**APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM AND OTHER SERMONS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**02. THE TRUE IMPERIALISM by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Ho everyone that thirsteth."*

*Isaiah 55:1*

Who are those thirsty souls, panting for a satisfaction which they do not find? They are the people of the hill-country, now exiled to the plains. They have been bereft of the companionable apocalypse of the heights, and they are now immured in the unsuggestive monotony of the plains. The heights abounded in speech. The plains are silent. There is not a single helpful figure in the entire Bible borrowed from the plains. The plains lie prone as a speechless sphinx. The hill-country is full of voices, loud in intimations and revelations. Its phenomena are the messengers of the infinite. There towers the rugged height, firm and immovable, standing sure and steadfast through the fickle and varied years. What is its suggestion? "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." Yonder come the treasure-laden clouds, driving in from the great sea. They unburden their wealth upon the shoulders of Carmel, clothing it with a garment of rare and luxuriant beauty. What is their significance? "Thy mercy reached even unto the clouds." Here, on these bare, basaltic heights, the tired and heated traveller rests in the cool and healing shadow of a friendly rock. What is the speech of the shadow? "He that dwelleth in this secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

All things are but the vestures and vehicles of larger things of spiritual import. The light, soft wind that stirs and breathes in the dawn -- it is God who rides upon a cherub, yea, who "flies upon the wings of the wind." The gentle, mollifying rain falling upon the parched, bruised, bleeding stems of the newly-cut grass: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." The end of the drought; the unsealing of the springs among the hills; the gladsome sound of the river as it laughs and dances down the bare and rocky gorge: "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures." It was an expressive, voiceful land. Its features interpreted the face and character of God. Land and people were in communion, and their intercourse concerned the nearness and the favour and the providence of the Lord of Hosts. But now the land and the people are divorced. The people are borne away into captivity. They leave the hill-country, so rich in interpreting speech, and they pass into the speechless monotony of the plains. Their environment is dumb. Their dwelling-place is no longer a sacrament. It is common and insignificant. They have passed from nature to art and artifice. They have left the shepherd, and met the merchant. The quiet labours of the pasture and the vineyard are effaced by the pompous show and glitter of a swift and feverish civilisation. Away in the hill-country the lanes were flooded with rivers of sheep. Look through the symbols of Ezekiel, and you can see the streets and lanes of the exile: "chariots like whirlwinds," "horses swifter than eagles," "horses and chariots," "horse- men with spears and burnished helmets," "wheels" and "wheels" and "wheels," all suggesting the street rush and the irresistible power of the triumphant city. Go into the book of Daniel, and you can hear its gaiety and its revelry: "the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer." You can see its rivers, broad and brimming, the rivers by which the exiles sat down and wept You can see its spacious estuary, the "desert of the sea," the "great sea," crowded with shipping, laden with the produce of India and Arabia, and the wealth of distant Britain. Ezekiel has described it as a "land of traffic," a "city of merchants," keen, intense, open-eyed, and pushful. The emphasis of its life gathered round about its trade. Its energy was bent upon acquisition and expansion. "Their cry was in their ships."

Now, take the people of the bracing, speaking hill-country, and immure them in this sweltering and superficial plain. In all the crowded interests there was nothing suggestive of God. In all the rushing, hurrying movements there was nothing significant of the coming and going of God. There was grandeur, but the grandeur had no voice. It was grandeur without revelation, and grandeur without revelation is never creative of awe. Where there is no awe, men step with flippant tread. The exile felt the glamour, but in the glamour forgot his God. The glitter allured him. The snake breathed out its tinted bubbles, and he followed in pursuit. He became a trafficker, and plunged his soul in trade. The instinct of the dealer rapidly matured. His eyes became heated with ever-increasing lust His vision was more and more horizontal, and less and less vertical. The fever of the conqueror infected the captive. The spirit of Babylon entered into Israel. Success was enthroned in place of holiness, and the soul bowed down and worshipped it. The exile embraced the worlds and shut out the infinite.

