

Possessed Land Less than Promised Land.

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[Preached to his own congregation, at the First Baptist church, Halifax, on Sunday morning, December 5.]

"There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," Joshua 13:1.

Aged Joshua had performed a noble work for Israel. The Promised Land had been entered, and considerable had been done in the way of conquest; but as yet the land of possession fell far short of being commensurate with the land of promise. In the words of the Lord to his servant: "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." But Joshua's period of labor was about over. Infirmities of age require that those who have long been leaders should commit the leadership to other hands, much as they would like to continue where they are. Happy they who can gracefully step aside and give a hearty God-speed, in the eventide of enforced inactivity, to those bidden to take their places. Happy they who thankfully receive the territory which has come to them from their fathers, and who so use their opportunities as to transmit the same to successors with valuable additions. What is passed on is often smaller than what was received. It so happened many times in the history of Israel. With the exception of two comparatively brief spaces, it could always be said, as was said to Joshua: "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." While faith and works were present in any fair degree, there was progress toward complete victory; but when these were lacking, idolatrous nations won back what had previously been taken. As then, so now, movement is backward or forward, according to the zeal or indifference in carrying out Divine orders. To keep what we have we must be employed for the gaining of more. We may be so thin as to hold up the man who keeps hurrying forward, and to let him go under when he stands still. No Christian is safe who is not active.

It is said to us, as was said to Joshua, "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." We have been permitted in his name to win some victories over the great enemy. And how has it been of late? Have we been retrograding or progressing? Have we been attending well to our tasks or otherwise? Such questions we have very properly been asked to put to ourselves upon this first Sunday of December. It is not always easy to answer such inquiries. We may belittle one sort of achievement and unduly exalt some other. One is constitutionally inclined to fix attention upon the dark features of the situation, while another is equally disposed to gather up only the favorable elements. But despite these differences, there will be agreement that we are not sufficiently aggressive, and that the past year of our denominational history calls for humiliation and bids us double our diligence. In the last Conventional year the additions to our churches have been more than two hundred less than in the year preceding, and four hundred less than the year before that. While the offerings to denominational work, as reported in ninety-seven, were nearly nine hundred dollars in excess of the year ninety-five, they fell below those of ninety-six over six hundred and fifty dollars. Too much may be made of figures, and too little, too; but surely we proceed not aright if not incited by these comparisons to fresh devotement of ourselves to the cause of Christ. Land is not being won as it might and should be. Instead of brave efforts, looking to large triumphs, we have to confess to a good deal of conformity to the ambitious and customs of the ungodly. When Israelites fell in with the ways of idol-worshipping neighbors they lost ground. And so do we when worldliness takes the place of obedience to God. In our private devotions, at family altars and in social services for prayer, let earnest petitions go up just now for a special blessing in these winter months. The young people should find stimulus in thinking that responsibility, in growing measure, is passing over to them. As the Joshuas are obliged to relinquish exertions, the juniors should be stepping forward with exultant hearts, ready for valiant service. Think and talk as we may, there is after all only one opening for our youth, and that is in filling places somewhere and somehow in the work of world evangelization.

God said to Joshua: "Arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give them. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." He says to us: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." All who are rightly employed are busily engaged to fulfil this command. This is the great and all-inclusive enterprise which embraces within itself every legitimate occupation. Toward the one aim of bringing the world to Jesus all may look and labor. Amid external variety there may be internal unity. As all radii run to the circle's centre, so every service rendered at Divine command for the Saviour's glory, far removed as it may seem from what most are wont to regard as religious work, helps to usher in the time when all shall own Christ as Lord. When we get strong hold upon this idea that there is only one

work, and set about becomingly to discharge the duties severally assigned us in our respective spheres, we are not hampered and hindered by the inquiry as to whether it is proper to do this or that. Having a definite and lofty purpose, it is sufficient to understand that a thing bidding for attention cannot facilitate our mission, in order that we may abjure it altogether. That is to say, if it is not clearly our duty to do a thing we account it our duty not to do it. There is a vast deal of waste where there is little eagerness to get to the proper goal. Those set to reap wheat turn to the chasing of butterflies. Those commanded to subdue the foes of righteousness enter upon a compromise with enemies. Instead of additions there are subtractions. We do well to beseech God, therefore, that he would make us to realize profoundly what constitutes our real business as we pass along. To be ruled, and always ruled, by the thought that our little while here is to be wholly and zealously used for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, is not only to be preserved from wasteful and injurious courses, but to be valuable contributors toward the world's betterment and the Redeemer's glory.

