

# Possessing the Inheritance

by A.B. Simpson

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*A.B. Simpson's sermon emphasizes the importance of actively claiming and living out the spiritual inheritance that God has provided for believers.*

**Scripture:** Joshua 13:1, Joshua 18:3, Isaiah 43:19, Matthew 9:37, Philippians 3:14

**Topics:** "Active Faith", "Spiritual Inheritance"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the importance of not only conquering but also possessing the spiritual inheritance that God has promised to His people. He draws parallels between the Israelites' delay in claiming their land and the modern Christian's hesitance to fully embrace the fullness of the Gospel. Simpson urges believers to actively appropriate their inheritance through faith and experience, warning against spiritual slackness, indifference, and complacency. He calls for a renewed commitment to pursue the deeper truths of God's Word and to engage in the work of evangelization, reminding us that there remains much land to be possessed. The preacher's message is a clarion call to awaken from spiritual lethargy and to claim the abundant life that Christ offers.

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## Transcript

"The Lord said to Joshua, You are old, and stricken in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed." (Josh. 13: 1.)

"How long are you slack to go to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you?" (Josh. 18: 3.)

We have looked at the conquest of the land and the kings who disputed its ownership. This is over now and the occupation of the conquered territory next engages the attention of the great leader. This is quite different from its subjugation.

It is one thing to fight a decisive battle and disperse the opposing forces of a hostile province. It is another thing to settle down to the employments of peace, and cultivate the conquered territory, covering it with peaceful homes and fruitful fields, and developing its resources.

This was the next business of the conquerors of Canaan, and in this we find a strange and long delay. For a considerable period after the conquest of Canaan we find no less than seven of the great tribes still lingering around the tabernacle at Shiloh, and failing to go forward to claim their respective inheritances so

that God had to reprove them for their negligence and delay, and Joshua had to send forth a special commission to divide the land and apportion it to the tribes that had not yet received their inheritance.

This is all applicable to our special inheritance. There is much more for us than the conflict with temptation and sin. There are positive advances in the Christian life into which God is calling us as well as them, and it is to be feared that a much larger proportion of the spiritual Israel has failed to enter into its inheritance than even the seven tribes who lingered at Shiloh.

God is obliged, after eighteen centuries, to send forth His messengers to plead with His negligent and faithless people to take the blessings which He has, at such a tremendous cost, provided and prepared.

He is pleading with us, as He did with them, and saying, "How long are you slack to go to possess all the land which the Lord your God has given you?" There are not, perhaps, ten Christians in a hundred who even claim to have accepted all the fulness of the Gospel of Christ; and the people of God as utterly fail to enter into their inheritance of service in the evangelization of the world. In every direction, there remains yet very much land to be possessed.

Let us survey this unoccupied territory, and listen to the challenge which is speaking to us from heaven, to arise and occupy it.

## POSSESSING THE LAND

It is much more than conquering the land. It is one thing to break down the walls of Jericho; it is another thing to enter in and possess the city. It is one thing to fight a great, decisive battle with temptation; it is another thing to go on to perfection, and add to our faith, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity and all the fruits of the Spirit. Every word is extremely suggestive. The first thought suggested is, appropriating as our own the inheritance. It is one thing to understand the promises, to desire the experience, to purpose obeying the commands. It is another to put our own name in all, and claim for ourselves the things promised and commanded. The personal pronouns, "my" and "mine," make all the difference in the world.

The second thought suggested by the expression is the actual experience of the thing that we have claimed, -- the entering upon it and living it out. The immigrant may go to the land office and put in his name and application for a free grant on the Western Reserve, but that is not enough. It cannot become his property until he settles down upon it, builds a house and lives in it, and begins to cultivate the estate. Then he is the real possessor, and his title cannot be alienated.

This is what God requires us to do. First, by faith, to appropriate the inheritance promised, and then, by actual experience, to settle down upon the promise and take it into our lives.

There is something very real in this idea of appropriating for ourselves a distinct Christian experience. Most people are trying to live somebody else's life. But God has an inheritance for each of us, -- unique, distinct and personal. He wants us to appropriate it, understand it, catch the vision of it, claim it for ourselves, and realize it in our actual life.

The great majority of people are made up of patchwork. They take a rag from one, a piece from another, and they stitch them on as best they can, until they become like a patchwork quilt, and it is little wonder if sometimes it is a "crazy quilt."

God wants you to be yourself, in Him. He has a pattern for you that He has for nobody else, and if you will let Him, He will weave it into your life, and work it out in all its unique and beautiful design. Is not this the meaning of this remarkable, and often misapplied verse, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works in you to will and to do of His good pleasure"?

This does not mean that we are to earn salvation by our works, for before the works begin, we are assumed to have the salvation and to have made it "our own." Then when it is our own, when we have claimed and appropriated it, we are to work it out, develop it; we are to enter into it in all its fulness, work it out as the weaver works out the pattern of his web; work it out as the artist works out the design on his canvas; work it out as the sculptor works out the figure in his marble; work it out as the oak tree is worked out of the acorn; and work it out "with fear and trembling," with a sense of the tremendous responsibility, the infinite trust, the mighty possibilities, and the Divine Worker who is working in you and pressing you on to apprehend all that for which you are apprehended in Christ Jesus.

### THE UNOCCUPIED LAND

"There remains very much land to be possessed."

### IN THE WORD

1. There is much unoccupied territory in the Word of God. There are promises that we have not yet made our own. There are conceptions of truth that we have not yet grasped with our minds, or translated into our lives. There are commandments whose finer shades of sacred duty we have not yet conceived, far less fulfilled. There are fields of truth into which the Holy Teacher and Comforter is waiting to lead us. There are many things which He would say to us, but we cannot bear them now. But if we will follow on, we will find that

He who so wondrously has taught,

Yet more will have us know;

He who so wondrously has wrought,

Yet greater things will show.

### IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

2. There is much territory in the land of Christian living to be possessed. The things we know, have we fully believed? The things we believe, have we fully realized? The things we realize, have we fully proved?

We have learned some lessons of love, but have we the love that "bears all things," that "never fails"? We have learned to suffer long, but have we learned to "suffer long" and yet be "kind"? And have we come into "all patience and long suffering with joyfulness"? We have received the white robes, but have we also put on the wedding robes? We have been made holy, but have we received "the beauty of holiness" and the finer touches of His polishing and perfecting hand?

We have known something of the joy of the Lord, but have we learned to "count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations," and to "glory in tribulation also"?

We have learned something of answered prayer, but have we come into the life of prayer, the prayer of the Holy Ghost, and the higher prayer of self-forgetfulness?

We have submitted to the will of God, and chosen it, but have we come to delight in it? and not only to delight in it, but to prove what is that good and holy and acceptable and perfect will of God?

## IN CHRISTIAN WORK

3. In the realm of Christian work there remains yet very much land to be possessed. What infinite varieties of holy service there are for the consecrated and obedient servant!

Most of us can remember how, within a short lifetime, Christian work has grown in its various phases and opportunities.

Fifty years ago there was usually but one worker in an ordinary congregation -- the preacher. His business was to work, and the others were simply worked upon.

After a little while, the Sunday school was added to the machinery of the ordinary church, and there was more work to be done and more workers were required. So the circle increased until there were, perhaps, a dozen workers in the church.

In the past quarter of a century how many new forms of Christian work have arisen -- rescue missions, work for the fallen and the suffering, calling out all the varieties of talent and capacity in the Church of Christ, and all the gifts of the Holy Ghost -- so that today there are ten people working in every thoroughly awakened church for one a quarter of a century ago.

But this is only the beginning. And how has this come about? Simply because some of God's children who were walking with Him, and waiting upon Him, caught the vision of His higher will, received His commission to go out in some new field, obeyed, and were used to originate some new department of service for God.

But the day is coming when all this will be multiplied an hundredfold, and when it will scarcely be respectable for any one to be a member of a Christian congregation for any considerable period, unless he can point to precious souls whom he has led to Christ; and the very least that Christ has suggested as the test of discipleship and the measure of fruitfulness, is thirty-fold.

God is waiting for workers to whom He can commit greater trusts than anything that we have seen. As the century hastens to its close, everything is moving on accelerated time, and God is going to multiply the agencies for Christian work in a manner that we can scarcely realize. If we are willing to open our ears to His voice, He will speak to us, and send us, and we shall wonder at the ways in which He will own and multiply our efforts, if made in the Holy Ghost.