Now, what was the issue of that? The exile made money. He increased it by increased trade. He amassed possessions. His body revelled in conditions of ease. His carnal appetites delighted themselves in fatness. He climbed into positions of eminence and power. What else? "In the fulness of his sufficiency he was in straits." The body luxuriated; the soul languished. He drenched the body with comforts; he couldn't appease its tenant. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up ... eat, drink, and be merry! " And still the soul cried out, "I thirst," and disturbed him like an unquiet ghost. He spent money and more money, but was never able to buy the appropriate bread. He plunged into increased labours, but his labours reaped only that "which satisfied not." The body toiled, the brain schemed, the eyes coveted, and still the soul cried cried, "I thirst.

Now, brethren, when there sits in the soul a hungry unrest and a feverish thirst, life will drop into faintness and weariness. You remember that striking conjunction in the first of the Psalms: "He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water... . His leaf also shall not wither." That is a beautiful sequence. When there is no thirst at the roots there shall be no withering of the leaf. What is the leaf? The leaf is the early thing, the spring growth, the beauty of the child-hood of the year. And what is the leaf in human life? The first thing, the thing of the spring, the beauty of the earliest days. And what is the beauty of childhood? Surely its hopefulness, its trustfulness, its love. These are the spring-leaves of human life. "His leaf shall not wither." Even on into the autumn-time his leaf shall still be green. In old age he shall still be hopeful, trustful, loveful. No thirst at the roots; no withering of the leaf. But suppose there is thirst at the roots? Then life shall faint and droop. The fresh green thing shall fade away. The leaf shall wither. Hope shall wither into pessimism. Faith shall wither into cynicism. Love shall wither into misanthropy. And, brethren, where the leaf has drooped the life becomes weary. All things become stale, flat, and unprofitable. We "spend our money for that which is not bread, and we labour for that which satisfieth not." "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." The soul which is unmoved in the finite feeds itself upon wind. We run and are weary; we walk and are faint.

Has all this no pertinency for our own day? Is the snake triumphant in our time? Are our people in pursuit of the bubble? Is our vision entirely horizontal? Which is predominant -- aspiration or ambition? Which is more coveted -- success or holiness? Would it be an altogether irrelevant quotation to apply the words of the text to our own people, and to say that we "spend our money for that which is not bread, and we labour for that which satisfieth not"? Acquisition and expansion are the primary notes of modern life. The lust of gold and the lust of empire are the twin ambitions of our time. The personal and the national glory-business, both appear to be briskly pushed. And is there no thirst, no disquietude of spirit, no vague unrest, no drooping leaf? Are there no weary feet? Do you find the green leaf in our literature, or is our literature pervaded by a faint and weary spirit? I should not go to our novels if I wished to find a strong and fruitful rest. Nor do I think our poetry moves amid the "still dews of quietness," and the composure of an optimistic faith. Our novels and our poetry are full of the drooping leaf. Behind the droop there is the thirst. The literature reflects the people. Business circles abound in faint and weary men. They get and spend, and spend and get, but through it all persists the inward thirst. They toil and tire, but their labour satisfieth not. At the end of the feast the hunger is unappeased. What is the explanation? "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Thou hast rivers of pleasure!" "I thirst." "Thou hast abundance of goods." "I hunger." What is to be the remedy? Where is the satisfaction to be found? Where is the singer, whose large note and clear can heal and arm and plenish and sustain?

