**THIRSTING FOR THE SPRINGS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**07. HOW TO KNOW GOD BETTER by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Increasing in the knowledge of God."*

*Colossians 1:10*

I WANT to speak to-night about growth in spiritual knowledge. How can we strengthen our grip of spiritual realities? How can we enter more penetratingly into the unsearchable riches of Christ? How can we get at life's marrow, at its pith, its real good, its God? These questions suggest the subject of our meditation. I want to recall two or three helpful counsels which indicate to us the way of larger growth in the knowledge of God.

**(1) "Be still, and know that I am God."** Stillness is one of the conditions of knowledge. This stillness is not the opposite to noise and tumult, but the opposite of excessive and perspiring movement. We use the same variation of the figure in our colloquial speech. We advise men to "take things a little more quietly." The counsel does not suggest the abatement of clamour, but the relaxing of intensity, the slackening of speed. "Be still," release the strain, moderate the speed, ease down a little! Surely this is a very pertinent warning for our own day. How many men and women are living at high pressure, the high pressure which is indicative of perilous strain. No man gets the best out of life whose life is on the stretch. Even the best violin needs to have its strings occasionally relaxed. Its music will fail if the strain is persistent. And life fails to reach its highest ministries if strain and stress are persistent. The principle applies to every department of our being. Physical strain is antagonistic to the highest good. Mental strain is not productive of fruitful solutions. To leave a bewildering problem, and to ease the mind by giving it temporary leisure, is often the first and best step to its ultimate unravelment.

And is there not too much strain in the life of the spirit? There is one line in that great and beautiful hymn, "Jesus, Lover of my soul," which I always feel is somewhat of a discord, "Hangs my helpless soul on Thee!" I do not like the stretch and the strain which are suggested by the words. It reminds one of the picture with which we are all familiar, and which is found adorning the walls of so many homes. There is a wild and tempestuous sea, and a rock rising out of the deep in the shape of a cross, and clinging to the cold rock there is a figure of a woman, with agonised face and streaming hair, holding on for bare life. I do not like the picture. There is nothing to corroborate it in the New Testament Scriptures. The New Testament picture is not that of a poor weak soul clinging with half benumbed hands to a cold rock, but of a soul resting in the hands of the Christ. But I am afraid the picture is descriptive of too many lives among the followers of Christ. We want less stretch, less strain, less feverishness, more rest. We are not called upon to be always on the rack. It is not demanded of us that our lives should abound in strain. If life is to be fruitful, and increasing in divine knowledge, it must settle down into a more steady rest. I have often paused at a word in the Book of the prophet Ezekiel, in the wonderful passage which portrays the living creatures with the mystic faces and wings: "When they stood, they let down their wings." That last clause expressed the counsel of the Psalmist. We need to let down our wings, to check our rapid movement, to "be still."

"Be still and know.'' How can God give us visions when life is hurrying at a precipitate rate? I have stood in the National Gallery and seen people gallop round the chamber and glance at twelve of Turner's pictures in the space of five minutes. Surely we might say to such trippers, "Be still, and know Turner!" Gaze quietly at one little bit of cloud, or at one branch, or at one wave of the sea, or at one ray of the drifting moon. "Be still, and know Turner." But God has difficulty in getting us still. That is perhaps why He has sometimes employed the ministry of dreams. Men have had "visions in the night." In the daytime I have a divine visitor in the shape of some worthy thought, or noble impulse, or hallowed suggestion, but I am in such feverish haste that I do not heed it, and pass along. I do not "turn aside to see this great sight," and so l lose the heavenly vision. If I would know more of God, I must relax the strain and moderate the pace. I must "be still."

**(2) "If any man will do His will he shall know"** That is suggestive of location and out look. It indicates standing ground and consequent vision. I was walking the other day through a lovely wood in the North Riding of Yorkshire. My vision was bounded by the trees to the right and to the left, and the undergrowth which stretched about my feet on every side. One who knew the wood took me a few paces from the beaten track to a little square of elevated platform, and a woodland panorama stretched before me in bewildering beauty. The native knew the standing ground whence the vision could be obtained. And here is another standing ground: "If any man will do"; and here is another panorama -- "he shall know!" I am to stand in the doing, and I shall experience the knowing: I am to stand in the middle of a deed, and I shall find the vantage ground for surveying the things of God. We have too often looked for visions in the midst of arguments. Here we are counselled to look for them in the midst of obedience. Go and do an act of mercy, and in the midst of the doing look around for God, and you shall have some vision of His glory. In the life you shall find the light, for "light is sown for the righteous." Go out and try to reclaim a fellow-man, and in the midst of the saving ministry look about for the Redeemer, and you shall have some vision of His glory. Plant your feet in obedience, and your eyes shall gaze upon the unfolding glories of the mind of God. "If any man will do His will he shall know."

**(3) "He was known to them in the breaking of bread."** When was He made known? "In the breaking of bread." Then He employed the occasion of an ordinary meal to make Himself known to them. It is a beautiful suggestion. The commonplace shall break open and reveal to us the King. If I invite Him to come into my house and share with me the common life of the common day, through the humdrum life He will make Himself known to me. If He be invited into the kitchen, then through the common ministries of the house He will give revelations of His glory. If He be invited into the office, then through all the mechanical details of the monotonous day we shall see His appearing. If He be invited into the study, then He will redeem the work from formality, and dry duty will be changed into delightful fellowship. If I invite him to share my pleasures, my very joys will be rarefied by the light of His countenance. He is willing to make His revelations through the humble things of the ordinary day. He will make Himself known to us "in the breaking of bread."

**(4) "I count all things but loss ... that I may know Him."** What am I prepared to pay for my knowledge? What did Paul pay? "The loss of all things." He looks as though his discipleship had cost him home and kinship and inheritance. But nothing was allowed to count in comparison with the knowledge of Christ. Nothing else was allowed for one moment to intrude its allurements. Ease, money, fame, were counted as "dung" that he might know Christ. I do not wonder that this man had visions, and heard things which could not be put into speech! I do not wonder that his letters abound in doxologies as he contemplates the unfolding glory of his Lord! Have I an altar of sacrifice in my life? What am I prepared to offer upon it? Have I shed any blood? Have I ever tired myself out for Jesus? Have I been willing to be misunderstood for Jesus? Have I been willing to stand alone for Jesus, and suffer apparent defeat? If my discipleship has brought me into these deserts, then I know the meaning of the gracious promise which announces that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." If we would know the Lord, we must be "ready to be offered." The altar must be always built, and we must be prepared for sacrifice. If we know "the fellowship of His sufferings," we shall know the radiant glory of His resurrection.