**BROOKS BY THE TRAVELLER'S WAY - ADDRESSES BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**03. BEHIND AND BEFORE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me."*

*Psalm 139:5*

"Thou hast beset me behind!" He deals with the enemy in the rear, the foe that lurks in my yesterdays. He does not ignore the dark heritage that bears down upon me from the past. "And before!" He deals with the enemy in the front, the foe that seems to hide in my to-morrows. "And laid Thine hand upon me!" He deals with the immediate contingency, and gives me a present consciousness of ample defence and security.

But does He perfectly understand me? Does He know my idiosyncrasies? Is He intimate with my peculiar weaknesses? Does He know where the hedge is thin and vulnerable, and where my life is most easily invaded and defiled? Does He know where defences are more specially required? Let us seek the answer in the earlier verses of the Psalm, and let the spacious experience of the psalmist be interpreted as revealing the Almighty's intimate knowledge of the individual life.

**I. God's Intimate Knowledge of the Individual Life.**

"O Lord, Thou hast searched me." The examination has been most thorough and penetrating. Every nook and corner has been explored. Nothing has been overlooked, unrecognised, unnamed. "I, the Lord, search the heart."

"And known me." It is the knowledge of an intimate friend. I require knowing. I am often misunderstood. The unexplored is so frequently the misjudged. The Lord knows me. "I know my sheep."

"Thou knowest my downsitting." He is present in my seasons of meditation, in the hours when I sit down to think and plan and devise, and when the formative purposes of life are chosen and shaped.

"And mine uprising." He is an intimate presence when meditation is ended, and the moment of execution has arrived. He knows when my purpose becomes an action, when "I will arise" has passed into "he arose," and resolution is being fulfilled.

"Thou understandest my thought afar off." He discerns the faintest beginnings of purpose. He detects the mental germs. He sees my thought long before it is incarnated in an act. He sees it "afar off," when it is only a trembling suggestion, and when it passes almost imperceptibly across the threshold of the mind.

"Thou searchest out my path." He knows the way I take to achieve my purposes. He knows all the windings of the road. He knows when it is "straight" and when it is "crooked." He knows all the means I employ. "He is acquainted with all my ways."

"There is not a word in my tongue, but lo! O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." He watches life as it blossoms at the lips. He marks the kindly vehicle of grace. He notes the ungainly vehicle of malice and ill-will. He knows the contents of all my intercourse, and how it is determined and coloured by the threats and flatteries of men.

Surely this God knows me! He is intimate with my personal "make-up," with my own peculiar weaknesses, and knows just what is needed to render me strong and invulnerable.

**II. The Security Given.**

**1.** "Thou hast beset me behind." He stands between me and my enemies in the rear. He defends me from the hostility of my own past. He does not cut me away from my yesterdays. Consequences are not annihilated; their operations are changed. They are transformed from destructives into constructives. The sword becomes a ploughshare; the implement of destruction becomes an agent of moral and spiritual culture. The Lord "besets me behind" and the sins of yesterday no longer send their poisoned swords into my life. They are changed into the ministers of a finer culture, nourishing godly sorrow, and humility, and meekness, and self-mistrust. The failures and indiscretions of yesterday are no longer creatures of moral impoverishment and despair. He "besets me behind," and they become the teachers of a quiet wisdom and well-proportioned thought.

**2.** "And before." He comes between me and the enemy that troubles me from to-morrow, the foe that lies ambushed in futurity and disturbs the peace of to-day. And so He deals with my fears and anxieties, and repeats the miracle of transformation, and changes them from swords into ploughshares. He changes destructive anxiety into a constructive thoughtfulness. He converts a lacerating fretfulness into an energetic contentment. He transforms an abject fear into a holy reverence. He takes the terror out of to-morrow, and enables me to live and labour in a fruitful calm.

**3.** "And laid Thine hand upon me." And the hand suggests the sweet sense of companionship. The little child awakes in the night, and is affrighted by the darkness and the stillness, but the mother puts out her hand and just rests it upon her troubled babe, and the little one sinks to rest again. "O, let me feel Thee near me!" "Only in the darkness just to feel Thy hand."

And the hand suggests the ministry of soothing. The nurse lays her cool hand upon the burning brow of her patient, and he exclaims, "How lovely that is!" And when I come into a sudden crisis in life, and am tempted to become feverish, and "heated hot with burning fears," the Lord lays His cooling hand upon me, and I grow calm again. "And Jesus touched her, and the fever left her."

And the hand suggests the ministry of guidance. That is a most suggestive word, constantly in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "And the Lord said unto me with a strong hand." Speech by strange graspings! Suggestion by grips! Guidance by the creation of a mighty impulse! The Lord declared His will unto the prophet Isaiah by implanting in his life the sense of a tremendous imperative, a terrific "must," a consciousness which the prophet expressed under the symbol of the grasp of a "strong hand." "Thy right hand shall guide me."

With these defences we are safe. In these hands our security is complete. "None shall pluck them out of My hand." "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit."