

The Graves at the Gateway

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of death to self and sin in order to enter into a deeper spiritual life through the death of Christ.

Scripture: Joshua 1:2, Matthew 16:24, John 12:24, Romans 6:11, Romans 8:13, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 3:3, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Death To Self"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the necessity of death in the journey to spiritual life, using the deaths of Moses, self, and Joshua as pivotal moments that lead to a higher existence in Christ. He explains that Moses' death symbolizes the end of the law and human effort, while crossing the Jordan represents a deeper death to self and sin, essential for true sanctification. The sermon illustrates that true life comes through surrendering to God, and that this process is often difficult yet vital for spiritual growth. Simpson encourages believers to recognize their inability to achieve sanctification through works and to rely on Christ's power for transformation. Ultimately, he calls for a complete surrender to Christ, allowing Him to lead and guide in the journey of faith.

Transcript

"Moses, My servant, is dead; now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel." (Josh. 1: 2.)

We have looked at the land, now let us look at the gateway. It leads past four solemn graves. Through death we enter into this higher life, and the deeper the death the higher the life will be. There is no principle so profound and so prominent in the plan of redemption as this principle of life through death. Indeed, we find it deeply written in the records of nature. The generations that live today are treading on the dust of former generations. The very plants on which animal and human life is sustained are the outgrowth of death, and they have sprung from the ashes of myriads of beings that once themselves were living creatures.

"Life evermore is fed by death,

And joy by agony:

And that a rose might breathe its breath,

Something must die."

Spring itself, with all its glory, comes from the grave of winter; the waving harvests grow from buried seeds, and the corn and wheat must die before they bear their fruit of golden grain.

TYPES OF DEATH

The rite of circumcision, which was the initiatory ceremony of Judaism, is the symbol of death -- the death of our natural life. Baptism has its chief significance in the same idea. All these symbols find their fulfilment in the cross of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of redemption and the eternal memorial of life through death and salvation by suffering and sacrifice. The profoundest truths connected with our deeper spiritual life are associated with this idea of death. And so, in introducing the subject of sanctification, in the sixth chapter of Romans, the Apostle teaches us that we must enter into union with the death of Christ, and thus into His resurrection life "reckoning ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

And so, again, in Colossians, we are represented as dead with Christ, and risen again with Him, by virtue of His resurrection from the dead. It is all summed up in these pregnant words: "I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ within me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2: 20.)

This is the truth that lies back of the vivid symbolism of the Book of Joshua. The Land of Promise, the great type of our full inheritance with Christ, was entered by the gateway of the grave. Four graves stand out before us in these opening chapters. First,

THE GRAVE OF MOSES

"Moses, My servant, is dead; therefore arise, you and all this people, and go over this Jordan."

The death of Moses has something very touching about it. Many of us have wept over that lonely grave on the heights of Nebo, and wondered why it should have been necessary for that brave, true heart to sink on the very threshold of his most glorious hopes. And yet the death of Moses was essential to our higher life, for Moses never could lead Israel into the land of promise. This was something that Joshua alone could bring about. Moses represented the law, and "the law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did." Moses represents human effort, and the best that man can do, and man's best can never bring us into the land of victory over sin, and full obedience to God. Therefore, Moses must break his own law and sink under its condemning blow, to prove forever to the world that all man's efforts are vain to sanctify the soul. And so in every individual life there must come a point where we pass out from under the law, and it becomes true -- "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace."

There are thousands in the Church of Christ who fully believe in salvation by Christ, but they are struggling after sanctification by works. It is as impossible for man to purify his heart as it is to cancel the judgment of God against his sins; and so God has to let us strive and struggle chiefly that we may find out our own inability, and give up the struggle for the better way of Christ and His divine and complete salvation.

Sanctification is the obtainment of grace, not the attainment of effort. True, it involves the most strenuous and mighty energy on our part, but it is all the divine fruit of God's working in us "to will and to do of His good pleasure," and we pass out of our works into His working, and from henceforth say: "Whereunto I

also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me mightily." But there is a deeper death signified by the river Jordan.

THE GRAVE OF SELF AND SIN

"Now, therefore, arise and go over this Jordan."

We know that Jordan is the symbol of death and judgment, and the crossing of the Jordan is the symbol of our partnership with the Lord Jesus Christ in that deeper death to self and sin of which the New Testament speaks so fully.

Some very suggestive things are brought out by the detailed account given in these opening chapters of the passage of the Jordan by the children of Israel.

1. We notice that it was a very definite act.

They came up to a real river; they stepped in and passed over; they knew when they crossed it, and they knew that they were on the other side. And so this experience in our life must be very definite. We cannot glide into it, we cannot grow into it; we come to a point where we take a definite step that can never be undone, and can never be done over again. This is not a great marsh that spreads over leagues and miles, and in which we wade along indefinitely for half a lifetime; but it is a real river, which there is no mistaking. There is a moment in every consecrated life when we come to the fords of this Jordan, when we pass sentence of death upon ourselves, and by one blow, by one definite act, forever pass out of ourselves into Christ and His fulness; and from that time our Christian life is as different from its former era as that was different from the time prior to our conversion.

2. It was difficult, as well as definite.

We are told that when they crossed the Jordan the river overflowed all its banks, for it was the time of harvest; and it is always flood-time when God calls us into the experience of death. The thing He asks you to do is the most difficult thing He could ask of you, and the time is usually the hardest time when it could happen. When God aims a deathblow at us, He aims at the heart, and His aim is so true and sure that He never wants to repeat the blow. When man tries to crucify himself, he always manages to escape a vital point; but when God undertakes the work He chooses the thing which is the very key to the situation, and requires the sacrifice in which all your life is most intensely bound up. It is your Isaac that He demands; it is your life He seeks; and if you are wise you will let Him have it promptly and unreservedly, and by one decisive and final act be done with the agony.

3. It is possible only through divine enabling.

You cannot put yourself to death; God alone can accomplish this work. You are just as unequal to the death as you are to the life. You can mutilate yourself, you can tantalize yourself, you can deny yourself a thousand things, but you cannot slay your sinful self. God must do that. And soon we read in Romans 8:13, "If you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." It must be through the Spirit. And again the Apostle says, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, as I unto the world."

No one but Christ can crucify you. You cannot die alone, but must fall into the arms of Jesus, and hang with Him upon His cross, and let Him love your sinful soul to death.

Now, this is all set forth in the symbolism of Jordan. The people could not enter Jordan until the ark -- which is ever the type of Christ -- had preceded them, and it had to remain in the bed of the Jordan until they had all completely passed over, and then to follow up and finish the work which it had begun.

Jesus must lead us into the waters of death; He must stand with us through them, and must bring us out on the other side. We are helpless to perform any act of self-surrender or true consecration except by Him. We can pass sentence of death upon ourselves, we can yield up ourselves to the deathblow, but He must strike that blow, and we must trust Him to do it.

4. It must be an act of faith.

The symbolism here is very fine. They had to step down to the very edge of the flood; their feet had to touch the cold waters, and it was not until they were dipped into the brim, that the waters divided and the way appeared. And so our self-surrender must be right up to the edge of death itself; we must go forward until there is no way apparent, and God will not interpose until the very last hour, and then, as we march on right boldly, the sea will divide, and a way will be prepared, even in the midst of the flood, for our feet to walk upon the dry ground.

5. It must be a very thorough work.

We read that "the priests stood in the midst of the Jordan, until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people." (Josh. 4:10.)

The people were no doubt very anxious to go over quickly. It was an awful journey; it was a terrific pathway; it was a trying hour; but right here, in the midst of the flood, they must stand unmoved, and listen to all God had to say -- how long we know not, but long enough to accomplish a thorough and everlasting work.

We are in too great hurry to get through our transactions with God. The Holy Ghost will do thorough work if we will let Him. When God lays you low at His feet He wants you to listen to Him. There are things you can hear in the valley of the shadow of death that never can come to you again, and His word is, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time." This is a place that you can never come to again; let nothing be wanting to its completeness. Let your heart answer back, "I will hear what God, the Lord, will speak"; and the echoes of those messages will come back to you amid the hallelujahs of His coming.

6. Again, it was an enduring act.

They brought up from the bed of Jordan memorial stones, and they planted them on the other shore as a memorial of that crossing, so that it could never be forgotten. And so, God wants us to remember this hour, and to be established in this experience forever. He wants you to be dead, and to know it, and so He uses the strongest figure of arithmetic when He says "Reckon yourselves to be dead" -- reckon by a process which admits of no evasion -- "indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

THE GRAVE AT GILGAL

Next, we come to the third grave. It is the grave at Gilgal, which is the place where they were to be circumcised after they had crossed the Jordan. But why is this added symbol here introduced? Is it intended to emphasize especially the death of the flesh, and its affections and passions, as one of the

things we need most carefully to watch? Or has it some broader and larger significance? Undoubtedly it does mean that we should be very sure that our self-crucifixion reaches to our natural life, and lays our tenderest affections and all our appetites and propensities at the feet of Jesus for His filling and consecration.

But it means more than this. The crossing of Jordan expresses the faith side of our dying; the circumcision at Gilgal, the experimental side. Jordan teaches us how to reckon ourselves dead, but Gilgal teaches us how to realize the dying in actual life.

