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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

ALEXANDER MATHER
1733 -- 1801
(Methodist)

After reading and considering the foregoing [the first account sent by Alexander Mather to John Wesley] account I observed to Mr. Mather that he had wholly omitted one considerable branch of his experience, touching what is properly termed, The great salvation. He wrote me a full and particular answer, the substance of which I have subjoined. -- John Wesley

I answer, 1. With regard to the time and place, it was at Rotherham, in the year 1757 ... What I had experienced in my own soul was an instantaneous deliverance from all those wrong tempers and affections which I had long and sensibly groaned under; an entire disengagement from every creature, with an entire devotedness to God; and from that moment I found an unspeakable pleasure doing the will of God in all things. I had also a power to do it, and the constant approbation both of my own conscience and of God. I had simplicity of heart, and a single eye to God, at all times and in all places, with such a fervent zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls as swallowed up every other care and consideration. Above all, I had uninterrupted communion with God, whether sleeping or waking ... May it never be retarded, but press into the glorious liberty which is equally free for all the sons of God.

"As to the manner wherein this work was wrought, 1. After I was clearly justified, I was soon made sensible of my want of it. For although I was enabled to be very circumspect, and had a continual power over outward and inward sin, yet I felt in me what I knew was contrary to the mind which was in Christ, and what hindered me from enjoying and glorifying him, as I saw it was the privilege of a child of God to do. And such I knew myself to be; both from the fruit and the witness of his Spirit, which I felt in a strong degree, supporting me in conflicts of a very close and particular nature. 2. My conviction of the need of a farther change was abundantly increased by the searching preaching of Mr. Walsh, of blessed memory. This kept my conscience very tender, even to a degree of scrupulosity; and helped me to be much in private prayer, and kept me watching thereunto. 3. When I saw my call to preach, the difficulties attending that office showed me more and more the need of such a change, that I might bear all things: and by searching the Scriptures I

saw the possibility of it more clearly, and was stirred up to seek it more earnestly. 4. When I began travelling I had, no end, aim, or design, but to spend and be spent for God: not counting my life, or any thing dear, so I might finish my course with joy, which indeed I expected would be very short as " I dealt my life at ever blow." I saw as clearly as I do now, that nothing furthers that end so much as a heart and life wholly devoted to God.

This made me neglect the advantage I had in my youth, of a tolerable acquaintance with Latin, which I could easily have recovered; but this and every other gain I counted but loss, that I might win that intimacy with God which I still think to be the life of preaching. Therefore I husbanded all the time that I could save from company, from eating, or sleeping, to lay out in wrestling with God for myself and the flock: so I devoted to God some part of every leisure hour, over and above the hour from eleven to twelve in the forenoon, and from four to five in the afternoon. Herein I was sweetly drawn after God, and had many and large views of that salvation which I wanted, and which he had provided in his Son. The exceeding great and precious promises were clearly opened to me. And having a full assurance of the power and faithfulness of the promiser, my soul often tasted of their sweetness. And, though unbelief prevented my immediate possession, yet I had a blessed foretaste of them. This made me desire the full enjoyment more and more. I abhorred whatever seemed to keep me from it. I sought out every obstruction. I was willing to offer up every Isaac, and inflamed with great ardour in wrestling with God; determined not to let him go till he had emptied me of all sin and filled me with himself.

This I believe he did when I ventured upon Jesus as sufficient to save to the uttermost. He wrought in me what I cannot express; what I judge it is impossible to utter. Yet I was not long without reasoning; not concerning the work; of this I was absolutely sure; but whether such and such things as I soon discovered in myself were consistent with it. And this had its use, as it qualified me to advise others, who, though saved from sin, were tried in the same way.

Upon this head I consulted Mr. Walsh, and his advice helped me in some degree. But God helped me much more in private prayer: herein I was clearly satisfied, 1. That deliverance from sin does not imply deliverance from human infirmities. 2. That neither is it inconsistent with feeling our natural appetites, or with the regular gratification of them: and 3. That salvation from sin is not inconsistent with temptations of various kinds. And all this you have clearly and fully declared in the Plain Account of Christian Perfection.

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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