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THE UNFINISHED TASK

Joshua 13:1, "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."

Introduction: Joshua is old and stricken in years. Think about what he had been able to accomplish:

- Getting a foothold in the Promised Land,
- Unifying and organizing the new nation,
- lifting their spirits and hopes high,
- and much, much more.

Yet much of the land was not conquered or possessed. Their enemies were strong and threatening.

In our Christian life and work there remains yet much to be possessed and accomplished.

I. The unsaved have not possessed their purchased redemption.

A. Many may have a superficial sort of happiness but do not know the joy of sins forgiven or the assurance of salvation.

B. Many have been inoculated with just enough religion to keep them from taking the real thing.

C. Christ has purchased our redemption by His blood, and we are to possess it by faith. It is not enough that he died, unless we repent of our sins and trust him by faith and accept him as our personal savior.

D. Much land is to be possessed in the knowledge of God. Many suppose they believe in God, but they know very little about him, or what he is like, or if and how he might have revealed himself to us, or what he wants from us.

Some think they can spurn the teachings of the Bible and live in sin, and then stand before the holy altar of God and ask his blessings on their life, before they have asked God's forgiveness for their sins, or have shown any evidence of repenting and turning away from their sinful style of life as it is characterized in the Word of God.

Many know a little ABOUT God, but they do not know HIM as their personal Father, or the Son of God as their personal Savior.

II. Many Christians have not possessed the blessings of victorious living.

A. Note the wilderness experience of the Israelites and its parallel with many compromising Christians today.

There was a "mixed multitude" among the Israelites. Not all were personally committed to their national mission for God.

Exod. 12:38, "a mixed multitude went up with them"
Num. 11:4, "The mixed multitude fell a lusting" --

(another version translates this, "Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving... and said, "O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.")

So we see today those who long for the sinful pleasures of the old life and despise the spiritual opportunities of the new life in Christ.

Some say, "I don't enjoy going to that church any more; there is not enough fun and entertainment there; there is nothing but prayer, and Bible study, and preaching, and singing hymns, and worshipping, and supporting missions, and trying to win lost people and get them saved and involved in the church and the thingee

B. Christians can conquer through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

C. The power of a Spirit-filled life.

1. The power to resist temptation
2. The power to live a clean moral life
3. The power to be a soul-winning fruit-bearing Christian.

D. The possession of a holy life and character

1. Following the pattern of Jesus Christ
2. Your spirit may have beautiful wings, but how short are its flights, and how often, like a fledgling eaglet, has it to seek the nest, and come back to rest on the Rock of Ages.

3. Your soul is also like a garden, amid whose beauties Christ delights to walk: but how many weeds are there -- ready to spring up, and Oh so hard to keep down.

E. Most Christians haven't gone far at all along the journey to which God calls them. Their situation is somewhat like that of the Old Spanish rulers who inscribed on their coins the picture of the pillars of Herōules, which stood on either side of the Straits of Gibraltar, the extreme boundary of the Spanish empire, with only an unexplored ocean beyond. On the scroll over the pillars was written [Ne Plus Ultra" -- meaning "nothing beyond." After Columbus discovered America Spain struck out the negative and left the instription "Plus Ultra" - "More Beyond."

Likewise there is more beyond what Christians have discovered to date in their spiritual lives. Jesus said something about this "more abundant" life: "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." There is much "more beyond."

III. The Church has not yet possessed the territory of sin and Satan which Christ has commanded us to conquer.

A. The analogy of the Israelites under Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Saul, David, & Solomon.

B. The victory of the early church in carrying out the Great Commission.

C. The lapse in the intervening centuries.

D. There are an estimated 160 million lost people without Christ in our nation today.

Their lives are not being significantly touched by any kind of church at all.

In 1889 - ~~almost~~ 100 years ago - there was one Southern Baptist Church for every 4,000 people in the U.S. Today there are 6,200 people in this nation for every one Southern Baptist Church, and the same ratio holds for every other denomination and interdenominational church in the land.

We now have 37,000 churches, but we need to start 20,000 new churches, while all other evangelical denominations grow at the same rate, just to get back to the same ratio we had 100 years ago; otherwise, we will fall farther and farther behind the population curve.

We need to be winning new converts and baptizing one million of them every year, but we aren't doing but about one-third of that, and the worst news is that our rate of baptisms is declining instead of increasing. (Baptisms in SBC churches were down by 6.8% to 338,495 last year, which was the lowest for any year except one since 1949.) Many feel that the preoccupation with doctrinal arguments and political power plays are at least partly responsible for this decline.

[Meanwhile, as some of our seminaries are under attack, they continue to grow and be blessed by God, while ^{some of} your churches and pastors neglect the lost. This is the day to recognize gratefully and support heartily our Baptist Colleges, Universities, and Seminaries. But if they continue to be attacked as they have been in the recent past, they will certainly lose students, good faculty, and support, and we Southern Baptists will be the weaker for it. We need all of our denominational colleges, universities, and seminaries, and they deserve our prayers and support. They are doing a good job of training 12,000 ministerial students and thousands of other students who want a Christian education in a fully-accredited institution with scholarly professors of recognized credentials and who believe in a Christian philosophy of life.]

E. There is much territory that this church should attempt to possess in the next few years. How long do you plan for it to take for you to reach an average attendance of 1,000 in Sunday School? How long do you plan for it to take for you to reach an annual baptismal rate of 100 per year?

How long do you think it will take for you to go to two or three morning worship services every Sunday, or to build a sanctuary seating 1,000 people?

How long is it going to take to reach an annual budget of \$1,000,000, with at least 25% of that going to missions?

If you don't dream this dream, and plan for it to happen, and if you don't work your plan, it won't happen. But if you let God use you totally, if you let him get all the glory, if you put your own ego in the background, and let Jesus Christ have all the preeminence, it CAN and WILL happen, and SOONER than most of you could ever imagine!

CONCLUSION: There are at least 500% more people living in (the southern end of) this county as there are seats in all of the churches in this whole area. If they all decided to go to church on a certain Sunday, or just half of them, the churches couldn't begin to hold them. Most of them would be turned away. The people are here. Someday there will be a great revival, and hundreds and thousands will be seeking the Lord. But evangelical Christians believe we should not wait until people seek the Lord in great throngs. ~~We are to go them, even when they are not conscious of any spiritual needs.~~ Sometimes people need God most just when they are not conscious of their spiritual needs. We must ~~go to them and witness~~ because Jesus commanded us to do so. That alone is sufficient reason. And His promised presence is sufficient reward. How can you, by the help and grace of God, possess the rest of this territory, in our lives, in our community, and in the world. Are you ready?

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