There were various spheres for men and women to occupy in the conquest of Canaan; but not nearly so many as are open to us in the winning of the world to Christ. "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," and assistance in extending present boundaries may be given in ways innumerable. Often do we here take occasion to remark upon this, but the thought needs to be iterated and reiterated, for it seems to be frequently assumed that the Great Commission comes only to such as can serve by preaching and teaching, and by missionary labor among the more destitute. "I am a doctor." "I am a lawyer." "I am a merchant." "I am a tradesman." But there is one occupation which is to be common to all, irrespective of incidental differences. Paul indicated this when he wrote: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." There is to be oneness of aim, while there is endless variety in the means by which the common end is reached. The preaching of the preacher is in a way conditioned upon the generosity of his business friend, so that we need to be careful about affirming that the preacher's work is more important than the merchant's. God calls merchants to be merchants just as he calls preachers to be preachers. He does not have large concern about one class of his toilers and small concern about some other. Agriculture and commerce and education are to be attended to for the glory of the Master as surely as missionary operations; and in the measure that workers in fields, offices and shops have this preeminent purpose before them will the gospel be extended. Because in business life there are more temptations to depart from the true aim, than in the life spent more largely in contact with the Bible and in pointing souls to the Saviour. Business talent, in general, is not so largely consecrated to God as is preaching talent. Hence the necessity that laymen have line upon line with a view to impressing upon them the importance of the places God has assigned them. As the most obscure workman in a factory may impair the completed product by remissness, so the humblest disciple of Jesus in the humblest of places diminishes the sum total of blessing to men by reckoning of no account, or little, what has been committed to his hands. Depend upon it, if it is worth while for God to assign a task, it is worth while to execute it with diligence and care. Were we more bent upon doing what we are told, and less given to a comparison of assignments, it would be a deal better for us, for others and for the cause in which we are enlisted. A great man is he who has learned to do what God tells him. Only let his tribe increase, and there is swift movement toward making the land of possession equal to the land of promise.

Some people have discomfort under the frequent appeals from pulpits for funds to carry on the Lord's work. Much depends upon how the appeals are made, and the ground upon which they are made to rest. Much depends also upon the extent to which hearers are devoted to the gospel's spread. When we look upon ourselves and all we have to do with as God's, and upon life as affording one great privilege of helping to recover the lost by the preaching of Christ crucified, we do not grow restive under calls for money, but rather we welcome these as ways of doing what our hearts are set upon. Week day working is worth while in the prospect of Sabbath giving. Incitements to generosity that are rightly founded and rightly managed are not efforts to rob people, as some insinuate, but efforts to prevent people from robbing themselves and others. Pastors cannot tell in us just how we should use funds, how much should go here and how much there, but they may help to such an outlook as will hinder lavish expenditure upon ourselves while a pittance is doled out for benevolent objects. Our danger lies, as we ought well to know, in using the lion's share for our own gratification; and nothing is surer than that selfishness will eventually be found to be loss. It will never do to act simply with thought of the present hour and our own home. Men have sinned, I daresay, in appropriating so largely to missions as to deal unjustly with their families. But usually the sinning is done the other way. And there is no need that it should be done either way. The will of God may be found out and followed. Without living on intimate terms with him there is no such thing as wise procedure.

As far as this church is concerned it is a pleasure to be able to say that during the last conventional year the amount raised by us for denominational purposes has considerably exceeded our allotment. Of course no man, nor men, can tell just what we ought to contribute. The amount will vary somewhat in different years according to temporal prosperity. But it is just to say that the advance made among us has been chiefly due to efforts of the young people,—an encouraging feature, surely, when we recollect that from their ranks the depleted ranks of seniors are to be replenished. It is expected, too, that with the opening of ninety-eight our young people will fall into line as regular contributors toward the Convention Fund. The adoption of systems

will tell very favorably by and by because of the educational effect. Only by the forming of such a habit in early life do we contribute easily and according to prosperity. As well expect growth in grace apart from the Bible and prayer, as without taking gospel claims into account in disbursement of funds.