So cries William Watson, and I want no better words with which to express the need. A faint and weary people is in need of some one who can "heal and arm and plenish and sustain," but that some one will not be found in a singer, however large and clear his note, but in a Saviour; not in a gift of poetry, but in the gift of life; not in any inspired man, but in the infinitely gracious ministries of an unveiled God.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth!" That is a call to the faint and the weary. What is he to do? "Incline your ear." "Hearken diligently unto me." First of all there has to be a discipline of the ear. There has to be a determined and resolute effort to listen to God. "Hear, ye deaf." You know the space which these injunctions fill in the sacred Book. On every page there sounds the cry of the herald, "Hearken!" "Listen!" "Incline your ear." How often our Master repeated the phrase, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The counsel is urgent, sharp, strenuous, as though shouted to a man in the gravest peril: "Let him hear! " The voices of the world are so plausible, so fascinating, so easily seducing, that if a man is to catch the higher voice he must set himself in the resolute act of attention. "Hearken diligently unto me." Put some work into your listening! In the senate, in the council-house, on the exchange, behind the counter, in the study, in the pulpit, be intent on hearing the highest, and incline your ear unto God. Many clamorous voices will call you from beneath -- Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mr. Pliable, Mr. Time-Server, Mr. Love-the-World -- but pull yourself together, and intently listen, that through the noisy clamour you may hear the upward callings of your God. "Hearken diligently unto me." For the individual and for the nation the discipline of the ear is the first step to the attainment of a strong, restful, unwearied, and satisfying life.

What is the next step? The discipline of the ear is to be accompanied by the discipline of the heart. Listen, and then yield. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Right hearing necessitates strong and unequivocal doing. Know, and then dare! Hear the highest, and then uncompromisingly obey it. "Yes, but that is impossible!" Ah, you remember what Robert South said: "It is idleness that creates impossibilities." That is very true. When men make a real work of their religion, impossibilities melt away into glorious practicalities. When Richard Cobden began his agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws, he was met on every hand with the objection that he was attempting the impossible. "Impossible," said Cobden; "if that is the only objection it can soon be done." I think that perhaps one of the greatest needs of the world to-day is that some great nation, having heard the voice of the highest, shall stand forward and resolutely attempt the impossible. Let her begin by divesting herself of all unclean habits, of everything that is tricky and perfidious and subtle and selfish and false. "Let the wicked forsake her ways." Let her strip herself of all sordid ambitions, of all mean purposes, of all sneaking policies and small conceits. "Let the unrighteous forsake her thoughts." Let her "hearken diligently" to the divine, and determinedly follow in pursuit, even when the way of pursuit appears to lead to impossible heights. Let her "return to the Lord," and be no longer a democracy, or an aristocracy, or a plutocracy, but a theocracy, willingly and gladly counselled and governed by Jehovah, Lord of Hosts.

What would be the issues of such obedience? They are unfolded for us in this chapter with wondrous prodigality. First of all, there is the assured promise of a fuller life. "Your soul shall live." "Your soul!" Hitherto life has been a thin existence, a mere surface glitter, a superficial movement. Now, vitality shall awaken in undreamed-of depths. " Your soul shall live." Life shall no longer be confined to the channels of the appetites, to mere sensations, to the outer halls and passages of the sacred house. "Your soul shall live." The unused shall be aroused and exercised. Unevolved faculty shall be unpacked. Benumbed instincts shall be liberated. Barren powers of discernment shall troop from their graves. New intelligences shall be born. The ocean of iniquity shall ebb, and "the sea shall give up its dead"! "Your soul shall live." Life shall be no longer scant and scrimpy. Your soul shall "delight itself in fatness." Every tissue shall be fed. Weakness shall depart with the famine, "The people that do know their God shall be strong." The tree of its life shall bear all manner of fruits, and "the leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations." Mark the succession. Here is a people, diligently listening to the highest, and as diligently yielding to it. The inevitable issue is a deepened, enriched, and glorified life. "Your soul shall live." See, now, the further issue. "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knewest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, for He hath glorified thee." What does that mean? It means that a true and glorified natural life is to create a true and glorified Imperialism. "Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God."

