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HOW THEY ENTERED CANAAN
(A Collection of Holiness Experience Accounts)
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

ELIHU GUNN

I have been the subject of deep religious impressions from the period of my earliest recollections. God gave me a pious and devoted mother, who taught me very early my lost condition as a sinner, and my need of pardoning mercy through the blood of Jesus. My Mother, however, died when I was nine years old; and her loss was to me irreparable. Eternity only can reveal how much I suffered from the want of some one to guide my young feet into the way of life, and holiness, and peace.

My convictions, although frequent and often powerful, uniformly wore away without producing any lasting fruit until I was about twenty-one years old. At that time during the prevalence of a powerful revival of religion, I obtained a hope in Jesus, although it was but a weak and trembling one. This occurred on February 10th, 1839; though I did not make a public profession of religion until nearly a year after. It is no wonder, that, living in disobedience to God, I soon fell into doubts, and, for many months, was often in darkness.

It seems now strange, indeed, that I could have been so ignorant of the way of salvation by faith in a crucified, but living Jesus. After uniting with the Church, however, I enjoyed, perhaps, about the usual Christian experience for many months; sometimes rejoicing in Jesus, and walking in the light of his countenance; and then again plunged in darkness, doubting my adoption, and groaning under the lashes of an accusing conscience.

About two years after my conversion I became interested in the subject of entire sanctification, chiefly through individuals and publications that fell in my way from Oberlin, Ohio. Almost from the very first I had felt, at times, most painfully conscious that there must be some state of spiritual attainment and enjoyment far superior to any thing which I had experienced. My soul went forth in ardent longings for a heart "from sin set free," and a conscience purified in the blood of Jesus; but I had always been taught that such a thing was not possible in this life, and I believed it.

When, however, I became enlightened on the subject, and saw, from the plain, explicit teachings of God's word, that it was my blessed privilege, and, if my privilege, then, of course, my most sacred obligation and duty, to avail myself of the precious provisions of the atonement in this respect, and be cleansed by the blood of Christ from all sin, then at once my mind was placed in a position in which any real enjoyment in religion, or true and lasting peace, became impossible until the attainment should be made.

How could I be at rest, when I was slighting a precious grace which I fully believed the agonies of the dear Saviour in the garden and on the Cross had purchased for me, while I was living below such a blood-bought privilege, and dishonoring Christ, by neglecting so pious and palpable a duty? Others may be able to answer the question satisfactorily to themselves; but, to this day, I never have.

Then and there began a struggle in my soul, which was often more terribly severe than any words can describe, which lasted for twenty years, and never fully ceased until my soul was basking on the shores of deliverance, in the sunshine of full salvation and perfect love.

I met with no individual who enjoyed the blessing to assist me in seeking it; but I had the Bible, and I read the works of Upham, Mahan, and others, and I sought the blessing with great earnestness. But the more I strove to be holy, the more my lusts rose and rebelled. I resolved that I would be free; and yet I could not break the chain that bound me. I resolved over and over again. I wrote my resolutions, and once I wrote them in my own blood; but it was all in vain. Alas! it was all in my own strength. I did not know how to lay hold on Jesus, and let him do for me what no mortal ever did for himself, -- deliver me from my sins. I read the journals which I wrote, -- the record of those dark years of sorrow and struggle, -- soon after I obtained my great deliverance with blank amazement, that I could have been kept so long under the delusions of the devil. "Why did not some one tell me," was my exclamation, "how to trust in Jesus, and be delivered?"

After many months of such fruitless struggles, I at length grew weary and discouraged, and at times nearly gave up the idea that the attainment of perfect love is possible; though I never for one moment lost the conviction, that a high and holy consecration to Jesus, a state of grace far different from any thing I had ever experienced, was eminently practicable, nay, a most solemn duty.

Thus year after year wore away. I passed through a course of study, and entered the ministry. My experience was very various. Sometimes the Saviour was very near and precious, and I rejoiced in His salvation; though more frequently I was in the dark, and almost always dissatisfied with my spiritual state and attainments. What infinite mercy that God did not leave me to go through life in this halting, doubting, complaining, miserable way! It is of His infinite grace and mercy alone that my soul has found deliverance. To Him be all the glory forever! He laid the hand of His Providence upon me.

