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

**17. DESIRING AND SEEKING by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me."*

*Psalm 27:4-6*

It is always a great privilege to be permitted to overhear the prayers of a saint. It is greatly helpful to be allowed to know the kind of vision which occupies the mind of a saint when he is upon his knees. What is the burden of his supplications? What is the character of his largest hopes? What is the hope of his aspirations? Perhaps it is by no means the smallest of our obligations to the Apostle Paul that we are so frequently permitted to hear him at prayer. Again and again in his epistles he breaks out into supplications, and we enjoy the privilege of gazing upon the wonderful spiritual prospect which his own soul contemplates and covets. And here in the psalm which we are meditating to-night, the veil is lifted, and we overhear the prayer of a saint of old. What is the nature of the prayer? What is the goal which offered the greatest allurement? "One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after." What is this thing which formed the all-attractive goal of his devotional life?

**I. The Character of the Quest.**

"That I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life." He prays that his life may be spent in a sanctuary. The ideal life is to him the life of ceaseless worship. In the perfected life the soul is always upon its knees. The saint "dwells in the House of the Lord all the days of his life." There are no interregnums. Life is not broken up into hours spent in the House of the Lord, and days spent away from it. The whole life is pervaded by the atmosphere of worship. Now when we usually speak of the devotional life, we describe a mere patch of our days, a little fringe, or a thin thread in a wide, barren waste. We think of the early moments of the day, or of its later moments, and these we regard as constituting the devotional season. But here is a man whose aspiration is not for a partial sanctification, but for a life entirely devotional. He yearns to spend all the days in the House of the Lord. He never wishes to be away from the atmosphere of worship. He desires never to lose the attitude of the suppliant. When the body rises from its knees, he wants the soul to continue in prayer. He longs to "pray without ceasing."

We commonly speak of the religious and the secular, as though they were two quantities that might run along in parallel lines without flowing into intimate combination. The distinction is perilous and illegitimate. We can no more separate the religious and the secular, and preserve their life, than we can preserve the life of flesh which is divorced from blood. We cannot isolate flesh and blood and sustain vitality. The condition of the life of each is the union of both. Religion without the secular is a wasted and ineffectual breath; the secular without religion is a dead and inert form. And so the distinction between secular music and sacred music, between secular books and religious books, between secular callings and sacred callings, is fraught with tremendous peril, and is usually the prelude to spiritual death. The psalmist wanted no such divisions in his life. He wanted all the days, and every moment of the days, to be spent as in the House of the Lord. He never wished to go from beneath its gracious roof. He wanted life to be a temple. If he were in the market-place, or in the ways of the crowded city, or threading a sheep-track on the lonely moor, he wanted to have the unbroken consciousness that he was in the Temple of God. He wanted the humblest toil to be as sanctified as sacrificial service. He longed that his soul might be at prayers in his labour, in his pleasures, in his social intercourse, in his burden-bearing, and through all the varied experiences of the complex day. He prayed that he might not be a mere sojourner in the house of worship, but that the incense of devotion might rise continuously from his reverent and aspiring soul.

"To behold the beauty of the Lord." That is the second of the great emphases of the psalmist's prayer. He yearned for a life that is inspired by contemplation of the divine beauty. Is it altogether irrelevant to say that nowadays we give ourselves very little time to "behold" anything? Is not seeing becoming a lost art? We go too much at the gallop, and quiet, fruitful seeing is not consistent with the racing and hurrying life. We have almost coined a word which has supplanted the old word "see," and is perhaps expressive of our modern ways. We speak of "doing" a place. We walk round the National Gallery, and we have "done" it. But in the doing there is no seeing; in the going there is no quest. A mere glance appropriates nothing; a long gaze appropriates the beauty it beholds. It is only when we behold with quiet, steady, persistent contemplation that we pierce beneath the surface of things, and possess the hidden wealth. I do not wonder that another psalmist proclaims this most natural sequence:--"When I meditate on Thee in the night watches ... my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness." That is not an arbitrary connection; it is the natural fruit. Meditation appropriates the very marrow of things. We only lay hold of rich, satisfying sustenance when we practise the habit of meditation. If we wish to taste the exquisite sweetness of life's essences, we must move in the spirit of more deliberate meditation. "My meditation of Him shall be sweet." If we want to know the rich beauty of God, we must give ourselves time to think about it. It is well to take some single word spoken by the Master, or some one incident of His life, and dwell upon it until we have beheld its glory, and, by the beholding, have ourselves become glorified. As the beauty dawns upon our vision it will inspire the heart into more fervent quest. Let us gaze upon the Lord until the wondrous allurement wooes us into ever deeper and richer union.

"And to enquire in His Temple." He wants to seek his knowledge in the spirit of devotion. Where will he make his enquiries? "In His Temple." That is the place in which all enquiries should be made. All investigations should commence and be continued on one's knees. The solution of pressing problems must be sought in the mood of prayer. We are just here at the root of many of our errors. We do not ask our questions in His Temple. We ask them elsewhere, and in an alien spirit. We ask our questions defiantly. Grief overshadows us, and we raise our questions in stiff rebellion. Adversity comes, and we project our enquiries in bitterness. The healing answer is frequently withheld because we have asked amiss. We must ask our questions in reverence. We must kneel if we want to enquire. We must not give up worship when we are face to face with a hard difficulty. Let us seek the clue in the Temple. "Take it to the Lord in prayer." There are many things which feel overwhelming when we ask them in a spirit of revolt; they become tolerable when we ask them in the mood of prayer. "When I sought to know this, it was too painful until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I." We get the clue which makes the burden light when we bow in reverent prayer and praise.

"Sometimes a light surprises

The Christian while he sings."

**II. The Fruits of the Quest.**

What would be the issues of such a life? The psalmist yearns for a life in which the spirit of worship is unceasing, and in which the divine beauty is intimately contemplated, and in which all investigation shall be made in the spirit of reverent supplication. What will be the fruits of such a quest?

**1. Restfulness.**

"In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me." There shall be quietness at the heart of things. There shall be a centre of rest, even though there be a circumference of trouble. The life shall be kept calm, and free from panic, as in a secret place. When the foes are many and threatening, there shall be a place of rest, even in their midst. When the enemy shows his teeth, and I can almost feel his hot breath, there shall still be a hiding-place of rest. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." That is a wonderful promise, and it is daily fulfilled. I have seen a widow sit down quietly and trustfully at the Lord's feast when the grim enemy death is in the house. The life that is spent in intimate fellowship with God is never bereft of a pavilion of peace. "Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round."

**2. Security.**

"He shall set me up upon a rock." He will give me the sense of the firm-rootedness of the good. He will inspire my consciousness with the faith that everything is not loose, and slippery, and uncertain. There is something firm and dependable. There is a rock. "The Lord is my rock." The man becomes sure of God, and in that assurance his security is complete.

**3. Elevation.**

"Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me." The foes that conquer shall themselves be conquered. The enemy that ruled shall become a subject. The things that troubled him shall now be beneath his feet. It is salvation by elevation. "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." I shall be above my old worries, my old irritations, my old temptations. The Lord lifts us above our enemies, and makes us more than conquerors.

There are just two other words in the passage which I desire to emphasise. This kind of life was not only "desired" by the psalmist; it was "sought after." "That will I seek after." His prayer determined his pursuit. That is the order in all fruitful religion. A man's practical search must follow the vision of his supplications. It is not a mere coincidence that our Master has linked together the two words "ask" and "seek." We must find our purpose in our prayers. We must shape our ambitions out of our aspirations. We must turn our supplications into duties, and let our prayers determine the trend and intensity of our search.