Beloved, "lift up your eyes, for the fields are white already to the harvest," and ask the Lord to show you His highest thought and will for your precious life.

## THE CAUSES OF FAILURE

"How long are you slack to go to possess all the land?" This little word "slack" expresses the secret of all the failure. It is a very difficult word to translate, but many of us will doubtless recognize some of its applications to our own souls.

1. It denotes indolence. There is no meaner vice in the world than laziness. Most people would be ashamed to claim it as a relation; but the fact is more people are suffering from it than would be ready to own it. It is the cause of most of the failures in secular life. God hates it and always blesses the diligent in natural ways.

"Do you see a man diligent in business? He shall stand before kings," God has said. "He shall not stand before common men." Even if a man is wrong in many things God will recompense him in natural things, as far as He can.

Many are kept back from spiritual progress by a spirit of indolence and unwillingness to put forth any real spiritual effort. It is so much easier to be content with things as they are, and take the easy way.

One of our missionaries in Peking told me of a Chinese beggar, for whom she got a good situation; but he kept it only two or three days, and then was back on the "Beggar's Bridge" once more. When she asked him why he had given up his job he said, "Well, the truth is, I can stand almost anything; I can bear to be cold and hungry, to be beaten and kicked, to be poor and homeless, but I cannot bear to be tired."

A good many people are like him. It is true of spiritual, as well as natural things, that "the hand of the diligent makes rich." We cannot reach the highest place in heavenly things unless, like the great spiritual athlete of whom we read in the Epistle to the Philippians, we "reach forth unto those things which are before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

#### INDIFFERENCE

2. Many persons are kept back from the highest blessing by spiritual indifference. They have no intense or holy ambition or desire for the highest things. They are content to be saved any way, and the prizes of the high calling have no attraction for their hearts. Like Esau, they despise their birthright, and do not think it worth the trouble or the cost. They that would enter into that rest must "labor to enter in," and kindle with the holy intensity that "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord." God will never give His prizes to an indifferent heart. He wants them to be prized above all cost, and sought above all treasures.

#### SELF-COMPLACENCY

3. This keeps many back. They are quite satisfied with what they have attained. They have received enough blessing to assuage a guilty conscience, and heal the fear of future punishment. And, perhaps, they have gone further, and had some experience in the past on which they are continually lingering, which effectually displaces all true and honest hunger of the heart for the larger life that God can only give to self-emptied souls.

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

"Because you say, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that you are wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked."

#### EASE AND PLEASURE

4. The life of ease and pleasure. There is nothing that so relaxes the cords of spiritual earnestness as the life of the world. Men who contend for earthly prizes have to forego the pleasures of earthly indulgence.

The trainer for an athletic contest denies himself every gratification that could relax his vigor or weaken his physical energy. Much more must they who strive for an incorruptible crown keep under their body and bring it into subjection.

The cost of holiness is too great for the lover of this present evil world. Many of you, dear friends, who read these lines, are hindered in your holy ambitions and heavenly aspirations because there is some selfish thing in your life which has shorn you of your strength, even as Delilah robbed the mighty Samson of his Nazarite separation, and brought him to disgrace and ruin by the fascination of earthly pleasure.

## THE INFLUENCE OF OTHERS

5. There is nothing so depressing as the tendency of some persons to look at things on the average. They say: "Why should I be better than my neighbors ? Why should I claim more than my father ever knew? Thousands of good people are content to go on in the old way, and they are all going to heaven; why should not I be content to be as good as they?" And so, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, they rise no higher than the human standard, and comfort themselves by the average Christian and the average measure of the Gospel, and are slack to go up to possess all the land which the Lord our God has given them.

Beloved, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." You cannot afford to come short of anything which God has prepared for you at such large cost. There is not a promise in His Word, not a command in His precepts, which is not essential to you for your complete Christian life. If you miss any part of His will, you shall be an eternal loser, and your future will be defective to just that extent. God's faithful people in every age have had to be in the minority. The man who goes with the crowd is invariably wrong.

God is calling you to step out and stand alone, and, putting your fingers in your ears, to press forward in the narrow way, calling, "Life, life, eternal life !"

