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

**25. THE THINGS OF OTHERS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*

*Philippians 2:4*

"LOOK not every man on his own things," for that would be an imprisoning egotism: "but every man also on the things of others," for that would be a fertile and liberalising altruism. "Look not every man on his own things," or the issue will be a pinched and dwarfed individualism; "but every man also on the things of others," and in the resultant collectivism, the individual shall find the conditions of his own ripest growth.

"Look not every man on his own things." It is a warning against the perils of self-centredness. "But every man also on the things of others." It is an appeal for the exercise of the imagination. Imagine the conditions which prevail within the circle of another man's life. Get his point of view. Look at things through his windows. Survey his outlook. Inspect his treasure. Realise his life. Let the implement of thy exploration be not only a microscope, for the close watching and inspection of thyself, but a telescope, for the discovery and inspection of thy brother. We are to exercise ourselves in the wider vision of imagination, in order that we may realise and understand the immensely complex and varied life which prevails in the common race.

"Look not every man on his own things." But what is the need of the wider vision? The need is this, that even a man's "own things" will not ripen beneath the enticements of a self-centred vision. No man can find adequate nutriment for his own development within the pale of his own life. Even genius is not self-sustaining. If genius is to become full-grown, it must borrow from other men's resources. It is not difficult to name some of the wells from which Shakespeare fetched his water. It is comparatively easy to discover some of the larders from which Wordsworth borrowed his bread. Their genius needed the stimulus which they found in another man's wealth. And what is true of genius is equally true of the more commonplace life. Life will remain comparatively dormant unless it is breathed upon by the bracing influence of human fellowship. No man can lift his own powers out of comparative babyhood by the strength of his own original resources. We raise our plants into strength, and symmetry and beauty, by placing them in glass houses, which on every side hold fellowship with the spacious sky. And if the seminal powers of our life, the germs of virtue and fine capacity, are ever to become strong and grandly proportioned, it will not have to be in a narrow and walled-in exclusiveness, but in a brotherly communion which on every side holds spacious fellowship with the race. If self is to be realised, it must be in communion with brother. Self and brother will come to their crown in a mutual comprehension. Therefore, "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

We are called, then, to the ministry of imagination. Now imagination is an ally of sympathy. I think perhaps I have used a most defective figure. The kinship is more vital than that of alliance. I should prefer to say that sympathy is the faculty of which imagination is the function. It is the man of fine sympathy who has the rare discernment. The man devoid of sympathy may see a smile upon the face and think it sunshine. The man of exquisite sympathy sees the smile, but knows it to be a theatrical light, and feels behind the smile the tears that sorrow has shaken into frost. Imagination without sympathy is only surface sight; sympathetic imagination discerns the hidden depths. "Look not every man on his own things," but let every man, with sensitive, sympathetic imagination, look also "on the things of others."

Here, then, is one of the principles of life in the Kingdom of God, the principle of sympathetic imagination, in the exercise of which the lives of the members are perfected in the strength and beauty of holiness. Let me take the great principle round to one or two of the many aspects of life to which it might be beneficently applied.

**1.** Call to mind the variety of life represented in a worshipping congregation. We are pacing the way of the pilgrimage at almost every part of the road. There are some who are in the Slough of Despond, and are half inclined to give up the difficult crusade. Others have just passed through the wicket-gate, and have a kind of chequered and trembling rejoicing in the Christian life. Some are climbing the Hill Difficulty and are troubled by the crouching lions, which appear to bar their progress in the distant way. Others are in the Palace Beautiful, resting in the sweet chamber called "Peace," whose window is toward the sun-rising! Some are descending the Valley of Humiliation, and are finding that the descent is more irksome and trying than the difficult climb. Others are in fierce and deadly combat with Apollyon, encountering some monstrous temptation, which overwhelmingly threatens their life. Some are walking through Vanity Fair, tempted by the glare and glitter of worldly wares, and tried by the seducting offers of fading garlands and tinselled crowns. And others are in the land of Beulah, where the birds sing, and where the sun shines night and day! Some are just at the beginning of the pilgrimage, and all the perils lie before them. Others are just on the brink of the narrow river, and all their dangers lie behind. How varied and many-coloured are our lives! And we come together to worship -- to pray and to praise, and to engage in holy fellowship. What do we need? The ardent exercise of the imagination, the ministry of a fervent spiritual sympathy. The man climbing the steep hill must have spiritual sympathy with those in the sunny land of Beulah; and those in the song-filled land of Beulah must have spiritual sympathy with those who are crossing the lone and desolate plains which are haunted by Apollyon. The man who is in the Slough of Despond must sympathetically recall the one who stands on the hill called "Clear," with its wide and lovely prospects, stretching right away to the celestial gates; and those on the hill called "Clear" must hold spiritual sympathy with those toiling through the deep, dark places of despondency and despair. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

That is the very genius and ministry of Christian communion. I announce a hymn, and it leads us through valleys of shadow and desolation.