Different schemes of self-aggrandizement and worldly good which I had formed were frustrated in succession, and I was reduced to great extremities. From comparative wealth I was reduced to poverty. It had been a favorite scheme to fix myself and family in a position comfortable for life; but all these schemes were blasted; and now the question was presented, Will

you forsake all anew for Jesus, and go again into the work of the ministry, submitting cheerfully to all its losses and crosses, and privations and toils? The struggle was severe, but God gave me grace to make the sacrifice. I gave myself to God and His Church anew with all I had or hoped to be.

I entered a new field of labor, and was more happy in the work than ever before. I formed the acquaintances here (for the first time in my life) of a number of dear brethren and sisters, who professed and enjoyed the blessing of entire sanctification. I said, "Now is God's time for me. I will examine this question anew, and become fully satisfied in my own mind as to what is truth on this subject." I read "Faith and its Effects," other good books, and especially, with much earnestness and prayer, the Bible; and I conversed with dear Christian friends, whose kindness towards, and prayers for me, will ever be held in grateful remembrance. I could not remain long in doubt. I said, "This is God's truth: it cannot be gainsaid. The Scripture testimony is conclusive."

Then another decision followed in my own mind, just as clear and just as emphatic. "This blessing is for all. It is for me. By the grace of God, I will have it." I sought it with my whole heart. I sought instruction from the word of God, from good books, and from those who enjoyed the blessing. I obtained a clearer idea than I had ever had before what the blessing is, and how it is to be obtained. I saw that I must simply present my body and spirit a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is my reasonable service; that I must lay my whole self on the altar, Christ, in full faith that the altar sanctifies the gift; that God, simply because He has promised to do so, accepts the offering, and performs the sanctifying work.

But to perform such an act seemed impossible. I could not exercise the faith. Often I struggled to do it; but God, who had wrought these desires in my heart, was not long in performing the work. To His name be all the glory!

Monday, June 9, 1862, memorable day in the calendar of my being, I had observed as a day of fasting and prayer. I felt happy, I felt sure of the blessing ere long, because God had promised it.

I came into my room at night, having spent the afternoon in pastoral visiting, and immediately kneeled down to pray. I seemed at once to be wrought upon by some power out of myself to make then and there that full surrender of myself to God. The whisper of unbelief was, "I cannot do it." But it was at once suggested, "It must be done some time; why not now?" And so, almost before I was aware of it, my soul was struggling in the mighty effort to make then and there a vow of consecration to God, which should include my whole being, and which should be irrevocable and eternal. I thought, I will write this vow in my journal; and I seized my pen for that purpose, when a passage of Scripture came flashing into my mind. I found it by the help of my concordance (I shall never want a concordance to find it again), and read, "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who, of God, is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." I read it over and over with amazement. Can it be, I said, that I have read this over so many times, and never saw what was in it before! Why, if Jesus is all these things to me, then surely He is every thing. He is all in all; all I need, all I want; and I could have shouted His praise aloud. I felt that truly I had found what I had so long been seeking for; that my soul was clear across the Jordan, and in the Canaan of rest. Peace flowed into my soul like a river,--peace which nothing could disturb. It was indeed a glorious change. Often did I repeat to myself and other,

"Praise the Lord! I am in a new world. Old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." Preaching was a new work to me, and has been, blessed be God, ever since. So of pastoral visiting, and so of laboring to bring souls to Jesus.

It is now almost three years since these things transpired; but they are still fresh in my memory as if it were but yesterday; and, although I have often come very far short, and, sometimes, through neglect to testify to the great work of God in my soul, almost cast away my confidence, and been brought into much difficulty, and my buffetings of Satan, yet I have ever found Jesus faithful to all His promises; and today, by His grace alone, I can say that His blood cleanseth from all sin. My confidence in Him is stronger than ever. My vows are all renewed, and my sacrifice is lying upon the altar, by the grace of God, never to be removed.

Source: "Pioneer Experiences" Edited by Phoebe Palmer

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THE END