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

**18. THE FORCES OF THE KINGDOM by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

*John 3:3*

"We know that Thou art a teacher come from God." How did he know? There is a dogmatism and a finality about the assertion which arouses our inquisitiveness. The statement is made in the tone of one who is familiar with heavenly things. "We know that Thou art come from God." About Thee there are all the signs of the heavenly-born. What were the signs he marked? How did this ruler of the Jews know that Jesus came from God? "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." "These miracles that Thou doest." These were the signs that determined the ruler's judgment; these were the hall-marks which testified that Jesus belonged to the prophetic order, and had intimate relationship with God. Is that the criterion? Is that the standard of judgment? There is no reference to character, no reference to beauty and sanctity of life, no reference to personal motive and ambition. These are all signs without significance, symptoms that to Nicodemus suggest no eternal import. These "miracles that Thou doest" are the unquestionable evidences that a man is in league with the heavenly forces, and is a favoured son of the Eternal God. "When we see the miracle," says Nicodemus, "we know its significance, and know how to interpret the man."

Now look at that position. By this one individual we may be able to interpret his race. Here is a light which illumines for us the thought and expectation of a people. The Hebrew people were looking for a kingdom, the kingdom of God. Their eyes were gazing wistfully for signs of its advent. They said that when it came they would see it, and know it by its extraordinary display of miraculous power. That was to be the sign of its presence. There would be a manifestation which would fascinate all eyes and determine all judgments, and all men should see it together.

Here, then, was the attitude of the Hebrew race. "Let us wait for the kingdom. Let us watch for the miraculous, that we may know the advent of the Kingdom. Let us keep our eyes alert that we may see these forces of the Kingdom when they appear." That was the attitude of the race, an attitude shared by Nicodemus, a ruler of the race. He has been upon his watch-tower, a sentinel, scanning the horizon, looking for the Kingdom, and the miraculous burst upon his vision in the doings of a lowly Nazarene. He saw a miracle, and it interpreted itself to him as a sign of the Kingdom. Tremblingly he buried the secret in his soul, and carried it in the hush of night to the wonder worker himself. "Rabbi, we know ... for we have seen." "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." To see a miracle is not to see the Kingdom. Thou speakest as though thou wert altogether intimate with the Kingdom, as though thou didst understand its characteristics, and knew its tendencies, and wert familiar with its forces and recognised its life. Thou sayest, "We know, for we have seen." The Kingdom is not in the region of the visible and temporal. It lies back in the Unseen and the Eternal. Its nature is known only to its natives. Its conditions are known only to the initiated. Its forces are mystic and mysterious. "Except a man be born again he can have no knowledge of the Kingdom; he has no faculty of vision or apprehension, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Now, if that be so, what is the work of the unregenerate judgment when it expresses itself concerning the Kingdom of God? What is the value of the "we know" of the unborn? The Master declares that the unregenerate are stamped by inability to apprehend and appreciate the forces of the Kingdom. What authority, then, I ask, shall we place upon their judgment? The man born blind is no authority in the discernment of exquisite colours. The man born deaf is no authority in the discrimination of melodious sounds. The man born without a palate is no authority in matters which demand the exercised powers of an epicure. To receive sensations you require a sense. The forces that create light demand an eye. The forces that create sound demand an ear. The forces that operate in the Kingdom of God demand a regenerated soul. Except a man have eyes he cannot see the kingdom of colour. Except a man have ears he cannot apprehend the kingdom of sound. Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.

Now, can that declaration be submitted to the test of practical experience? What is the declaration? The declaration is this, that in the regenerate life forces operate and conditions prevail which are absolutely beyond the apprehension of the unregenerate, and that when the unregenerate express judgments about the regenerated life they are speaking about a Kingdom of which, by necessity, they are absolutely ignorant. Is that confirmed by common life? Can the unregenerate in a congregation form any conception of the hallowing ministry, the gracious heavenly forces which are now at work in the lives of the re-born? Can they see that Kingdom, with a vision which includes vivid and sympathetic apprehension? The Apostle Paul, a man of no slight intellectual eminence, well disciplined in faculty and broad in culture, emphasised and re-emphasised this inability of the unregenerate man to perceive the Kingdom of God. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared." "Eye hath not seen"--art-culture or nature worship, assiduous discipleship in the school of the beautiful, the adoration of the lovely in field and sea and sky will not endow a man with the perceptiveness for apprehending and appreciating the things of the Kingdom of God. "Ear hath not heard"--no passion for music, no listening to the musical speech of the philosopher as he teaches in the grove will endow a man with aptitude and power to realise the things prepared in the Kingdom of God. "Neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive"--the unregenerate cannot by any power of the imagination conceive the condition of the regenerate; poetry will tire of wing, and fall back baffled in the attempt. "It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive." Mere poetic sensibility is devoid of the higher sympathy which can perceive the things of the Kingdom of God. The study of the beautiful in art, and music, and poetry, through eye and ear and heart, can never win the secret of the Lord. They leave all undiscovered the deeper mysteries of the Spirit; they leave a world unknown, for "except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Let me give one or two examples of forces at work in the regenerate life of which the unregenerate cannot conceive. Let me give one or two suggestions of a kingdom which they cannot see. In the Kingdom of God there are what I will call liberating forces at work, of which it is quite impossible for the unredeemed to conceive. You cannot be in the Kingdom and not experience their power. You cannot be outside the Kingdom and understand their power. They may be at work, operating upon the life of the one who is sitting near to you in the House of God, and if you be outside the Kingdom the life of your neighbour is to you an entirely unknown and unthinkable world.