I hope that I am not entirely without sympathy for those who are sometimes troubled under the frequency and urgency of demands upon liberality. And yet a due reflection will make us calm and undisturbed. The various interests that ask for financial support,—personal interests, family interests, church interests, educational interests, missionary interests, philanthropic interests,—do not themselves clash with one another. The persons who represent these separate matters may be in conflict. One man, for instance, pleads for the support of his own particular church, to the forgetfulness of larger concerns. The Foreign Mission advocate is pitted against the Home Mission agent. But the various divisions of the one cause are not themselves in contention. Rather does the highest good of the one all embracing enterprise require that in each section of God's great workshop,—in the family section and school section, in missionary effort at home and abroad,—due value be given to every individual part, and no one thing allowed to encroach upon the rights of any other. Injustice to any particular portion is loss to the whole. Hence the damage wrought by pleaders who treat the department they stand for as though it were everything. And hence the necessity, not only that we should have an eye upon all these different parts, but that we should maintain that fellowship with Christ which alone can prevent from overdoing in one direction and underdoing in another. God is not a hard Master, although men may at times lead us to think that he is. Duties never conflict although they may be made to appear to do so. The Lord withhold us from impairing the general weal by an excess which ignores related interests.

It helps not only to placidity but to increase of happiness and usefulness to get into the way of looking upon multiplied appeals as evidences that our prayers for the coming of God's Kingdom are being answered. With the hearing of prayer we are summoned to larger endeavor. Petition-making involves expense to ourselves; and where there is aversion to outlay, after prayers are put up, there has been nothing more than the mouthing of words. If it is understood that "there is yet very much land to be possessed," and there is a consuming desire to march on and take it in the name of the Lord, there will not only be strong crying to Jehovah to grant the extended dominion which is promised, but joy in the use of anything and everything at our disposal for enlargement of present boundaries.

With up-turned gaze we daily say, "Thy Kingdom come." Now let us, while we think for a few minutes of some things which seek for our support, keep in mind that these calls are coming in response to our entreaties. In them God is bidding us unite with him in the accomplishment of his beneficent designs. He is going on before us and commanding us to follow after in the bringing of new territory under the sway of love. And only as he is submitted to, and sacrifices are made for the spiritual enrichment of others can we know prosperity within our own borders. The broader our sympathies the greater our local gain.

A few persons are yet found, here and there, who lack sympathy with efforts for the conversion of the heathen. (The Lord be praised that they are getting delightfully scarce!) Let us provide for the perishing near by, they say. Very well, then, let these come forward and meet their obligations to the neighbors for whose welfare they claim such deep concern. The destitution on our Home Mission fields can accommodate them. No one proposes to hinder their lavish outlay for local improvement. All in this congregation will unite, therefore, in making the desert places of Halifax county to blossom as the rose. A few miles beyond Halifax a comfortable school house has recently been erected, and a school has just been opened. For fourteen years there has been no school in that region, quite a discredit to the thing to this church-studded city. We are glad that through our own District Committee this tardy justice has been done our dusky brethren, although people of all phases of religion have shared in the financial burden. If a work like this commends itself to any hearer who has not as yet done anything toward that building, the opportunity of helping has not passed since there is a little debt remaining.

But another boon for Halifax County is contemplated by this same committee. We speak of this, out of the much that might well occupy us in connection with numerous Home Mission fields, because it has been before some of us during the past week. Whether the thing hoped for is to be realized remains to be seen; but it may well be mentioned here as a possible opportunity, so that if it comes we may be somewhat prepared for the meeting of a privilege. In the city we regularly enjoy the services of God's house. Indeed our advantages are so many that we are liable to put small value upon them. But many residents of the county outside have few religious advantages. The Sabbath pass without affording them much for the nourishing of their souls. Now it is proposed that the Baptists secure a county Missionary who shall devote all his time to going about in these more needy parts. Through him the Committee meeting in the city can do something worth while. He will be our arm, as it were, to reach out for the assisting of the less favored; and their arm to reach in to us and obtain what we may have to bestow. The city churches are recruited considerably from these same sparsely settled districts, and by means of the Missionary those coming to the city to reside will more readily, and in larger numbers, be brought into active Christian work. In the support of this man, the Home Mission Board, the city churches, and the communities ministered to, are expected to unite. Of course it is not supposed that his presence will do away with the need of pastors on any of the separate fields; but rather it is assumed that by his efforts individual churches will be strengthened and, if pastorless, helped to the enjoyment of regular preaching from men adapted to their requirements. It will never do to overlook Halifax County and see India, any more than it will do to see Halifax County and leave India out of view. But suitable concern for the near is usually attended by thought of the far; and thought of the far by solicitude for the near. To get at the mind of God respecting a part, is to be a long way toward knowing his mind touching the whole.

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