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

**19. FORGETTING THE CLEANSING by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins."*

*2 Peter 1:9*

"He that lacketh these things." What things? The radiant treasures are named in a previous verse: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, love of the brethren, love. "He that lacketh these things is blind." His spiritual outlook is obstructed by a dense and earthborn cloud. "Seeing only what is near" -- he has lost the sense of the heavenly, the perception of what is ideal and divine -- "having forgotten the cleansing." Let us grasp the order of the apostle's thought. "Having forgotten the cleansing." That is not the ultimate consequence; it is the primary cause. It is not the last fruitage of a prolonged degeneracy; it is the original root. The "lack" and the "blindness" do not create the forgetfulness; they are created by it. "Having forgotten the cleansing." That is the starting- point of the appalling deterioration. Certain primary matters are permitted to pass into oblivion. Great cardinal truths are erased from the active consciousness. The battery of the man's creed loses some of its most powerful cells. Elements are submerged in which reside the secrets of life. Theology is devitalised. "Having forgotten the cleansing." What follows? Impoverish your creed, and you sterilise your morality. There will be a "lack" in "these things." Graces will be reluctantly pursued, and only scantily possessed. A devitalised theology creates a disabled and dispirited morality. "Having forgotten," he "lacks." What follows? Chilled morality results in impaired visions. Men who cease to pursue the ideal, speedily cease to see it. "He that lacketh is blind, seeing only what is near." He sees the small policy, the mean expedient, the earthly and the transient. "Seeing only what is near," he has no sense of the heavenly. The divine aspects of things have faded out of his sight. He has lost the ideal. That is the order and succession of the apostolic thought. A devitalised theology is succeeded by a disabled morality, which speedily issues in the obscuration of the ideal. "Having forgotten," he "lacks" and is "blind".

"Having forgotten." Forgotten what? "The cleansing." In the New Testament there is a recognised gradation in the importance of duties. Some of the commandments are described as "least," and others as "greatest." There is a similar gradation recognised in the importance of truths. There are truths which are regarded as primary, radical, fundamental, pre-eminent sources of holy energy, centres from which radiate the driving power of all assured and progressive spiritual life. Predominant among these primary truths are the truths concerning "the cleansing." Our fathers used to call them the "saving truths," not that any truth is devoid of saving and emancipating power, but that these truths are immediately and superlatively concerned with the deepest and most appalling need in human life. "I delivered unto you first of all " the truths concerning the "cleansing"; "first of all," as of primary and unspeakable import, "Christ died for our sins"; "first of all," as radical and alphabetic, in which everything which seeks to be positive and enduring must take its root, "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." You know the exalted eminence which these truths occupied in the teachings of the Apostle Paul. The space they fill in his epistles is indicative of the conspicuous authority which they exercised in his life. He could not keep away from the glorious themes. They possessed and held him by a strange and ever-increasing fascination. He lived and moved and had his being among the sublimities. "He dwelt on high; his place of defence was the munition of rocks." He was always "from above," never from beneath. He approached everything from lofty altitudes, and everything he touched was sublimed. He came to the commonplace from the blood of the cleansing, and the commonplace stood transformed. His base of operations was back in the saving truths, and to these he ever returned for reinforcement and renewal. The glorious mystery of the atoning death; the certainty of reconciliation; the assurance of forgiveness; the possibility of salvation for all men; these are the cardinal truths which formed the gospel of the Apostle Paul, and which run like an unbroken strain of music though all the changing complexities of his intensely varied life. "First of all," proclaimed the Apostle Paul, "Christ died for our sins." "First of all," repeats the Apostle Peter, "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." "First of all," cries the Apostle John, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." These are the primary truths concerning the cleansing which formed the staple and the emphasis of apostolic ministry, and these are the truths which, with glad and passionate eagerness, they published to a sin-bound, saddened and soddened world.

