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

**13. HE DIED FOR ALL by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."*

*2 Corinthians 5:15*

"Christ died for the ungodly." Yes, but what is meant by "to die "? The question suggests no fanciful inquiry, the pursuit of which will lead us into merely fruitless speculations. The question is of deep, practical, immediate, personal import. The word "death" is a cardinal word in the New Testament Scriptures. It enshrines a primary fact, out of which a great gospel is born. "I delivered unto you first of all ... How that Christ died for our sins." "First of all." The fact takes first rank. It is all-determinative of our message. It must have priority and precedence over all other proclamations. All other proclamations must find their significance in this. This is the creative fact, primary and fundamental. "First of all. ... Christ died for our sins." "Christ died for the ungodly." But what is meant by "to die"? We must have some large and worthy interpretation of the imperial fact if we would worthily appreciate the work of our Lord. Have we a sufficiently profound and pregnant interpretation of death? What is the prevalent interpretation? Our conception is too commonly narrow and impoverished. Our emphasis is false, and false emphasis always means distorted truth. The body is too obtrusive in determining our spiritual judgments. It constitutes the Alpha and the Omega of much of our thought. It defines and limits our outlook. Take the first hundred people you meet, and confront them with the inquiry -- What is life? and half the hundred will immediately think of the body. Vary your inquiry, and launch the question -- What is death? and the thought of the ninety and nine will immediately gather round about a body, a coffin, a graveyard. It is this dominance of the body, this intrusion of the body into all our conceptions, which impoverishes our comprehension of truth, and robs life of its heights and depths and far horizons.

Now, our Lord repeatedly proclaimed that the bodily aspects of things are not primary, but secondary, and that the way into the Kingdom of Truth is by a scrupulous observance of this divine order. No man rightly interprets his daily bread to whom its primary aspect is its relationship to the flesh. "Seek ye first" the spiritual aspects of common bread. Let it become to you a sacrament, and let its cardinal significance be its expression of the unseen and eternal. Let the body be subordinate and secondary, even in your interpretation of daily bread. That is the divine principle, the principle of succession in all ennobling and healthy thinking, and it seeks application in all the urgent affairs both of life and of death.

"Of death?" Yes; we misinterpret death if we allow the body to determine our thought. If we are to pursue the fruitful way of the divine order in our gropings round about this mystery of death, our first step must be to place this clamorous flesh in the rear. Death is not primarily, but only very secondarily, an affair of the flesh. This is our Master's teaching. Our investigations must find their starting-point here. The making of other starting-points has betrayed us into judgments which, I believe, have taken us far away from the Master's mind. You must have repeatedly noticed that what we ordinarily call death, our Master insisted upon calling sleep. When the bodily activities cease, we describe the cessation as death. Jesus described it as sleep, holding the word "death" in reserve. You will remember that when He came to the ruler's house, and one gave Him the intelligence that the little daughter was dead, the Master, even in the presence of the hired mourners, and surrounded by the trappings and wrappages of woe, made the surprising declaration, "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth." "And they laughed Him to scorn," so glaring was the apparent conflict between the declaration and the stern reality. "Not dead"; cessation of this kind does not constitute death; it is only sleep. The word "death" must be held in abeyance to express an experience of infinite and appalling significance.

You will remember, too, from that beautiful story which enshrines our Saviour's love for the family at Bethany, that when He heard of the black terror which had invaded their home, He used the same mild and gentle-toned expression, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth"; and it was only because of the exigencies of the moment, and because of the practical bewilderment of the disciples, only because of their infantile grasp, and their inability to reach and grip the larger thought, that our Master, with a sigh that one can feel through the straining speech, condescended to their limitations, and using their own abused word confessed "Lazarus is dead."

Here, then, is a suggestive indication of the Master's mind. What too often constitutes our entire conception of death scarcely entered into Christ's conception at all. What we called death, Christ named sleep. The word death must be kept in the rear to suggest some other experience of awful and unspeakable import.

Now, let us advance a farther step. The Master repeatedly declares that He came to save us from that which He calls death. "If a man keep My word, he shall never see death." Insert the common interpretation of the word death in that phrase, and the sentence becomes a dark confusion. "If a man keep My word, he shall never see death." But the saintliest among us, they who have lived and walked upon the serene mountain heights, hand in hand with God, become worn in body, and grow weary, and cease, and we have to carry their remains over the same well-trodden way to the cemetery, along which we carry the remains of the lustful, the avaricious, and the proud. Yes, we have to dig graves even for saints. Do they then die? Nay, nay, they only sleep, for "if a man keep My word, he shall never see death." They sleep; yes, but they cannot die!

