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

**07. REST FOR WEARY FEET by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"I will give you rest."*

*Matthew 11:28*

One of the youngest of our poets, and in many ways perhaps the most brilliant of them, Mr. William Watson, has given us some beautiful verses which were born in his soul as he stood by Wordsworth's grave. He asks himself what it is in Wordsworth which makes him the sought companion of multitudes, and which has given the poet a place among the immortals. He compares him with many others of our poets, and finds that the excellent glories in which they shone he conspicuously lacks. He has none of "Milton's keen translucent music," none of "Shakespeare's cloudless, boundless human view." He has none of "Byron's tempest anger, tempest mirth." He lacks "the wizard twilight Coleridge knew," and "Shelley's flush of rose on peaks divine." In all these great poetic treasures, which his peers possess, Wordsworth is wanting. What endowment then had he, of his own, which could make amends for all this lack? Our poet answers, "He had, for weary feet, the gift of rest." That is Wordsworth's wealth -- "for weary feet, the gift of rest." His poetry takes the heart, and just bathes and steeps it in an atmosphere of deep quietness and peace. He takes us away from the strife of tongues, and from the hard and jarring noise of city life, away to that quiet land of lakes, on to those still uplands, whose only sounds are the cry of the peewit and the bleating of a wandering sheep. And as you read the poetry, and feed upon its spirit, the stillness of the moorland and the mountain tarn enters in and pervades your soul, and you enjoy a sense of most refreshing peace. He has "for weary feet, the gift of rest."

Ay, but put down your Wordsworth, and you are back again in the old city. You awake to the hard reality and noise of things, and the still atmosphere of the poem has gone like the fabric of a dream. The old world is as clamorous as ever. Its ways are as rough and stony as ever. Its rude and thoughtless jostlings are as painful and as breathless as ever. Your feet are soon again weary, and your heart is tired and sore. The poet's gift of rest is beautiful and not to be despised. It provides a short holiday for the soul, but only a holiday, a temporary respite, from which it must return to the old monotonous beaten ways, and soon find itself wearied with the old strife, the old care, the old sin. But the soul craves, not merely for a holiday, a temporary tent-life on some poetic hill, but for "a rest that remaineth" -- to use the apostolic word -- "a rest that remaineth," remaineth even when we are in the midst of strife and trouble and death. That is the rest for which the weary heart craves, and which no poet has it in his power to give. His gift of rest is a holiday; we want the rest of the Eternal, the changeless rest.

But there is Another who claims to have for weary feet the gift of rest. The world is always full of weary feet, and the days of the Nazarene were no exception. The souls that gathered about Him numbered a great many weary ones, tired, self-nauseated, faint. He looked upon them, and saw their weariness, and was moved with infinite pity, and thus appealed to them: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "I will give." How? You remember that other great word He spake on another day: "Not as the world giveth, give I." How does the world give? If the world wished to help a heavy-laden man, it would seek to do it by removing his burden. The world's way of giving rest is by removing a man's yoke. "Not as the world giveth, give I." The world would create a paradise of sluggards. The world's heaven would be a life without burdens. Its gift of rest would be a gift of ease. "Not as the world giveth, give I." That is not His way. The restful life is not the easeful life -- life without burdens or yokes. The gift of Jesus is a gift of rest while wearing the yoke, rest while carrying the cross, rest in the very midst of mystery temptation, and strife. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now, let us look at one or two types of weary feet to which this Saviour will, with infinite gladness, bring the gift of rest. Look around you. Where would you look to find the most weary feet in the city? Where would you find the soul most tired and wearied? You would not necessarily find it in homes that had been the scenes of great and burdensome sorrow. The deepest weariness is not the accompaniment of the deepest grief. Through the darkest sorrows the soul can often "walk and not faint." So that I don't think I should seek out the homes of blackest sorrow if I wished to find the most weary life. Where then should we find it? Look at those twelve disciples who were chosen by our Lord. Which of them would you think experienced the deepest weariness of spirit? Would you single out Thomas, and say that his very proneness to doubt must have often filled him with deep weariness, as he encountered so much that was mysterious and perplexing? Or would you point out John, and say that his clear vision of the ideal life, with all its love and light and truth, must have created a deep sense of weariness as he compared the ideal with the real, and saw how unfriendly the world was to the pure and the true? Or would you pick out Peter, and say that a man who was always resolving and always failing must have often sunk into a profound weariness, and felt as though it were useless for his tired and beaten soul to strive anymore? I think that each of these disciples must have known at times a really deep weariness of spirit, and yet I would have chosen none of these if I wanted to select the man who experienced the most terrible weariness of all. I should have put my hand upon Judas Iscariot. I should say that he knew seasons of weariness of which the Apostle John could not conceive. And why? Because he was a selfish man, the most selfish heart in the disciple band. There is no weariness like the weariness which gathers round about a selfish heart, and if we could place our finger upon the most selfish heart in the city, we should have discovered a life that moves with terribly weary feet. Why, such a character is a commonplace in fiction because it is a commonplace in life. Think of any selfish character in fiction whom you can call to mind, and you will find that he moves through discontentments and dissatisfactions and continued unrest. A man who lives entirely for himself becomes at last obnoxious to himself. I believe it is the very law of God that self-centredness ends in self-nauseousness. There is no weariness like the weariness of a man who is wearied of himself, and that is the awful Nemesis which follows the selfish life. I am inclined to believe that a great deal of the tiredness and weariness of the world, perhaps more than we commonly think, is only the sickly loathing and self-disgust arising from a morbid selfishness, however much we may strive to attribute it to something else. Be that as it may, there is one truth which may be proclaimed with absolute dogmatism, that selfishness inevitably tends to create self-nausea and weary feet. Well, you know what remedy we commonly prescribe for such complaints. What do we say of the selfish man who is weary, discontented, full of jadedness and unrest? What do his fellows say of him? They say: "He wants to get away from himself." It is a very suggestive phrase. A man getting away from himself! For why? For rest! If he could only get away from himself, he would lose that sense of weariness and nausea, and find a pleasing rest. It is only another way of expressing the truth, which is so beautifully worded in one of the hymns we sing, where we pray for "a heart at leisure from itself." "A heart at leisure from itself!" -- a heart that gets away from itself, that does not stay brooding over itself, fondling itself, nursing itself, until it loathes itself in weariness -- a "heart at leisure from itself," and by its absence from itself finding strength and rest.