Now, what did they claim for the Word? They claimed that the truth was a gospel of power, the "power of God unto Salvation." These truths were declared to be force-centres, creative of impulse and motive, with power to change dead, inert, and sluggish lives into passionate activity and enthusiasm. The truths were offered to the world as dynamic cells, forming the battery of a mighty, active creed, which would instill energy into every activity in the entire circuit of the life. Yes, that is the word they used. Truth "energises." "The word of God worketh in you." "The implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Get these truths implanted within you; get them enthroned in the conscience as dominant conceptions; let them be bold and vivid presences in the chamber of your imagery, and a strong, saving, cleansing energy shall pervade your moral and spiritual being like a pure and vitalising current of healthy blood. This is what the apostles claimed for the truth they taught. They claimed that it would energise the conscience, and purge it from uncleanness. They claimed that it would energise the will, and endow a fickle, wavering reed with the staying power of adamant. They claimed that it would energise the emotions, and transform a mean, sluggish, dribbling affection into the serviceable passion of a mighty stream. They claimed that it would energise the entire being, arousing the dormant spiritual cravings, quickening a healthy appetite, yea, a hunger and a thirst for righteousness, and a jealous watchfulness for the companionship of the Lord. And how they laboured to enthrone it! With what persistence they sought to give "the cleansing" great and isolated glory! With what varied ministry they sought to preserve its remembrance clear, vivid, intense, and influential. How jealously they watched to save it from oblivion! "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, and for you it is safe." "I shall be ready always to put you in remembrance of these things." ..."I will endeavour that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." … "Do this in remembrance." ... That was the burden and the glory of the apostle's work, to keep "the cleansing" in remembrance. That is what they would have called their "practical" service. But take any ordinary commentary on the great epistles, say on the Epistle to the Romans, and mark its analysis of the apostle's thought, and not until you reach the twelfth chapter will you find the section headed "Practical." But what of the great reach of urgent, palpitating thought which stretches across the previous eleven? Eleven chapters devoted to placarding the great truth concerning "the cleansing"! Perhaps, after all, this is the section that should be named the practical. It is infinitely more than theory. It is root, it is spring, it is life! Get the eleven chapters exalted and enthroned, let the truths become abiding factors in the consciousness, let them be contemplated until contemplation becomes conviction, and musing creates fire, let them become possessed until they possess you, and the graces of chapter twelve will arise as an eager and spontaneous issue. Remember the cleansing. Let the primary truths have the primary place; let them be princes in the conscious life; and the princes of consciousness will appear as principles in conduct, filling life with moral passion and enthusiasm, and converting a reluctant drudgery into an exultant freedom.

But, now, obliterate the energising truth. Let it be exiled from the consciousness. Let the cleansing be forgotten. Blot out the first eleven chapters to the Romans. Begin with the twelfth. Begin with what you call the practical. What then? The practical will become the impracticable. You cannot expunge the theology and retain the morality. You cannot make the starting-point of the Epistle to the Galatians at the end of chapter 5 -- the culture of the fruits -- and ignore or renounce the previous chapters, which contain the root. Why, if the Epistle to the Galatians means anything at all, it is a passionate appeal and warning to men, out of whose minds the primary truth was fading, and in whose lives moral enthusiasm was declining. They had begun their religious life in the "power" of the Gospel. The great truths of "the cleansing" had energised them with healthy, moral passion. "Ye did run well!" Why, then, this panting, this fainting, this reluctance, this slow indifferent step, this moral "lack"? They had "forgotten the cleansing"! We are to be able to "stand" -- firm, strong, and irresistible -- when our loins are "girt about with truth." But if we take off the belt, if we ignore it, if we renounce it, the soul loses its vigour, it sinks into moral laxity, and becomes sluggish, undecided, and limp.

We have abundant confirmation of the sequence in the history of the Christian centuries. The principle is this -- dethrone the cleansing, and you chill the passion for perfectness; exalt the cleansing, and moral enthusiasm becomes abounding. Go back to the years which preceded the emergence of the Protestant faith. A sacerdotal ceremonialism had eclipsed the gospel of cleansing. Religious life was corrupt and corrupting, because the interpreters of religion had lost the key. The Christian doctrine of grace was obliterated and forgotten. With the doctrine of grace there had gone into oblivion the companion doctrine of sin. Grace being exiled, graces became scant. The great cleansing was forgotten. The sense of sin was dulled. Shame died. Morality became sluggish and unclean. The sequence of forgetfulness was lack. Protestantism tore down the ceremonial veil. It brushed aside the obscuring legends. It rediscovered and reaffirmed the doctrine of grace. It published anew the gospel of "the cleansing." "First of all, Christ died for our sins." "We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son." "In Christ we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." That was the primary burden of Protestantism. And what was the issue? Conscience was quickened. The sense of sin was revived. The chilled passion for perfectness was rekindled and reinflamed. Reformation became an enthusiasm. Out of Protestantism came Puritanism -- ay, came as natural in its emergence as the emergence of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters of Romans from the great body of cardinal, primary truth which precedes them; and whatever one might say about Puritanism, however severely critics may disparage it for its supposed narrowness, let it be remembered that it was the narrowness of power, a healthy recoil from the impotence of diffuseness -- the narrowness of the mill-stream, a concentration for more abundant labours in the service of God and man. Protestantism made Puritanism. A revitalised theology created a re-empowered and impassioned morality.