Listen again to the Master: "This is the bread which cometh down out of Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." But men and women do eat that bread. They make it their daily food, and yet they may be way-worn invalids, toilsomely dragging along in wearying infirmity, and long before they reach the limit of threescore years and ten they fall by the way, and we have to lay their worn-out bodies beneath the soil. They fed on Heaven's bread; do they die? Nay, nay, they only sleep. "If a man eat of this bread, he shall never die." They sleep; yes, but they cannot die!

Let me give you one other of the Master's words. "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me ... is passed from death unto life." "Is passed." The great transition is effected. He is alive for evermore. But men and women do hear His word, and they do fix their belief on the Father who sent Him, and yet they pass from physical strength through physical weariness to physical cessation. We hear their farewell. We draw our blinds. The mourners go about the streets, and we devise little memento-cards, on which we inscribe the words, " Died So-and-so!" "He that heareth My word and believeth is passed from death unto life." "Died So-and-so!" "If any man eat of this bread, he shall never die." "Died So-and-so!" "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." "Died So-and-so!" We are clearly using the word with quite another interpretation from that given to it by Christ. It cannot be repeated too often, or emphasised too strongly, that what we call death is to Christ our Lord not death at all. It is only sleep, and He came not to save us from sleep, but to deliver us from death. We shall all sleep, saints and sinners alike; but we shall not all die: for if any man keep the word of the Christ, he shall never see death; he is passed from death unto life; he abideth for ever.

But my text tells me that "Christ died." He did more than sleep; He died! What, then, was the Saviour's death? What do we commonly mean when we speak of the death of Christ? We fix our eyes upon Calvary. We see the Cross. We see the crucified body. We see the quivering flesh. We see the dripping blood. We see the face-lines of unutterable woe. We see the last gasp, and we almost feel the appalling stillness which follows the appalling pain. And we call that the death of Christ. That physical cessation we call the death. What if Christ should call that part of the stupendous crisis His sleep? When the little maid was lying in a precisely similar condition respecting the flesh, Christ named the condition a sleep. When all the physical activities of Lazarus had ceased, Christ named the cessation a sleep. May we reverently take the Master's own word "sleep," and use it to name the physical cessation on the Cross, and reserve the word death for something behind the physical cessation -- something of untold and overwhelming horror? I think that even on Calvary the body may be too obtrusive in our thoughts. We see the rude, rough cross-beams; we see the hammers and the nails; we see the uplifted Saviour; and the vision is terrible and terrifying, and I pray that it may be burnt into our hearts in lines of fire. But on that awful Mount of Calvary we see the Saviour sleep; we do not, and we cannot, see Him die! But "Christ died." If the physical cessation were sleep, what was the Saviour's death? Since the crucifixion of the Master, hosts of His disciples have been similarly crucified, and have shared His bloody martyrdom. Like their Master, they slept; unlike their Master, they do not die. "Christ died." What was the Saviour's death?

I would now lead you along a way that I almost fear to tread. One can divine by instinct so much more than he can put into speech. We can feel so much more than we can express. And the way is very dim, with only here and there a guiding mark. Let us away into Gethsemane, at the midnight, that we may just touch the awful mystery. The Master is there, and He has taken with Him His three most intimate friends. They can accompany Him part of the way, and then He must leave them that He may continue the weird journey alone. Says the simple narrative, "He began to be sorrowful and very heavy." I think that marks the beginning of the dying. He "has not yet begun to sleep; I think He has begun to die. "Sorrowful and very heavy." Just gaze into the hearts of these words. "Sorrowful" has a profounder content than the word appears to denote; it is significant of the grief of desolation; and as for the word translated "heavy," it suggests an awful sense of homelessness. Shall we insert these words in place of those that have become almost too familiar to us? "He began to be desolate and very homeless." Let us pause there. "Very homeless!" He who only a few hours before had spoken so comfortably about His Father's house with the many mansions, and who on the self-same day had joyfully proclaimed the unfailing presence and companionship of His Father -- "I am not alone, my Father is with Me" -- was now becoming burdened with the oppressive sense of homelessness. The Father's house was becoming dim, and communion with the Father was waxing faint, and this sinless Son of God was beginning to feel the chills of a homeless desolation. I think that was the beginning of the dying. He was beginning to taste death!

