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

Vol. I -- Named Accounts

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(Congregational)

In the spring of 1815, in connection with a remarkable revival which took place in Dartmouth College, I suppose that I experienced religion. About three years afterward I made a profession of religion in the Congregational Church.

Accordingly, I have been a public professor of religion ever since that time. During the greater part of that long period I believe that I have striven earnestly for high religious attainments. For various reasons, however, and particularly the discouraging influence of the prevalent doctrine that personal sanctification cannot fully take place till death, I did not permanently attain the object of my desires. Sometimes, it is true, I advanced much, and then again was thrown back, living what may be called the common Christian life of sinning and repenting, of alternate walking with God and devotedness to the world.

This method of living was highly unsatisfactory to me, as it has often been to others. It seemed exceedingly dangerous to risk my soul in eternity in such a state as this. In this state of mind I was led, early in the summer of 1839, by a series of special providences which it is here unnecessary to detail, to examine the subject of personal holiness as a matter of personal realization. I examined the subject, as I thought, prayerfully, candidly, and faithfully looking at the various objections as well as the multiplied evidences and came, ultimately, to the undoubting conclusion that God required me to be holy, that He had made provision for it, and that it was both my duty and privilege to be so. The establishment of my belief in this great doctrine was followed by a number of pleasing and important results.

1. As soon as I had become established in the belief of present holiness I felt a great increase of obligation to be holy. Many secret excuses for sin, which had formerly paralyzed my efforts, now lost their power. The logic in the case was very simple. God requires me to be holy now, and as He can require nothing unreasonable I am under obligation to be holy now. I could not turn to the right hand nor to the left. I knew instinctively and most certainly that God did not and could not require impossibilities. I considered His command as involving an implied promise to

help me to fulfill it. I felt, moreover, that every moment's delay was adding transgression to transgression, and was exceedingly offensive in the sight of God.

Accordingly, within a very few days after rejecting the common doctrine that sanctification is fully attainable only in the article of death, and receiving the doctrine of the possibility and duty of present holiness, I consecrated myself to God body and spirit, deliberately, voluntarily, and forever. I had communicated my purpose to no human being. There was nothing said; nothing written. It was a simple volition; a calm and unchangeable resolution of mind; a purpose silently but irrevocably made, and such as any Christian is capable of making. But, simple as it was, I regard it as a crisis in my moral being which has, perhaps, affected my eternal destiny. I acknowledge that I took this important step in comparative darkness, that is to say, clouds were round about me, and I went by faith rather than by sight; but I had an unwavering confidence in God, that He would in His own time and way carry me through and give me the victory.

This important decision was made in the summer of 1839, and about the middle of July. Two almost immediate and marked results followed this act of consecration. The one was an immediate removal of that sense of condemnation which had followed me for many years and had filled my mind with sorrow. The other result, which also almost immediately followed, was a great increased value and love of the Bible. It required no great effort of reasoning to perceive that, in doing the whole will of God which had become the fixed purpose of my life, I must take the Bible for my guide. As I opened and read its pages from day to day, its great truths disclosed themselves to my mind with an impressiveness and beauty unknown before. And this result, independently of the aid implied in the biblical promise that they who do the will of God shall understand His communication, was what might have naturally and reasonably been expected.

Before this time, reading everywhere my own condemnation, I had insensibly but voluntarily closed my eyes to the doctrine of present holiness which shines forth so brightly and continually from the sacred pages. But now I found holiness everywhere, and I felt that I began to love it.

2. I now proceed to mention some other changes of mind which I soon passed through. In December of this year, 1839, I visited the city of New York on business which brought me into communication with certain persons who belonged to the Methodist denomination. I was providentially led to form an acquaintance with other pious Methodists, and was exceedingly happy in attending a number of meetings which had exclusive reference to the doctrine of holiness and to personal holy experience. In these meetings I took the liberty, although comparatively a stranger, to profess myself a believer in the doctrine of holiness and a seeker after it. And I found myself greatly encouraged and aided by the judicious remarks, the prayers and the sympathies of a number of beloved Christian friends.