Now, come down the generations to the early years of the eighteenth century. Primary truth had again become obscured. The great cleansing was forgotten. The creed of the Puritans was erased, and had ceased to be a controlling and pervading factor in the consciousness of the personal life. With the obliteration of cardinal truth there came the disparagement of the ten commandments. The current of moral life ran slow and unclean. The entire nation was possessed by the laxity. Our prominent statesmen were notoriously and grossly impure. Literature had lost its wings, and no longer soared into the ideal. The masses of the people were ignorant, brutal, and debased. They had "forgotten the cleansing," and the sequence was a terrible "lack." Then came the early Methodists with the great awakening. What was the message which effected the rousing? The exiled gospel, the obliterated truth, the forgotten cleansing. "First of all, Christ died for our sins." Grace! Sin! Faith! Life! These were the projecting emphases around which gathered the speech of the evangelical revival. Says George Whitfield in his journal; "This sermon, under God, began the awakening at Gloucester, Bristol, and London." And what was the sermon about? "The nature and necessity of regeneration in Christ." The sermon which forms the introductory discourse in John Wesley's published volumes of theology reveals the keynote of his extraordinary ministry. These men uncovered the veiled and buried truth; they proclaimed the great doctrines of "the cleansing," and from the moors of wild Northumberland to the more genial haunts of Cornwall and Devon vast multitudes of men and women turned their faces heavenward, recoiling from the uncleanness in which they wallowed, in a passionate longing for the purity and sweetness of the Lord.

Come further down the centuries to our immediate time. What is the religious phenomenon of our own day which remains undimmed even when placed by the side of the great evangelical revival? Is it an illegitimate emphasis to ascribe that glory to the Salvation Army? What is it that confronts us when we open our eyes? A vast army of men and women distributed all over the world, the majority of whom were in the grip of the vulgarest devils, morally barren and unfruitful, sin-soaked and spirit-bound, but who are now rejoicing in a passionate hunger for holiness and truth. How do you account for it? Here they are, round about us in our land, men and women with an enthusiasm for self-denial which puts the more reputable Church to shame; men and women who were once grovelling in the mire, but who are now fitted to take their place by the sea of glass, among the vast multitude who have "gotten the victory over the beast." What is the secret of the great awakening? The remembrance of the great cleansing! All intermediaries, both of ritual and tradition, have been brushed aside, and they have been brought face to face with "the blood of the cleansing," with the unspeakable grace and love of the reconciling Lord.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,

In my place condemned He stood,

Sealed my pardon with His blood.

That is the secret of the Salvation Army, and from that secret proceeds the passionate moral energy which by abundant labours is serving the ends of the world.

This has been the secret power of the Christian centuries, and its submergence has been the explanation of all moral decline. Exalt the doctrines of grace, and you create the hunger for God. Let the truths of the cleansing be received and vividly retained, and graces will spring in abundance. Let this realisation possess the personal consciousness, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," and the realisation will itself create a moral energy which will exultingly declare, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." But let the great truths be erased or ignored -- let the cleansing be forgotten, and forgetfulness will issue in lack, moral enthusiasm will sink into indifference, into an apathetic contentment with the unclean ways and fashions of the world.

"Forgetfulness of the cleansing"; moral laxity. What is the ultimate issue? "Blindness." What we cease to crave for we cease to see. When moral passion cools, moral ideals fade, or we see "only what is near." We become near-sighted, weak-sighted, blind to the things that are afar off. We lose the vision of the ideal, the heavenly, the eternal. We see only what is near, the earthly and the temporal. When the passion for perfection becomes lukewarm and cold, we become more concerned with postures than with depositions, with temporalities more than with spiritualities, with a good living more than a good life. We see only what is near, and are blind to that which is afar off. Foreign missions, if they appeal to us at all, appeal as the ministries of a more extended commerce, the pioneers in the creation of multiplied centres of trade. We are blind to the heavenly and the divine. The work of the Lord presents itself as a nice expediency, and not as a glorious and tremendous privilege and obligation. We cannot see! Life, having lost its background, loses its foreground. Having lost the saving truth, we lose the ideal. Forgetting "the cleansing," we become blind. We become dominated by the earthly, and the heavenly becomes as an impotent fiction lost somewhere in the encircling mists.

That is the order and succession of this appalling degeneracy, -- forgetfulness of grace, moral laxity, lost ideal. Turn the matter round. If we are to see clearly, if we are to behold the heavenly, to appreciate it, to be responsive to the allurements of the ideal and the eternal, our moral life must be a passionate enthusiasm, and for a passionate enthusiasm the consciousness needs to be possessed by the great energising truths of the cleansing. Is it here that we are wanting? In this great matter of Christian missions have we clear sight? Do we see them as the Lord sees them? Do we see the ideal and the heavenly, and does it allure? Or do we only see the things that are near? Have we forgotten the cleansing? The conditions of power remain unchanged. Let us get nearer the springs. Let us reaffirm the great cleansing. Let us startle the world with surprises of grace. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."