no longer rest satisfied with anything short of the thorough, practical, habitual, carrying out of the great truth, that " We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God." Mere profession is worthless. We want the living power—the true result—the proper fruit.

" And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of Jordan"—stones of peculiar import—no other stones could tell such a tale, teach such a lesson, or symbolize such a stupendous fact—no other stones like them—"those twelve stones did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord that it is mighty; that ye might fear the Lord your God forever."

Here, then, we see Israel at Gilgal. "Everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua." Every member of the host had passed clean over Jordan, not one had been suffered to feel the slightest touch of the river of death. Grace had brought them all safely over into the inheritance promised to their fathers. They were not only separated from Egypt by the Red Sea, but actually brought into Canaan across the dry bed of the Jordan, and encamped in Gilgal, in the plains of Jericho.

And now mark what follows. " And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them anymore, because of the children of Israel. At that time"—note the words! when all the nations were paralyzed with terror at the very thought of this people—"At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time."

How deeply significant is this! How suggestive are these "sharp knives!" How needful! If Israel are about to bring the sword upon the Canaanites, Israel must have the sharp knife applied to themselves. They had never been circumcised in the wilderness. The reproach of Egypt had never been rolled away from them. And ere they could celebrate the passover, and oat of the old corn of the land of Canaan, they must have the sentence of death written upon them. No doubt this was aught but agreeable to nature, but it must be done. How could they take possession of Canaan with the reproach of Egypt resting upon them? How could uncircumcised people dispossess the Canaanites! Impossible. The sharp knives had to do their work throughout the camp of Israel ere they could eat of Canaan's food, or prosecute its warfare.

"And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise. All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt.....And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way.....

And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal (" rolling") unto this day. And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month, at even, in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn, in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."

Here, then, we have a type of the full Christian position. The Christian is a heavenly man, dead to the world, crucified with Christ, associated with Him where He now is; and, while waiting for His appearing, occupied in heart with Him, feeding, by faith, upon Him as the proper nourishment of the new man.

Such is the Christian's position—such his portion; but in order to enter fully into the enjoyment thereof, there must be the application of the " sharp knife" to all that belongs to mere nature. There must be the sentence of death written upon that which scripture designates "the old man."

All this must be really and practically entered into, if we would maintain our position, or enjoy our proper portion as heavenly men. If we are indulging nature, if we are living in a low, worldly atmosphere, if we are going in for this world's pursuits, its pleasures, its politics, its riches, its honors, its fashions, and its distinctions, then, verily, it is impossible that we can be enjoying fellowship with our risen Head and Lord.1 Christ is in heaven, and to enjoy Him we must be living, in spirit and by faith, where He is. He is not of this world; and if we are of it, we cannot be enjoying fellowship with Him. " If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." 1 John 1:6.

This is most solemn. If I am living in and of the world, I am walking in darkness, and I can have no fellowship with a heavenly Christ. "Wherefore," says the blessed apostle, "if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" Do we really understand these words? Have we weighed the full force of the expression, " living in the world?" Is the Christian not to be as one living in the world? Clearly not. He is to live in spirit where Christ is. As to fact, He is obviously on this earth, moving up and down, and in and out, in the varied relations of life, and in the varied spheres of action in which the hand of God has set him. But his home is in heaven. His life is there. His object, his rest, his proper all, is in heaven. He does not belong to earth. His citizenship is in heaven; and in order to make this good in actual practice, from day to day, there must be the denial of self, the mortification of our members."

All this comes vividly out in Col. 3 Indeed, it would be impossible to give a more striking exposition of the entire subject of " Gilgal" than that presented in the following lines: '1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." And now comes the true spiritual import and application of "Gilgal" and its " sharp knives." " Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth."

May the Holy Spirit lead us into a deeper and fuller understanding of our place, portion, and practice, as Christians! Would to God that we better knew what it is to feed upon the old corn of the land, at the true spiritual Gilgal, that thus we might be better fitted for the conflict and service to which we are called.

clickbible.org