Surely we all have learned the difference between these two things. There is a day in our spiritual life when we yield ourselves up unto God, and pass the sentence of death upon ourselves, and register it in heaven, and begin to reckon ourselves "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God." And there is another day when we step out into the battle of life, and find our old self, at the first temptation, rising up in all the strength of self-assertion, and refusing to be reckoned dead. Then it is that Gilgal comes in, and as we come face to face with the touch of God, He makes the death real. Helpless and distressed, we throw ourselves upon Him and claim the fulfilment and realization of the great transaction which we have so sincerely entered into. Then the Holy Ghost actually touches our inmost life with the sharp knife of His power and the consuming fire of His breath, and withers the evil that we cannot touch, and fills us with the life of purity which excludes the darkness through the coming in of the light. And so, day by day, as we go through the repeated tests, we find the promise holds; the faithful love and power of God continue to meet us, the reckoning becomes a reality, and the promise tried and proved.

Now all this is beautifully illustrated in the idea of crucifixion. Crucifixion was not an instantaneous dying, but a lingering death. And yet the victim was said to be crucified the moment he was suspended upon the cross.

It was high noon on that Friday which never shall be forgotten, when Jesus was hung by the cruel nails on Calvary's cross, but it was three o'clock in the afternoon before He died; yet from the very first moment it was said by the sacred narrative: "They crucified Him." He was regarded as crucified from that midday hour; but it was not until hours later that He breathed out His glorious spirit into His Father's arms, and went down amid the regions of the dead.

This is exactly fulfilled in the crucifixion of the believer with His Lord. There is a moment when we yield ourselves to be dead with Christ; and from that moment it is true, "I have been crucified with Christ." But after this there come hours and days of suffering, during which we are hanging with Him upon that cross, and a thousand voices are saying to us as they said to Him, "Save yourself, and come down from the cross!"

Oh, how many do that, and forfeit all they have suffered and done! It is of these that the Apostle says: "Have you suffered so many times in vain?" But there are others who remain unmoved and undismayed through all the severity of the test, and it is to these that the Spirit comes with His love and power in the actual experience of the death.

How long these three hours represent God only knows. Each life has its dark Friday and its dying day. The first of these is represented by the Jordan, and the second by the circumcision at Gilgal. And as "they abode at Gilgal until they were whole," so God holds us still until His testing is complete and the work is done. This must surely be the meaning of that passage in Philippians where the Apostle prays, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made

conformable unto His death," after which comes the great hope, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead."

JOSHUA'S GRAVE

There is one more death. Even Joshua, the captain of the Lord's host, must die. The picture of his self-surrender is very striking and significant. Standing over against Jericho, perhaps at dead of night, reconnoitering the position, and thinking of the assault which he was about to make, suddenly there stood before him a man with his sword drawn in his hand. Nothing daunted, but every inch a soldier and a captain, Joshua went unto him and said, "Art You for us or for our adversaries?" The answer came that thrilled his soul and laid him on his face before the supernatural Presence: "No, but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and said unto Him: What says my Lord unto His servant? And the Captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua: Loose your shoe from off your foot; for the place whereon you stand is holy. And Joshua did so."

This was no other than the Son of God, the true Captain of the host. Joshua had supposed that he was captain, but henceforth his sword was laid down before the Captain of the Lord's host, and Joshua, with his shoes off his feet, took a servant's place, took his orders from above and followed where the Lord should lead.

This is the secret of Christian victory; this the place where we must come before we can be overcomers. This is the meaning of that sublime announcement of the Apostle: "Thanks be unto God who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus." It is not "that causes us to triumph." We are not the victors, but simply the followers of the great Commander, as He leads us conquering and to conquer. With such a Leader, we must always be victorious. But to have such a Leader we must die to our self-sufficiency and strength. There cannot be two commanders; you and Christ cannot both rule.

How much there is among consecrated Christians and the best of God's children that needs to be laid down at His feet! How much there is in our Christian service that reflects honor upon ourselves, or springs from self-consciousness! Sometimes it throws around us such a glamor that it dazzles us with its brilliancy, and we do it for the work's sake, rather than for the Lord's sake. All this is false and wrong. To all this we must die, so that our service will not be affected by the approval of others or their neglect, by the pleasantness of the surroundings, or the self-denial it costs us. We should be like the holy angels, of whom it has been said, that if they were sent to sweep a street crossing they would be just as willing as to minister in a palace, or lead an army into victorious battle. The holy I, the pious I, the useful I, the spiritual I, the ecclesiastical I, the I that says, "I am of Paul; I am of Apollos, and I am of Christ," -- all these must cease, and Christ alone be known and glorified. , Then shall our service abide the testing day; then can Christ lead us through all the land of victory and power, and then shall "our light so shine before men that they shall see our good works and glorify" -- not us, but "our Father in heaven."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ab-simpson/the-graves-at-the-gateway/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net