

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE BRANCH OF THE LORD

In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. Isaiah 4:2

Moses sent men to spy out the land of Canaan, prior to their entering into it. (see Num.13:17) These men brought back tales of wonder and amazing things which none of them had ever seen before. One of the trophies that they brought back was a cluster of grapes which was so large that it had to be borne on a staff between two men. (see Num.13:23) This was indeed a glorious testimony of the fruitfulness of the land which the LORD had given them. They were overjoyed as they recounted the abundance which was in the land saying, *"We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it."* (Num 13:27)

Yet they also brought back news of giants dwelling in the land and walled cities which struck fear into them, and they testified that it was impossible for the Israelites to conquer the land due to the strength of these inhabitants. Insofar as the power of their flesh was concerned, they had made the proper assessment. The children of Israel did not possess enough skill or weapons to fight against these overwhelming odds. We are not surprised at their evaluation of the situation.

Surely, insofar as the flesh was concerned, Joshua and Caleb, who were part of the spy detail, were speaking foolishly when they encouraged the children of Israel, to go forward and enter the land. *"And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey."* (Num 14:6-8)

Of course, we know that they spoke with a knowledge of the strength and power of the ONE who had given them this land. If GOD be for us who can be against us? They knew that if the LORD had sent them then they could not help but triumph. They had confidence not in themselves or any power which they might possess, but in the GOD of angel armies who would fight for them and conquer any foe that might seek to thwart HIS purpose even as HE told Zechariah. *"This is the word of the LORD ---, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."* (Zech 4:6)

The difference in the assessment of the majority of the spies and that of Joshua and Caleb, was that Joshua and Caleb viewed this situation through the eyes of FAITH. The others considered the likelihood of their failure based upon a reliance upon themselves. Joshua and Caleb were made to differ from the others, not because they were naturally, smarter, more willing, or more courageous, but rather because of the gift of FAITH bestowed upon them by the grace of GOD. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Eph 2:8-9)

It was not the "amount" of FAITH which they had that caused them to believe that they could triumph but rather the OBJECT of that FAITH. Their trust was in HIM who cannot fail to accomplish HIS sovereign purpose in the Earth as it has been decreed in the Heavens. *"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will*

also do it." (Isa 46:9-11) This is the same FAITH which Peter expressed as he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68-69)

The thinking of natural men is always contrary to that Spiritual Truth which is revealed to those who are born again by the SPIRIT of GOD. The flesh can but rely upon the flesh. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6) Only those who have been given Spiritual eyes and ears can see and hear the TRUTH of GOD. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." (Isa 50:4)

The natural man (especially he that is religious) considers that he has the power, will, and ability to seek after GOD and to converse with him whenever he decides to do so. He is sure that GOD can do nothing apart from the acquiescence of the "free will" of men. Thus, he is sure that GOD must depend upon men rather than vice versa. This notion is that which fueled the fear of those spies who were sure that they could not triumph over these giants since they were relying upon their own will and power. Joshua and Caleb on the other hand knew that they had no power at all but understood that HE who rules in the Heavens and upon the Earth had all power. They trusted not in the arm of the flesh but in HIM who had made the promise. FAITH prompted their actions and preceded their readiness to confront these enemies. HIS grace is sufficient in all things.

Joshua and Caleb could never have arrived at this place of willingness except the LORD had first convinced them of their own weakness. Men will not call upon the LORD nor find a place of REFUGE there until such time as they are emptied of all reliance upon themselves. We see this in the case of Job who was a quasi-religious man who most definitely was favored by the LORD as an object of HIS grace. When Job was brought face to face with the LIVING GOD, he confessed his hatred of himself and he eschewed all knowledge which he might heretofore have professed to have. He was made naked before the LORD saying, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6)

The LORD JESUS CHRIST came into the world to save sinners; not the righteous, not those who are able to perform great deeds of "faith" (as men would define it), and certainly not those who think that GOD somehow needs them to do something or waits upon them to seek HIM. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." (Rom 3:10-11) HE is that BALM of GILEAD, that PRESENT HELP in time of trouble, and HE who seeks and saves that which is lost. Only those who have been sought by HIM will ever seek after HIM and HIS righteousness, having been convinced by HIM of their poverty.

HE is the ONE who is that beautiful and glorious BRANCH which is excellent in the sight of those who are in the greatest need of encouragement. Just as that "cluster of grapes" from the Branch in the promised land, HE is most beautiful in the eyes of those who are given FAITH to believe HIS promise. "His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." (Song 5:16) Will HE ever turn one away who longingly looks upon HIM and cries out for mercy from HIS hand? No, a thousand times no, for "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." (Mat 12:20) That man whom HE has humbled before HIM, convincing him of his sin, and the absence of any true righteousness of his own will never be forsaken. "That man who on JESUS hath leaned for repose, HE will not, HE will not desert to his foes."

Jesus, immutably the same, Thou true and living Vine!

Around thy all-supporting stem, My feeble arms I'd twine.

I can do nothing without thee; My strength is wholly thine;

Withered and barren should I be, If severed from the Vine.

Quickened by thee, and kept alive, I'd flourish and bear fruit;

My life I'd from thy sap derive, My vigor from thy root.

Each moment watered by thy care, And fenced with power divine;

Fruit to eternal life would bear, The feeblest branch of thine. (by Toplady, #939 Gadsbys) mam