## UNBELIEF

6. They say, "It is of no use for me to attempt this higher life." Like Israel at Kadesh Barnea, they admit that "the land is a good one, but the enemies are so great and we so little, we shall never be able to enter in." But as old Caleb answered, "If the Lord our God be with us, we shall drive them out, as the Lord has said"

Faith in the promises of God and in the power of the Holy Ghost will nerve the feeble arm, steady the relaxed spirit, and make us more than conquerors over every obstacle and adversary.

## LACK OF COURAGE

7. Some people are moral cowards. They are afraid of self-denial, singularity, criticism, conflict and spiritual hardship. Only spiritual heroes can win the inheritance. Cowards will always fail. God is willing and able to give us true courage, if we will dare to stand where He bids us.

Beloved, let us face the difficulties and the enemies. Let us set our face like a flint. Let us take His own divine courage, and let us go up at once and possess all the land which the Lord our God Has given us.

## LACK OF POWER

8. Slackness expresses feebleness. This well characterizes the spiritual condition of the great majority of Christians. They are like a bow so relaxed that the bowstring has no spring, the arrow no momentum. The life that should be an example of the Omnipotence of God, and show the credentials of holy energy and divine efficiency, is, in most cases, such a poor, flabby, limp, powerless form that the men of the world despise it and feel that they are better off without it.

#### LACK OF PERSISTENCE

9. There are some bows that retain their spring for a short time, but the wood is inferior and after a few hours the spring becomes relaxed.

So many start out for the heavenly inheritance with high ambitions and hopes, but they have no real perseverance. The fair promise of their beginning soon becomes "like the morning cloud and the early dew."

We are made partakers of Christ if we hold our confidence steadfast unto the end. There can be no allowance anywhere for ease, indulgence, or laxity. It is a life-long way, and every step we must stand with girded loins, forgetting the things that are behind, reaching forth to the things that are before, and press forward to the mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

#### HOW LONG?

This is a solemn and tender appeal to us to act promptly and obey, without a moment's delay, the impulses of the Holy Spirit. If we are not prepared to go forward today, how can we be better prepared tomorrow? If we are disposed to take the easy way this morning, we will be just as likely to do it the next morning. Besides, time is passing by, and that which is more important, opportunity, is slipping away. There are crisis hours in life when everything concentrates at a solemn focus, and if the decision is not made then it may never be made.

There is something very pathetic in the words, "You are old and stricken in age, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed." There is a spiritual age that comes to people and comes sometimes before their life-work is fulfilled. We have all seen people young in years but old in heart, their pulses benumbed, their spiritual forces paralyzed by disobedience to the voice of the Holy Ghost.

There is such a thing as losing the spring of life, the high and heavenly inspiration that comes from the breath of God, and makes sacrifice and toil luxurious delights. There is a heavenly glow, there is a divine enthusiasm, which comes from the continual presence of Christ within us and the sweet voice of His approval; and if these are lost, life is drudgery indeed. Every toil will be a task, and every trial a crushing weight of unutterable woe.

And all this comes from disobedience. The Holy Spirit leads us up to the great decisive hour, and then presses us forward to the right decision. If we hesitate, if we shrink, if we refuse, there comes a time when that Presence is withdrawn, and the heart sinks back into a strange heaviness, and life has lost its glow. Temptations overcome us; trials discourage us; joy and gladness leave us; and gradually we sink back into premature old age and yet we know not what is the matter, and perhaps never fully realize where the fatal error was committed.

Oh! what is so sad as to see gray hairs on the hearts of people, and they know it not; to see the loss of spiritual freshness, buoyancy and power gradually creeping over the life that once was all aglow, and to

know that another soul has looked back on the way, and another crown has been lost by slackness!

Beloved, do not disobey the voice of God. Cherish the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and follow on after the hand that is beckoning you to higher things. Lose not a moment; meet every question of God today; or tomorrow you may find yourself unprepared for further advances. If you once begin to lose time on this heavenly highway, you may never make it up again.

There are some railway trains whose schedule time is arranged at the highest possible maximum, -- there is no room to make up a lost hour. If the train is late at this station, it will be late at the next, and come in late at the end. If it were a freight train or an accommodation train, it might make up what was lost; but the great Limited Express has no room for the recovery of loss.

Beloved, you and I have taken our passage to the heavenly land on God's great Limited Express, and we cannot afford to lose a moment on the way. Let us be true to our high calling, and let us begin today to press forward that we may apprehend all that for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus.

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