

"AS I WAS SO WILL I BE"

"As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."
Joshua 1:5.

Moses' birth and the preservation of his life in spite of the mandate of the Pharaoh were clearly providential. His rearing and training at the center of governmental activities, as well as in the greatest school of Egyptian learning, were a wonderful preparation for the administration of the great task which was committed to him. His success was due to the conscious and constant presence of God. It is even so with other men. In vain do people build a life without God. Every life lived in the consciousness of God's presence and in striving for His approval will be successful.

When Moses died the children of Israel were sad because they were without a leader. In subdued tones they discussed the death of their capable leader and spiritual counselor, to whom they had turned so many times for so many different things. They knew not what to do, now that he was no longer with them. A similar spirit prevailed in this country following the assassination of President Lincoln. As the dismayed people were rushing to and fro, as sheep without a shepherd, somebody flashed on the bulletin board for the crowds in the streets of New York City these words: "God lives and the government in Washington will live on." The people dispersed quietly, their hearts calmed, as they heard the word in season for that great hour. I shall never forget that arresting inscription which I saw in Westminster Abbey in London: "God buries the workman, but the work goes on." Regardless of how many depart this life, God does not die, and His work must go on.

Among those who mourned the death of Moses was a young man of great promise whose name was Joshua. He was distinguished already because of his ability and his faithfulness, and Moses had selected him as his successor. Less gifted in some respects than Moses, Joshua possessed many sterling qualities which are necessary for successful leadership. God called to Joshua and said: "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." (Joshua 1:2-5). Thus God challenged Joshua to measure up to the great days and demands which were upon him because of the passing of Moses. To Joshua God assigned a difficult task.

Many of the Old Testament characters faced great tasks, experienced all the natural shrinkings of the human heart before the unknown and the untried, and went forward in God's name, dependent on His strength, and upheld by His promise. It was in this spirit that Joshua took up the unfinished task left him by Moses. It was a formidable task, leading him over untrodden paths, but with the divine command to go forward there came the divine promise: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Thus God adapted His promise to the personal needs of His servant.

When God's people come into new positions they shall have fresh revelations of His love. New dangers will bring new protections; new difficulties will bring new helps; and new discouragements will bring new comforts. What God said to Joshua was particularly encouraging, and it came precisely when he needed it most.

One never knows for what God is preparing him. Joshua never dreamed, when he walked along as the humble servant of Moses through some forty years, that God was getting him ready to take up the work of Moses when the great law-giver passed away. When Elisha

drove the oxen and plowed the field, he did not know that a little later he was to take the mantle of the intrepid and powerful Elijah and carry on God's work when the great prophet should leave the earth. Paul did not know, when he was in Arabia for those three years, that God was getting him ready to be an apostle in his witness to the whole world. We never know for what God is getting us ready in the unfolding tomorrows, but we do know that faithfulness is the way to promotion. Christ taught that, if we are faithful in the least, we shall be faithful in much, but if we are unfaithful in the little things, we shall not measure up when the mighty demands are upon us.

The promise of our text was not limited to Joshua. It is made to us for the tasks that confront us. It is adapted to our needs, and is adequate for our tasks. In this glorious promise we see the link between:

I. The Dead And The Living.

Joshua needed to be reminded of this unbroken link between the dead and the living. Doubtless he recalled that the leaders had been raised to instruct and guide them. There were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. The sickle had passed over their generations and each of these men had fallen before its keen edge.

Moses had left his people in the desert, his life-purpose unattained, and now God commanded Joshua to take the torch from the hand of him who had fallen by the way, to carry on the work, to pick up the broken threads and to finish the great task which Moses had begun. And with this command there came the encouraging promise: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Or, as it might be stated: "Moses died, but I live, and I am the link between Moses and you, between the dead and the living." That link guaranteed that the work should not cease; the worker was dead, but the living God was going to carry on His work through another.

This is a message for us who live today. We stand upon the threshold of a new era in history. The past has slipped beyond us and been folded up as a scroll. We sometimes sigh for the easier days, as we face the struggle of the present and look ahead into a future that is dark and threatening. What an unbridgeable gulf seems to separate us from our fathers of forty years ago! Let us know that there is a promise from heaven that spans that gulf: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee."

Thus God binds the dead and the living together in the bands of His great divine purpose, and gives cohesion and unity to the toil and struggle and suffering of His people all through the ages.

II. The Past And The Future.

The past and the future engage the thoughts of men. We are sometimes told that there is no such thing as the present, because in point of time it is so short as to be inconceivable to the human mind; before our thought has grasped it, it has already slipped into the past. But we can think of the past and cast fond and longing thoughts back into the days of long ago. And we can think of the future, sometimes with happy anticipation, and at other times with forebodings and anxious care.

These were probably Joshua's feelings. He looked into the past -- with pardonable pride and admiration: there was Moses, the leader of God's people, the lawgiver, the administrator, the seer, and the prophet. He looked into the future, and there Joshua saw a desert and a leaderless and defenceless people surrounded by innumerable foes. Truly these two tenses could occupy Joshua's thoughts -- a past of splendor and a future of care and strife.

Just then God appeared on the scene and linked the past and the future by that word of promise: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Here was the great God, the ever-present One, binding the past and the future into one. As He had been faithful

to Moses in the past, so He would be faithful to Joshua in the future, for the past and the present were an eternal present to God.

What a heartening message for today! Like Joshua, we are engaged in the battle of the tenses -- the past and the future. The past has had its joys and sorrows, its health and sickness, its failures and its victories, yet we have been brought safely through them all. But the future is causing us anxiety, as we think of its conflicts, strife, and suffering. Yet here is One Who can say not only "I was", but, with equal authority, "I will be." Thus His faithfulness links the past and the future together.

III. The Known And The Unknown.

The life of Moses was an open book. Everyone knew something of his difficulties and trials, his battles and victories. These formed the cherished history of the nation.

But the life of Joshua had not yet been written, and his task had not been started. There lay before him a future wrapped in the mists of uncertainty. What journeyings, what foes, and what conflicts -- who could tell? The land of Canaan was largely uncharted and unknown. Was there anything in that future known at all? Yes, but one thing only, namely: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." That God had been with Moses was well known: how He had commissioned him, directed him, and blessed him was one of the most fondly cherished memories of the children of Israel. That God pledged that in the same way He would be with Moses' successor. The God of Moses had not gone through any change, and He was waiting to prove Himself the same all-sufficient help to Joshua.

It is good to know that amidst the changes and uncertainties of life there is a God Who never changes. Amidst the fluctuations of earth's fortunes and the uncertainties of this life, and face to face with a future that is dark and unknown, we have the assurance of a fixed and certain quantity -- the faithfulness of our God. Tested and proved in the past, He never changes, and so He links the known and the unknown in one, for all who trust Him. As He was, so will He be.

IV. The Small And The Great.

Imagine how Joshua must have felt when he took up the work which had been assigned to him. Moses was revered as a prophet of God and the father of his people. None greater than Moses had yet appeared. He consolidated Israel into a nation, led the Israelites into liberty, guided and fed them, and gave them laws of health and codes of morals. As Joshua looked back with veneration and awe upon the peerless leader of God's people, how insignificant he must have seemed to himself in comparison. In his own estimation he was but a child in knowledge, in experience, and in attainments. He could not lay claim to the prophetic vision of Moses, to his mighty intellect, to his resolute character, or to his quiet meekness. How could he, therefore, fill the office of Moses, and face the perhaps still more difficult task of accomplishing the conquest of Canaan?

Just then God interrupted His servant's musing with that word of promise: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." It was as if God had said: "I was sufficient in the day of Moses and in all the circumstances of his lot; I will be sufficient in your day for you and for your task." And so the small and the great in the kingdom of God were linked by the sufficiency of God.

They still are. You and I may well be awed and daunted by the problems we have to face and the difficulties we have to overcome. But there were difficult problems in every age, and men of God faced them in the divine strength, and in and by His grace they found a solution for them. It is easy for us to fall back on the assumption

that "there were giants in those days, "men whose mental, moral, and spiritual equipment was so much superior to ours. Granting that their ability was of a superior caliber to ours, have we any right to disassociate their attainments from the enabling and all-sufficient grace of God? Then, remember that this same grace is at our disposal for the tasks of God's kingdom in our own day, and we would do well to go forward to our task in humble reliance upon the all-sufficiency of the grace of God. It is God Who links the small and the great in the service of His kingdom, and gives to the humblest and feeblest of His servants the assurance that His grace is all-sufficient and His strength is made perfect in weakness.

By his faithfulness, unchangeableness, and all-sufficiency God bridges the gulf between the dead and the living, between the past and the future, between the known and the unknown, and between the small and the great.

God's glorious promise to be with me as He was with Moses had brought assurance to my own heart time and again. I consider it a joyous privilege to say with Samuel, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Gratefully I can testify that God's sustaining grace has never failed me. He will be with His own throughout the future.

Christian, God's great promise, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," is for you, as you walk in the pathway of obedience to Him. Whatever your condition or circumstances, as a child of God, take this promise and make it your very own. This great and glorious promise includes His presence, His protection, His provision, and His power. With the duty there will be the power to perform it, for God will not fail His own.

"Would you live for Jesus,
And be always pure and good?
Would you walk with Him
Within the narrow road?
Would you have Him bear your burden,
Carry all your load?
Let Him have His way with thee."