

Let Us Cross Over the River

The land had been promised to Abraham. Through Joseph, the sons of Jacob had been saved in Egypt. But Egypt was never intended to be the permanent abode of Israel. Exodus 1:8 says, *“Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.”* In the third verse following these words it says, *“Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens.”* The great people of Israel who were chosen by God and enjoyed all the freedoms that His fellowship could provide were now in slavery and needed deliverance. Even in bondage, the blessings of God were in operation, for the Scripture says, *“But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew”* (Exodus 1:12). Even after Pharaoh ordered the death of the male babies in an attempt to stop the procreation and blessing upon Israel, the Bible goes on to say, *“...and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty”* (Exodus 1:20). Finally, God raised up Moses and in the episode of the burning bush it is recorded, *“And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey...”* (Exodus 3:7,8).

Bringing Israel out of Egypt into the inheritance God had provided in the land of promise was no “tip-toe through the tulips.” God sent ten different plagues into Egypt to loosen the wicked hands of Pharaoh off of the Israelites, ending with the Passover that devastated the firstborn in Egypt, even to the household of Pharaoh. Reluctantly, Pharaoh let the people of God begin their journey to the Promised Land. Pharaoh had second thoughts and then pursued Israel to the very shores of the Red Sea. Entrapped between Pharaoh and the deep Red Sea, God gave deliverance! *“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD...”* (Exodus 14:13). A miracle was performed after Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all night and gave a dry ocean floor for the children of Israel to comfortably travel across. After the safe crossing for Israel, the Egyptian army followed, but God in His mercy brought the waters of the Red Sea back over them in full strength and delivered Israel.

The Promised Land was still not in the possession of God’s chosen. Just before they crossed the Jordan River, which separated the Land of Canaan, from the rest of the world, the people of God failed. Spies were sent over into the land and found milk, honey, and grapes the size of our modern basketballs. The spies, however, also saw the giants, *“And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight”* (Numbers 13:33). Out of the twelve spies, only one (Caleb) and, of course, Joshua believed God was able to overcome the giants and give them the land. The penalty for not possessing their possession was forty years of wandering in the wilderness. That land between Egypt and the Promised Land is no place to live! God miraculously provided them food in the form of the mysterious, yet nutritious manna in the wilderness as well as protection. Finally, the day came when the punitive action was complete and Israel was now ready to enter the land.

The point of entry into the Promised Land was the Jordan River. As soon as they crossed the river, Joshua was commanded to circumcise the children of Israel, which was the token physical sign testifying of the Covenant with God. God gave the name Gilgal to Joshua as the first settlement within the borders of the Promised Land. Gilgal means a circle or a rolling. The town later became the place where Saul, the first king of Israel was established. Although the later history of Gilgal was important, the earlier history was much more significant. Gilgal became the orientation of the new life for Israel. In a real sense, it is typical of orientation of our Christian experience. I say to the young Christian, let us cross over the river! I say to the carnal Christian dabbling with this old world, let us cross over the river!

1. Let us cross over the river and break the bondage that holds us back from the victorious Christian life.

Joshua 5:9 says, *“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 unto this day.”* Up until now Egypt held a large influence over the people of Israel. It is not that Egyptian appetites could not be cultivated in the Land of Promise; there were now three, rather than two barriers that geographically separated the Holy Land from the unholy Egypt: the Red Sea, the wilderness, and now the Jordan River. Satan is trying to keep a foothold in the lives of many young and immature Christians. This is accomplished by establishing strongholds of sin that He tries to convince the Christian he or she cannot break. This belief runs contrary to the true teachings of the Word of God. The Bible says, *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (II Corinthians 10:4,5). According to the Word, through Christ we can bring down any and every strong hold (castle or fortress) that Satan, this world, or our own flesh holds in resistance against Christ and the way of holiness. Let us cross over the river and leave the ways of bondage keeping Egypt behind! *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32).

2. Let us cross over the river and discover our destiny.

Israel’s destiny lay ahead of them in the Promised Land. Egypt and the wilderness depict everything that the Israelites are not to be. The will of God is now going to unfold for them like a kaleidoscope of wonder as they conquer Jericho, Ai, and the heights of Hebron. Gilgal represents for the Christian the introduction of the ultimate infilling of the Holy Spirit that enables us to conquer our giants. *“For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God I have leaped over a wall”* (II Samuel 22:30).

Satan wants to keep us from what is rightfully (through the blood of the cross) ours through Christ. He often does so by leading us to believe we cannot make it without natural means. Isn’t that how we hear the voice of the world? We have to compromise, do it the world’s way, and don’t be old-fashioned. You’ll fail if you don’t trust in natural means. Yet, rebuke against the Egyptian way of doing things is given in Psalm 20:7, *“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”* I do not believe it is a coincidence that the humanistic approach to understanding human development is called through the evolutionary process, “natural selection.” Thanks be to the Lord, our life is not the product of “natural selection,” but by the Divine creative act of God. Just as surely as God made Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Boaz, God made you and has a great plan for your life. We are people of destiny! Believe it! Our destiny, like the proverbial kaleidoscope will unfold for us as we trust in the Lord rather than natural process. *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”* (Proverbs 3:5,6).

3. Let us cross over the river and reunite with our relatives.

The Promised Land would be a place where the Israelites live and propagate. It was their own land. The last request of Joseph was to carry his bones out of Egypt to the land of his forefathers (Genesis 50:25). The Promised Land was where they belonged. Speaking prophetically, Isaiah said, *“Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married”* (Isaiah 62:4). In God’s plan we, His people, are “Hephzi-both” (my delight is in her) and the place of His perfect will for us is “Beulah” (married). We are in the family! And the crossing of the Jordan pictures “coming home.” It is no wonder that many of our references in death as a Christian are used in the similitude of crossing the river, to loved ones and home.

When Thomas Jonathan Jackson was only two years of age his older sister died of typhoid fever and shortly afterwards so did his father, Jonathan. At the age of seven his mother died leaving him and his sister, Laura as orphans. Tom moved to live with his uncle at the Jackson Mill on the West Fork River in what is now West Virginia. There was a brief period of time that he and Laura were together before they were reared separately by different relatives. When he became older he tried to stay in contact with her, with some difficulty. It seems in this young man's sad youth there was something special about the Jackson Mill where he and his little sister, the only link between him and his home, at one time played. Tom had a little boat that he and Laura would navigate through the waters to the other side and play beneath the beautiful white poplar and sugar maple trees. Even when Laura was gone, young Tom in solitude would find respite at this lovely spot just across the river. This young man struggled hard in his few years on earth. Early on, he accepted Christ and became a devout Christian. He fought to be admitted into West Point and although it was difficult, he rose to the top and became one of the highest-ranking class members. He taught at Virginia Military Institute and when war broke out, he took sides, like his commander, General Lee, with Virginia. At Manassas he was nicknamed "Stonewall." He went from victory to victory. In God's Providence, in May 1863, he was felled by some of his own men in friendly fire. The leading biographer of Stonewall Jackson wonders if the thoughts of his little sister, mother and father were on his mind when the last words he uttered were "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees."

Just over the river is home. Just over the river is Jesus. Just over the river is where we belong. Let us cross the river into a victorious life on earth, "*For me to live is Christ...*" (Philippians 1:21), and when we leave this world we have nothing to dread as we cross over the river to home "*...and to die is gain*" (Philippians 1:21).

- Pastor Pope -

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