As I now perceive, the great difficulty at this time in the way of my victorious progress was my ignorance of the important principle that sanctification, as well as justification, is by faith. By consecrating myself to God I had put myself into a favorable condition to exercise faith; but I had never understood and felt the imperative necessity of this exercise, namely of faith as a sanctifying instrumentality. My Methodist friends, to whom this view was familiar, gave me, in the spirit of Christian kindness, much instruction and assistance here, for which I desire to be grateful

to them. I found that I must give up the system, already to long cherished, of walking by signs and manifestations and sensible experiences, and must commit everything, in light and in darkness, in joy and in sorrow, into the hands of God.

Realizing, accordingly, that I must have greater faith in God as the fulfiller of His promises and as the pledged and everlasting portion of those who put their trust in Him, and aided by the kindness and supplications of Christian friends, I in some degree (and perhaps I may say in a very considerable degree) gained the victory. I shall ever recollect the time. It was early on Friday morning, the 27th of December. The evening previous had been spent in deeply interesting conversation; and in prayer on the subject of holiness, and with particular reference to myself. Soon after I awoke in the morning I found that my mind, without having experienced any very remarkable manifestations or ecstasies, had, nevertheless, undergone a great moral revolution. I was removed from the condition of a servant and adopted into that of a son. I believed and felt, in a sense which I had never experienced before, that my sins were blotted out, were wholly forgiven, and that Christ was not only the Saviour of mankind in general, but my Christ, my Saviour in particular, and that God was my Father. As I have observed, I had no ecstasy, but great and abiding peace and consolation.

3. I mark here another step in the process of this important contest. Under the influence of the feelings which I have just described I consecrated myself anew to God in a more specific and solemn manner. I now made a written record of my consecration, which I had not done before. But, while it seemed to me that I sincerely endeavored to give up all, I was unable as yet, in consequence, probably, of some lingering remains of unbelief, or because God in His wise sovereignty was pleased to try a little longer the faith which He had given me, to speak confidently of my sanctification.

I would take the liberty to say here that I do not consider consecration and sanctification the same thing. Consecration is the incipient, the prerequisite act. It is the laying of ourselves upon the altar; but it is not till God has accepted the sacrifice, and wrought upon us by the consuming and restoring work of the Holy Spirit, that we can be said to be sanctified. It is true that the one may immediately and almost simultaneously follow the other; and this will be the case where faith in God is perfect. But this was not the case with me. But I was now, however, by the grace of God, in a position where I had new strength, and could plead the promise with much greater confidence than formerly. God had given me great blessings, such as a new sense of forgiveness, increased love, a clear evidence of adoption and worship, closer and deeper communion with Himself, but I felt there was something remaining to be experienced.

In this state of mind, not having fully attained the object of my expectations and wishes, but still greatly in advance of my former Christian experience, and with a fixed determination to persevere, I left the city of New York about the middle of January, 1840. Immediately after my arrival at my residence, in the State of Maine, I united with some Methodist brethren in establishing a meeting similar to those which had benefited me so much in New York, for the purpose of prompting personal godliness, and which was designed to be open to persons of all denominations of Christians. This meeting was very encouraging to me and to others. Nevertheless, I was not able for about two weeks to profess the personal experience and realization of the great blessing of holiness as it seemed to be experienced and realized in others.

The principal difficulty, as I daily examined my heart to see how the case stood between my soul and God, seemed to be a consciousness, while other evils were greatly or entirely removed, of the remains of selfishness. Indeed, at this particular time the selfish principle, or rather the principle of self-love, in its inordinate and unholy exercise, seemed to be stimulated to unwonted activity. The remains of every form of internal opposition to God appeared to be centered in one point and to be prosecuted in one aspect. I do not mean to say that I was more selfish at this time than ever before; by no means. But the existence and horrible nature of this state of mind were more fully brought to view. I took this encouragement, however: that God was perhaps now showing me, as He often does when He is about to bless with entire holiness of heart, the very root of evil; and I was sincerely desirous to see it and to know it, that it might be slain in His presence.

The good hand of the Lord was pleased to sustain my faith in this sharp contest. My continual prayer to God was that He would enable me to love Him with all my heart. I knew not fully what the nature of perfect love was; but my prayer was that this love, whatever might be its nature and its inward manifestation, might in God's time and way be realized within me. And in the answer to this prayer, whenever it should be given, I confidently foresaw the termination of this internal conflict: for selfishness can never exist in union with perfect love.

