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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

WILLIAM HUNTER
(1728 -- 1797)

From a letter by William Hunter written to John Wesley, August 29, 1779:

Concerning the account I gave you at London, as I writ it in haste, I believe it is very imperfect: several things have occurred to my mind since which I should have put in if I had then remembered them.

As touching that greater salvation, being saved from inbred sin, I shall simply relate what I know of the dealings of God with me in this respect.

For some time after I knew the goodness of God to my soul, I was very happy; I sung in His ways for joy of heart, and His consolations were not small in me. I thought, indeed, I should learn war no more. It was then

I rode on the sky,
Freely justified I,
Nor envied Elijah his seat;
My soul mounted higher
In a chariot of fire,
And the moon it was under my feet.

Jesus all the day long Was my joy and my song;
O that all His salvation may see!
He hath loved me, I cried,
He hath suffered and died,
To redeem such a rebel as me.

But afterward it pleased Infinite Wisdom to open a new scene to me. I began to be exercised with many uncommon temptations, and felt my own heart ready to comply with the same:

this brought me into great straits, and I began to call in question the work of grace in my soul. Oh the pain and anguish I felt for weeks together! Yet all this while I was very earnest with the Lord, my soul clave to Him, and I often said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Under this exercise I learned several things. As, first, that my nature was not so much changed as I thought: I found many things in me which opposed the grace of God; so that, without continual watching and prayer, I was capable of committing the very same sins which I had been guilty of before. (2) I began to be more acquainted with Satan's devices, and found power from God to resist them. (3) I had very affecting views of Christ as my great High-Priest, who was touched with a feeling of all my infirmities. (4) The Scriptures were precious to me, and I found great comfort in reading them. And, lastly, I was conscious of the need of a far greater change in my nature than I had yet experienced. But I then read mostly the Calvinists' writings, who all write that sin must be in believers till death; yet I found my mind at times deeply engaged in prayer to be saved from all sin.

Thus went on for a long time, sometimes up and sometimes down, till it pleased God to bring me to hear you at Newcastle. You preached, I well remember, from the First Epistle of John, i.9: 'If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' This was a precious time to me. While you were preaching, a divine light shone in upon my heart with the word, and I was clearly convinced of the doctrine of sanctification, and the attainableness of it. I came home with full purpose of heart not to rest till I was made a living witness of it. I had now a clear view (1) Of the holiness of God; and saw that sin could not dwell with Him. (2) I had a clear view of the purity and perfection of His law, which is a transcript of the divine nature. And (3) I felt my great unlikeness to both; and, although I felt no condemnation, yet, in the view of these things, I felt much pain in my spirit, and my soul was humbled in the dust before Him! Oh how I longed to be made like Him; to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength! I had glorious discoveries of the grand provision made in the new covenant for the complete salvation of the soul; and I went on in joyful expectation, crying to the Lord to put me in possession of all He had purchased for me, and promised to me. Sometimes I seemed to be upon the threshold, just stepping into glorious liberty; but again fear and unbelief prevailed, and I started back. This cast my mind into great perplexity, and I often reasoned concerning the truth of the thing.

It would be tedious to relate the various exercises I went through for several years, without opening my mind to any one. I do not remember that I ever conversed with one upon the subject, or ever heard any one discourse upon it. Only, I think, about eighteen years ago, it pleased God that I heard Mr. Olivers preach a sermon upon the subject. His text was, 'Let us go on unto perfection.' His doctrine was clear and his arguments strong.

My heart consented to the whole truth, and I had clearer views of the way of attaining it, namely, by faith, than ever before. This added new vigour to my spirit, and I seemed to be more on the wing than ever. I prayed and wept at His footstool, that He would show me all His salvation. And He gave me to experience such a measure of His grace as I never knew before; a great measure of heavenly light and divine power spread through all my soul; I found unbelief taken away out of my heart; my soul was filled with such faith as I never felt before; my love to Christ was like fire, and I had such views of Him, as my life, my portion, my all, as swallowed me up;

and oh how I longed to be with Him! A change passed upon all the powers of my soul, and I felt a great increase of holy and heavenly tempers. I may say, with humility, it was as though I was emptied of all evil, and filled with heaven and God.

Thus, under the influence of His power and grace, I rode upon the sky. My soul fed on angels' food, and I truly ate the bread of heaven. I had more glorious discoveries than ever of the gospel of God our Saviour, and especially in His saving the soul from all sin. I enjoyed such an evidence of this in my own mind as put me beyond all doubt; and yet I never had such a sense of my own littleness, helplessness, and unworthiness as now. So true it is that only grace can humble the soul.

From the time the Lord gave me to experience this grace, I became an advocate for the glorious doctrine of Christian perfection; according to the gift He has been pleased to give me, I bear a testimony of it wherever I go; and I never find my soul so happy as when I preach most upon the blessed subject.

Thus I have simply related what I know of the work of God in my heart. I desire to give Him all the glory. But I have great cause to be ashamed before him for my own unfaithfulness. I feel I need his grace every moment: I stand by faith: I have as much need of Christ as ever; I may truly say,--

Every moment, Lord, I want
The merit of thy death.

Glory be to his name, I find my soul united to him, and my heart cries, None but Christ! I am kept by his power: I enjoy salvation: my heart is fixed, my anchor is sure and steadfast: I believe nothing shall separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

I conclude with saying, though the whole of our salvation is from the Lord, yet he deals with us as rational creatures. He gives us light and conviction of our lost state; then the heart is humbled, and the soul bows before him. He then speaks peace. This is done in a moment, and faith in the soul is the instrumental root of all Christian holiness. Thus the work of sanctification is begun in the heart, and the person is in a capacity of living to God, and growing in grace. If he finds us faithful in a little, he shows us there is a state of greater liberty provided for us. The soul being open to the Divine teaching, he shows us our want of this. We seek it with our whole heart, and he is pleased to put us in possession of it. This too is generally given in a moment, and perfectly frees the mind from all evil tempers, and enables us to "love the Lord with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves." Being thus perfected in love, we are much more qualified to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, than ever. O precious salvation! let me ever be a witness of it! W. H.

Source: "The EXPERIENCE of several eminent Methodist Preachers with an account of their Call to and Success in the Ministry in a series of letters written by themselves to the Rev. John Wesley" J. Collard, Printer, New York 1837

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