That is the true imperialism -- empire by moral and spiritual sovereignty, allurement and dominion by the fascinating radiance of a pure and sanctified life. "Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." What is the vulgar imperialism of to-day? It is empire by grab. It is expansion by coercion. It is aggrandisement by the power of the sword. Mark the contrast. "Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God." Such is to be the imperial gravitation of a people exalted and inspired by the purifying and energising presence of the Eternal God. This, I repeat, is the true imperialism, the imperialism which I covet for my nation; the glory which constitutes a fadeless dignity; empire -- not by the aid of Maxim guns, but by great and heartening evangels proceeding from a redeemed and glorified people. When are we going to learn that this is the shining goal of all worthy national ambition? The mission of a truly great people is to be " a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples," a "witness," ceaselessly reiterating the glad tidings of the eternal love which she her-self has proved in the power of her own redemption; a "leader," a pathfinder, going out among the benighted peoples who are groping blindly for the way that leads to liberty and light, and revealing unto them the road whose entrance-gate is the beginning of the gladsome dawn; a "commander," commanding her willing and waiting servants to go here, there, and yonder, bearing her shining lines through all the earth, and her words to the end of the world. "Thou shalt be called the restorer of paths to dwell in." That is a glorious title, and it describes a glorious mission, the inevitable mission of a great nation which has "hearkened diligently" unto God, and has surrendered herself to a glad and invincible obedience. "Her soul shall live," and her life shall be "the light of men." A splendid magnanimity! Now, mark the further issues in this radiant sequence. A true imperialism is to be accompanied by a splendid magnanimity. Little-mindedness is to be supplanted by clean and spacious ambition. The pure and exalted people is to be partaker of the sublime thoughts and purposes of God. "My thoughts are not your thoughts." What are Thy thoughts like, O Lord? "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." The thoughts of the Eternal are characterised by loftiness, by breadth, by comprehensiveness, by an all- inclusive sympathy which vibrates to the interests of each, as though each contained, as indeed it does, the welfare of the whole. The truly imperial people is to share this spacious and inclusive thought. Small parochial prejudices and petty peddling ambitions will give way to wide-seeing and far-embracing sympathy. A sterile individualism will yield to a pregnant altruism. A mean and feverish patriotism will be supplanted by a generous and fructifying cosmopolitanism. The annexation of territories will be regarded as infinitely inferior to the salvation of the world. Influence will not be measured by miles, but by magnanimity; empire will not be computed by so many leagues of earth, but by the multitude of redeemed and liberated souls; the outskirts of sovereignty will not be defined by bristling guns, but "thou shalt call her walls Salvation, and her gates Praise." "As the heavens are high above the earth," so shall thy thoughts be exalted above the low-lying purposes of carnal policy and merely material ambition.

And now note the climax of the sequence. All this exalted and glorified character, this true imperialism, this splendid magnanimity, is to issue in a rich, assured, and beautiful ministry. There is to be nothing wavering and uncertain about the moral empire and sovereignty of such a people. Its healthy and health-giving ministry shall be inevitable. "As the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, ... , and watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud; so ..." The inevitableness of the national ministry shall be leagued with the inevitableness of the budding and beautifying spring. The purified people shall discharge the mission of spring-maker among the peoples of the world. Its goings and its comings shall not be creative of destruction and distress. It shall be the creator of gladness and music and song. "The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree"; "the thorn" -- with its sharp, piercing, pain-giving spikes; the "fir tree" -- from which were made the musical instruments, and especially the framework of the harp; " instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree"; the glorified people shall move among the scattered peoples, and shall exercise the beautiful ministry of changing the creators of pain into the makers of melody and praise. "Instead of the brier," with its bitter, poisonous sting, "shall come up the myrtle tree," with its glossy leaves, and white flowers, and grateful perfume. "Instead of the brier the myrtle tree!" The redeemed and consecrated nation shall exult in a missionary enterprise which shall change the poisonous enmities and jealousies of the people into the perfume of sweet and gracious sentiments, and the chastened delights of a brief and blameless life.

A full life, a true imperialism, a splendid magnanimity, an inevitably beautiful ministry -- this is to be the heritage of a nation which is surrendered to the call of the Highest, and which is rooted by the "river of water of life." It is an ambition which we well might covet for our own nation, a consummation for which we might all devoutly pray. May the good Lord draw our people to the springs! May we turn from our faintness and weariness to "the river of God's pleasures." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" "Let him that heareth say, Come; let him that is athirst come; and whoso-ever will, let him take of the water of life freely."