What are these liberating forces of the Kingdom, circulating like healthful winds among all its members? Here is a member of the Kingdom. Listen to a snatch from his daily song, "He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock." Do we all know the meaning of that song? How much of it do we understand? We all know the horrible pit; we all know the miry clay. Thus far our experience has been common, and we speak in familiar terms. But do we all know the meaning of the rock? Do we all realise what the force has been that laid hold of the man, like a strong hand, and lifted him out of pit and clay into the welcome light and set his feet upon a rock? Can we form any conception of that? He was in the pit, and he walked in darkness, and the darkness was blinding his eyes, and he saw and heard nothing ahead but the threats and portents of judgment. And then God's Kingdom came, and the sweet, strong angel-forces of the Kingdom befriended him, and threw their influences round about him in glorious and redeeming might. And now, when I call to Him and say, "Dweller in the horrible pit, how fares it with thee now?" there comes back the glad response, "No more night; guilt and fear have fled away like great black birds of the darkness, never more to return." That is the inner life of the Kingdom. Can we all understand it? Can we all see it with a perception that is richest realisation? The man walked in the miry clay. He was sunk deep in unclean habit. Life had become a captivity of defilement. He was stuck fast in exhausting and paralysing sin. Then God's Kingdom came, and the power that works mightily worked round about the captive of sin. And now, when I call to him, "Man, who wast enslaved by the miry clay, how fares it with thee?" he sends back the response, "Free indeed! The captivity is ended; I am a child of liberty; He brought me up out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock." That is the life of the Kingdom, and such are its liberating forces. To some they are no more than fiction, a beautiful dream of an Utopian world. They cannot realise them. They are outsiders, and so the forces are unthinkable, for "except a man be born again" these powers to him are nonexistent, "he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Let me give another example of the forces at work in the regenerate, and of which the unregenerate are quite unable to conceive. I named my first example the liberating forces of the Kingdom; let me name the second example, the fertilising forces of the Kingdom. Now whether we are in the Kingdom or not we are under the same obligations. We do not lower the standard of judgment by the evasion of a duty. That is a truth that needs to be remembered. It is sometimes assumed that if a man turn a deaf ear to the calls of the Christian religion, he will not be subjected to the same exacting judgment. It is an appalling error. The standard remains, alike for all men, and "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." We are under common obligation, whether we are in the Kingdom, or out of it, to grow certain virtues and graces, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, faith, and many others of the shining band. Now there are some people, who are rightly named "saints," who are in the Kingdom, and who manifest these dispositions in marvellous strength and beauty. If I ask them by what power these fair flowers are grown, they one and all reply that they grow them "in grace." Do you understand that? Is it any more to you than a word? Does it suggest a great reality which in your personal experience you see and know? "Grace!" That is the familiar power of the Kingdom. They who are in the Kingdom declare that they have mysterious forces within them, which they call by the mysterious name of "grace." Yes, they declare that in the Kingdom they have a "new heaven and a new earth," and that with a new heaven and a new earth moral and spiritual culture becomes an eager delight. That is what grace provides in the Kingdom, a new heaven and a new earth. That is what is wanted in the desert of Sahara if ever that desert is to blossom as the rose. There is wanted a new heaven, which shall drop fatness, in showers of refreshing rain; and there is wanted a new earth, in which the barren sand shall be transformed into rich and fertile soil. We must get into conditions where the God above us can come down in showers of blessing, and where the stony heart within us can be transformed into prepared and eager ground. These conditions are to be found within the Kingdom. Within the Kingdom the heavens are opened in an outpouring of grace. "I will come down like rain"; "then shall the earth yield her increase." And so the saints grow their graces in grace. Can you understand that mysterious force? Do you know it? Or do you stand aghast, with the confused inquiry--"How can these things be?" I can understand how a vine that is thin and lank and fruitless, shivering outside a vinery, might look through the glass at the sister vine that is burdened with clusters, and despondingly cry, "How can these things be?" It is all a difference of atmospheric conditions. On the other side of the glass forces are reigning and at work which to the outside vine are practically non-existent. Just across the frontier, in the Kingdom of God, "grace reigns," and in grace the citizens accomplish their growth. Do you know the gracious powers? Or are you an outsider? Then to you the powers are unthinkable, and "except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

The Kingdom can only be known by its natives. How can we become naturalised? How can we cross the borders and come within the range of the gracious forces of the Kingdom? "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." We must lay aside all pride, and kneel at the King's feet. We must resign our wills. We must be docile and obedient. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."