Now, listen to the Master: "Come unto Me, ye weary, selfish ones, and I will give you rest." And how will He do it? By taking us away from ourselves, by giving us leisure from ourselves, by making us unselfish. When a weary, selfish heart comes to the Saviour, the Saviour meets his need by saying, "Take My yoke upon you." "But, Lord, he is tired and weary already; another yoke will crush him." No, no; he has just been carrying himself, and himself only, and that is the heaviest of all loads, heavier than any man can bear. But strange it is, that if he adds another burden, his own burden will become light. That is the mystery of grace, that the burdens of a selfish man are lightened by adding more. "Take My yoke upon you." And what yoke is that, Lord? "The yoke of other people's needs -- the burdens of the blind and the deaf, and the lame and the lepers -- the burdens of other folk's sorrows -- put them on to thy shoulders -- take My yoke upon thee -- increase thy burden, and thy burden shall become light, and instead of weariness thou shalt find rest." Now, it may be that there are weary hearts among my hearers whose weariness is only the measure of their selfishness, and for them this old world is true. Jesus will give you rest by giving you His yoke; He will add to your burden, and so make your burden light. He will enlarge your thought to take in others, and so give you leisure from yourselves. He will take away your jadedness, and give you His own rest. You "shall run and not be weary," you shall "walk and not faint."

But selfishness, while it accounts for much, does not explain all the weariness of the world. The weariness of selfishness can be expelled by unselfish Christian service. But the unselfish have often weary feet, and crave the gift of rest. Can this Saviour meet the need? Let us look around us. What kind of weary lives do we see? There are the anxious ones. The Master could see many of them in the crowd to whom He was speaking -- anxious ones, living in fear of the unknown, not able to rest upon to-day, however bright and fair it be, because to-day so speedily changes into to-morrow, and to-morrow is all unknown. It is this great surrounding unknown which creates our anxiety and feeds it into strength. That dark unknown is the parent of our fears. Well, this anxiety, this continued tension of spirit, produces great spiritual exhaustion. The anxious soul moves with weary feet, and would fain meet with one who had the gift of rest. I say our Master saw these anxious ones among His hearers, and to them He cried, "Come unto me, ye heavy-laden ones, and I will give you rest." How does He give it? I want you to notice the verses which immediately precede the words that I have quoted. I am afraid we sometimes ignore them because of the magnificence of the promise that follows. But they seem to me to have a very close and vital connection with the promise itself. The Master saw how many souls there were who were troubled and anxious about the unknown. And He knew the great secret which, if accepted, would set all their hearts at rest. What did He know? He knew God! If everybody knew God, nobody would be anxious. He knew Him, and would unveil Him! "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." "Come unto Me, ye anxious, laden ones, and I will give you rest. To you shall that dark unknown be filled with the Father's face, and your anxiety shall be changed into assurance and peace."

Have I succeeded in making the connection between these verses plain? The Saviour seems to say, "If they only knew their Father, their anxiety would vanish like cloud-spots in the dawn. I know the Father -- I will make Him known to them! Come unto Me, ye anxious ones, and by a wondrous revelation I will give you rest." And so He seeks to turn weariness into rest by the unveiling of the Father. And in what strangely beautiful ways He made the Father known! He told them that to Providence there were no trifles, that God did not merely control great things, and allow smaller things to go by chance. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." Nothing is overlooked; all is full of thought and purpose. "Look at that sparrow," He said; "how very lightly you regard it: a cheap thing: two of them sold for a farthing: and yet your Father knows when a sparrow falls! Be not anxious! God is thinking about all things! If the world were moving irrationally, without controlling thought, then anxiety would be natural and pardonable. But all things are happening in the thought of God, and God is Love." That was the revelation the Saviour made; and will any one say that if accepted, it would not end the anxiety of the world, and turn its mind-weariness into rest? To come to Jesus is to take His revelation of the Father, and to live in the inspiration of it, and such inspiration would turn fear into confidence, and confidence into peace. Think of it. Suppose that the sky of our souls, instead of being an "unknown " which might prove treacherous, were a Father's face, gracious and beneficent: and suppose that we lived in "the light of that countenance," and never lost sight of it for a day, don't you think that that would create within us confidence out of which would spring eternal rest? The Apostle Paul accepted the revelation of Jesus, and lived in it and through it, and when dark days came, he quietly sang, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able." That was just what the Master said, "If only they knew Him, their anxiety would change into an untroubled peace." And here is Paul, confirming the Master's word: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able," and in the days of darkness and persecution he remained steadfast and unmovable, enjoying the very rest of God. "Come unto Me, all ye weary, anxious ones, and I will reveal to you your Father, and in the beauty of the revelation ye shall discover the gift of rest."