"Speak, Lord, and bid celestial peace

Relieve my aching heart!

Oh smile, and bid my sorrows cease,

And all the gloom depart."

But YOU have no ache and no sorrows and no gloom! How can you sing it? Aye, but hidden here and there in the throng are souls that are just bowed and crushed in ache and sorrow and gloom, and for them the prayer is a closely appropriate cry. You must exercise your spiritual sympathy, live in your fellows, and sing it for them! ." Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

I announce another hymn, and it leads us through sunlit meadows and by softly flowing streams.

"My heart is resting, oh, my God,

My heart is in Thy care,

I hear the voice of joy and health

Resounding everywhere."

But YOU don't hear the voice of joy and health resounding everywhere! You feel the pressure of sickness and the chill of the shadow! How can you sing it? Aye, but there are here and there in the congregation souls who are just possessed by the sense of the flowing energies of the Holy God; and you must exercise your spiritual sympathy, and sing it for them! "Look not every man on his own things."

Such is the hopefulness of public communion when we minister to one another in sanctified sympathy. It will not impoverish the man who has reached the sunny height to think sympathetically of the man who is toiling at the shadow-haunted base, and it will not add to the burden of the man who is toiling through the cloud to join sympathetically in the jubilant hymn of the man who has reached the light. We are all the richer for a wider comprehension. When we visit one another's hearts in sympathetic ministry we help one another, and we enrich ourselves. The bee that serves the flowers by its visits brings wealth to its own hive. "Look not every man on his own things."

**2.** Let me take the principle round to another aspect of the common life. Here are a number of so-called sects, ecclesiastical fellowships, separated from one another by barriers and divisions. Each has its own peculiar treasure; each has its own peculiar defect. How shall each develop its own worthiest life to finest maturity? By the exercise of a sympathetic imagination, holding fellowship with the others. "Look not every sect on its own things, but every sect also on the things of others." There is nothing so cramping and belittling as a severe and walled-in sectarianism. Sectarianism, with no windows opening out into wider fellowships, can produce nothing higher than spiritual dwarfs. Whenever I wish to gain an instance of enlightened sectarianism, I turn to the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John. "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus." A sectarian, indeed! "The same came to Jesus -- " Sectarianism, then, with an open window; sectarianism with a healthy inquisitiveness; sectarianism with a hunger for light! "The same came to Jesus!" Sectarianism in fellowhip, seeking treasure beyond itself! "There was a man of the Congregationalists, named; the same came to a Methodist!" "There was a man of the Methodists, named; the same came to an Episcopalian." "There was a man of the Quakers, named; the same came to a Catholic." "There was a man of the Episcopalians, named; the same came to the Salvation Army." "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Should we be the losers by this sympathetic imagination? If we sought to realise one another's positions, to gain one another's point of view, to understand one another's outlook, and to discover one another's purpose and aim, should we be the poorer for the fellowship? If among all the denominations we sought for the largest common denominator would not the explanation be productive of great spiritual wealth?

Here is a man who is best aided in his devotional life by the ministry of extemporary prayer. Its spontaneity, its informality, its elasticity provide the most welcome vehicle for the expression of his own petitions. Well, now, would it not be well for this man to try to sympathetically imagine a temperament of quite another type, a temperament to which an extemporary prayer is a "rock of offence and a stone of stumbling," a temperament which requires the calm, unembarrassed procession of prepared speech, and which needs to know, for its own fruitful devotion, the entire line and tendency of the supplicating thought? I say, would it not be well for men of such different temperaments to "look not only on their own things, but also, on the things of others," that in their larger fellowship and understanding each might attain unto a richer and more spacious life? If the Ritualist would sympathetically seek to realise the Quaker, and the Quaker the Ritualist, I can foresee nothing but wealthy issues from such an exercise. I am therefore pleading for ecclesiastical sympathies. I am pleading that a man's eyes should travel beyond his own sect. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold." It is in that other fold that I want my imagination to be at work, that out of the more spacious outlook there may arise a more brotherly co-operation in the common work of saving the race.