On Sabbath evening, the 2nd of February, I was greatly afflicted in mind; tossed to and fro as in a tempest; and it seemed to me that I could not easily stand where I was but must either advance or retreat. But God's grace was sufficient. My faith remained unshaken, and on Monday morning I thought I could say with great calmness and assurance, "Thou hast given me the victory." I was never able before that time to say with sincerity and confidence that I loved my heavenly Father with all my soul and with all my strength. But, aided by divine grace, I have been enabled to use this language, which involves, as I understand it, the true idea of Christian perfection or holiness, both then and ever since. There was no intellectual excitement, no very marked joy, when I reached this great rock of practical salvation. The soul seemed to have gathered strength from the storm which it had passed through on the previous night, and aided by a power from on high, it leaped forward, as it were by a bound, to the great and decisive mark. I was distinctly conscious when I reached it. The selfish exercises which had recently, and, as it were, by a concentrated and spasmodic effort, troubled me so much seemed to be at once removed; and I believed, and had reason to believe, that my heart, presumptuous as it may appear to some to say it, was now purified by the Holy Spirit and made right with God. I was thus, if I was not mistaken in my feeling, no longer an offering to the world, but sanctified unto the Lord, given to Him to be His, and no longer my own; redeemed by a mighty power, and filled with the blessing of "perfect love."

4. The enemy might now be said to be cast out of the interior of the castle. Nevertheless, he has never ceased his hostility. He has laid his snares and presented his temptations. It would be presumption to assert positively that I had never in any case, nor for any length of time, yielded to his power. But I can testify abundantly to the goodness of God's grace, that He has heard the voice of my prayer and in a wonderful manner preserved me. Certain it is that my spiritual life has been a new life. There is calm sunshine upon the soul. The praise of God is continually upon my lips. I have continually what seems to me to be the witness of the Holy Spirit that is to say, I have a firm and abiding conviction that I am wholly the Lord's, which does not seem to be introduced into the

mind by reckoning nor by any methods whatever of forced and self-made reflection, and which I can ascribe only to the Spirit of God. It is a sort of interior voice, which speaks silently but effectively to the soul and bids me be of good cheer.

At times, especially on the 14th of February, 1840, I experienced some remarkable operations on my mind, which made a profound and lasting impression. Language would be but a feeble instrument in detailing them, and I will not attempt it. Indeed, I do not know but I must say with the apostle, "whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell." But in view of what I then experienced and have experienced at other times I cannot help saying with the apostle, "God hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

I could speak of many remarkable deliverances and supports in time of mental trial. God has ever been with me, in time of trouble, a "faithful God." But these, and many other things which have called forth the deep gratitude of my heart, I am compelled to omit. I cannot refrain from saying, however, that almost from the very moment of my obtaining the victory over those selfish feelings which have been spoken of, I was distinctly conscious; of a new but powerful and delightful attraction toward the divine mind. This, I believe, is a common form of interior experience among those who have enjoyed the blessing of sanctification. I perceived and felt very distinctly that there was a central existence, full of all glory, toward which the Spirit was tending. I could realize the meaning of the Psalmist, "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." I felt like an imprisoned bird when the string is cut that bound it to the earth, and which soars upward and spreads its wings to the skies. So conscious have I been that inordinate self-love has been the great cause of the separation between my soul and God that the very idea of self as distinct from God is almost painful to me. When self is destroyed, the divine union, which sanctified hearts only know, takes place.

If I know anything I know most certainly that the resting place of my soul is and must be in the infinite mind; that it is not and cannot be anywhere else. Perhaps no part of the Scriptures, during the more recent periods of my experience, has more affected me than the prayer of the Saviour for His disciples "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

It is difficult for me to conceive of any heaven but God's presence, of any hell but His absence. I realize that the cup of my happiness is full, whatever may be my personal trials and sorrows, whenever and wherever my heavenly Father is glorified in me. Accordingly it is my earnest and constant prayer that my will may be wholly and forever lost in the will of God, and that I may never know self any more except as the instrument of divine glory.

Source: "Forty Witnesses" by Rev. S. Olin Garrison

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