Go a little farther into the garden, and listen to the Master's agonised speech. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"; exceeding desolate, "even unto death." Desolation unto death! That is the wailing moan of the Saviour's soul. Is He shrinking from the Cross? Is He afraid of the nails? Does He recoil from the physical pain? I remember keenly that one of the distresses which used to afflict the religious hope of my boyhood was a temptation, which I tried hard to resist, a temptation to suspect that Jesus was not so brave and fearless as some of His own followers, of whom I had read in my school-books. I had read how disciples of Jesus, when the flames of martyrdom were rising and cuding about them, had almost toyed and played with the flames, as little children play with the fringes of the advancing tide. I had read of how young girls had been tarred from crown to toe, and then fired to illumine a sensualist's revels, and how they had sung in the flame. And did their Master shrink from that which they almost welcomed with a shout? "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." "My soul is exceeding desolate." Is he afraid of the Cross? Nay, nay, a thousand times nay; He fears not the sleep, but, oh. He does shrink from the death! Over His soul there is gathering and deepening a mid-night darkness and desolation to which no other name can be given but the name of death. He is tasting the exceeding bitterness of death. On now to Calvary, and let us hear the words in which the sense of desolation and homelessness deepens into an unspeakable and unthinkable intensity! "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That was death. What would follow would be only sleep. That was death -- appalling midnight in the soul, the horror of a great darkness, exceeding desolation, abandonment! That was death -- the Father's house obscured, the Father's hand vanished, and the Son of God in the outer darkness, in the agonies of a consuming loneliness! That was death -- the sinless Saviour out there in the night, in the abandonment which is "the wages of sin." What we call death, Christ called sleep. "Christ died."

Now, that homelessness of soul, that abandonment in the outer darkness, is "the wages of sin." But "Christ knew no sin." And so we are led to the music of the Gospel, which has brought cheer and assurance to a countless host, the Gospel that Christ Jesus walked that way of appalling darkness and alienation in place of His brethren. "Christ died for the ungodly." He died for our sins. A few soldiers with hammer and nails put Him to sleep on the Cross, but it was for the sins of a race that He died, that He voluntarily went into the outer darkness, into the awful eclipse of forsakenness and abandonment. "He tasted death for every man." He drank that cup for the race. "He died for all."

Now, the Scriptures affirm that apart from Christ I am still under the dominion of "the law of sin and death"; "sin and death," sin and abandonment, sin and homelessness, sin and forsakenness and terrible night. That is an indissoluble connection, stern and inevitable. It is a law, fixed and unchanging, "the law of sin and death." But the Scriptures further affirm that in Christ Jesus I come under the dominion of another law -- the " law of the spirit of life " -- and by this I am freed from the sovereignty of "the law of sin and death." Under "the law of the spirit of life," the lonely way of the outer darkness will never more be known. By Christ the way has once been trod, never to be re-trodden by those who are in Him. "There shall be no more death."

Let me now call up for review some of the Master's glowing promises which I read to you at the beginning of my discourse, and let me read them in the light of the interpretation which I have been endeavouring to expound. "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." He shall sleep, but he shall never know the outer darkness of separation and abandonment. "This is the bread which cometh down out of Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." He shall sleep, but he shall never die. He shall never pass into the cold, chilling eclipse of a homeless desolation. We have been "reconciled to God by the death of His Son," and in that Son death is abolished. There is "life for ever- more."

Here, then, is the Glory of the Gospel. It is declared that I, a poor struggling, self-wasted sinner, may by faith be so identified with Christ, that Christ and I become as "one man." That is no ingenious phrase, the vehicle of a pious but fruitless fancy. It is the expression of a gospel, which a highly privileged ministry has the glory to proclaim, and which has proved itself to be the most august and blessed of realities to a great and uncounted host. An unspeakably fruitful identity with Christ, the mystic oneness of the believing race in the risen Lord! This is the possible heritage of all men, made possible to all men by the Saviour's atoning death. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit"; he is "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord his God." He is a partner in the deathless or eternal life.

But now to me, and to all men, there is committed a great choice. I can choose to be one with Adam, or one with Christ; one with the old man, or one with the new; one under "the law of sin and death," or one under "the law of the spirit of life." I say the choice is ours, and we know it. If I make this the choice of my days -- one with Thee, Thou deathless Christ, by faith and by faithfulness, one with Thee -- I shall never die. But if my life be a deliberate affront to the deathless Son of God, if I turn my back upon His grace, if this be the choice of my days -- one with thee, thou man of sin, by obedience and by spirit with thee -- then I shall die, nay, even now I am dead, and the great day of unveiling shall reveal to me the appalling fact that I am homeless, desolate, separated by a "great gulf" from "the inheritance of the saints in light." "These shall go into the outer darkness," into the night of awful loneliness, into the eclipse of death. They shall die.

Oh, pray that we may never know the death! When the hour of our departure comes, and the friends whom we leave behind shall speak of us as "dead," I pray that the word may be a misnomer, a pardonable fiction, not expressive of the reality of things. I pray that we may only sleep. May the good Lord put us into a gentle sleep, and in the great awakening may we find ourselves not homeless, but at home, glad to be at home, glad to meet the deathless One, and to see Him face to face!