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

**23. THE HEAVY LADEN by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

*Matthew 11:28,29*

This exquisite passage is like a flower which one is almost afraid to touch, lest he should spoil the delicate bloom. Yet to disturb the flower may awake a fragrance and distribute it to others. My treatment shall be a gentle shaking of the flower, if perchance its inherent fragrance may captivate our spiritual senses and allure us to the heart of its gracious truth.

"Ye that labour and are heavy-laden." And who are the "labouring"? There is an intense force and significance in the word. We may discover one aspect of its wealthy content in the familiar verse, "Jesus being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well." Perhaps the Master was employing the figure of a poor beast carrying too heavy a load, with its heaving sides and hanging head, and strength almost spent; a beast ready to sink. That is the inherent meaning of the word "labour." It suggests a life sinking beneath a weight which is beyond its strength. And who are the "heavy laden"? The figure is taken from an over-cargoed boat, a boat that is burdened to the extent of peril, almost to the point of submergence. Here, then is the force of our Lord's appeal. All ye that are exhausted, whose strength is well nigh spent, who are carrying gigantic weights which are beyond your power, ye who are sinking in the hopeless task, "come unto Me, and I will give you rest!" All ye that are like over-cargoed boats, whose minds are burdened with anxieties and cares, or with the heavy and lumbering traditions of men, and who are nigh to being swamped, living in perpetual fear of submersion, "come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

Are there such souls? Are there any sinking, sunken, despairing hearts? Are there over-cargoed men and women, beset by hungry waves ever seeking to engulf them? Is life a merry maytime, a sunny round of lightsome games in a flower-decked meadow? Or is life full of steep and difficult highways, hard, dry, and dust-covered? And is it that wherever we turn our eyes, we may see a horse down, a panting beast of burden, spent beneath its load? Turn where we will, do we not gaze upon some poor soul sunk into despair, crushed into the dry choking dust by a weight that has broken the heart? What shall we legislate for, a picnic or a shambles? If life is a picnic, a Redeemer is superfluous, but if sin has made life a shambles, if sorrow has changed the old home into a galling prison, then we need a Redeemer, and He comes with the right word when He says, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

I think if we could gather together all the scattered army of the sinking and the heavy-laden, and marshal them in ranks, they would form a procession which would surely melt the hardest heart. Who would be found in that vast procession?

One big regiment would be formed of those who are sinking under the burdening sense of guilt. Does that sound like fiction? Have we never heard of men and women who have spent the forces of mind and soul, and who are sinking in sheer exhaustion because of the load of guilt which they drag after them to-day? If, when we have lived to-day, to-day were done, men might walk with airy step, but the guilt of to-day is added to the heavy baggage-waggon which constitutes our load, and at length men sink in sheer collapse. "Oh, full of scorpions is my mind." That is an expression of common experience. We do a deed and so welcome a scorpion, and the scorpion embitters the life and racks it with unending pain. Here is another picture of the heavy-laden. "And behold a woman in the city which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, came and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet." There, I say, is a heavy-laden soul, dragging her guilt like a galling chain. Now there is no exhaustion like the exhaustion created by the sense of guilt. It is accompanied by terrible drain and strain. Hope fades away from life like the light from the evening sky, and there is nothing left but the burden of the chain.

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day."

The outlook on the morrows is just a monotony of laden and hopeless gloom.

Now what can we do for such? Men attempt to alleviate the burdens of the guilt-bound by little fictions. "This is the very painting of your fears." Painting! "My worm dieth not, my fire is not quenched." Another little fiction is tried. "Maybe there is no God." No God! "I feel His terrible grip." Then a third little fiction may be applied. "There is no hell; it is only the creation of heated and unhealthy brains." And I think I hear the reply of the guilt-burdened:--"No hell? I am in it. I am there; I am tormented in this flame." No, there is no emollient in these petty fictions. There is only one hope for those who are sinking beneath the crushing burden of guilt, and that is to be found in the infinite power of the Divine forgiveness. He not only forgives, but forgets. I think in this Divine forgetfulness is the real luxury of my Father's forgiveness. When I remember my sins it is an unspeakable joy to know that the Father has forgotten them. "I will remember them no more for ever." This is the secret of rest.

Another regiment in the procession of the "labouring" soul would be composed of those who are heavy laden with the burdensome mystery of things, who are dragging along in the mire of fears and uncertainties, and who are looking about for some firm way of assurance and rest. A regiment of heavy-laden gropers! Is there anything so exhausting as long and fruitless search? Men who are looking for work become more exhausted than if they were engaged in work. Work itself provides an element of rest, but looking for work is productive of nothing but exhaustion. The man who goes about all day, seeking for work, turns home again at night, weary and tired out. It is not otherwise with men and women who are groping for God. I think there is a very burdened and tired life behind the Old Testament cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." That cry represents a labouring soul sinking like a spent and weary beast. It is to such as these that the Master makes His loving call, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

But the trouble is that men do not search for Him in the right place. "Ye search the Scriptures ... and ye will not come unto Me." I have seen a tourist travelling through one of the loveliest parts of Scotland, who was so absorbed in his guidebook that he scarcely lifted his eyes to look at the scenery. "Ye search the Scriptures, and ye will not come unto Me." Men will search anywhere and do anything except turn in simple surrender to the Christ Himself. They weary themselves in intellectual exploration, and they will not lay their wills in childlike simplicity, in lowly obeisance to the Master's call. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." The secrets are discovered in the way of devotion and reverent fear. "Come unto Me," ye sinking, exhausted seekers, "and I will give you rest."

Let me name one other regiment in this great army of the heavy-laden. How shall we describe them? They are burdened with religiousness. We can exhaust a horse by too much harness. We can put upon him so many trappings that he has no margin of strength for real and useful service. Harness is purposed to direct our strength to the most efficient use, but excessive harness may drain the very strength it was intended to preserve. It is even so in the religious life. Rules and regulations are purposed to aid us in spiritual efficiency, but excessive regulation may drain the spirit and despoil it of the power of fruitful ministry. Rules may become mere binding straps, which hold the soul in galling servitude. That was the condition of many of the Jews in the time of our Lord. They were "laden with burdens grievous to be borne." Their multitudinous rules made their spiritual life a bondage, and their souls were weary and spent. I am not sure that we are altogether free from peril even in our own day. I turn to Manuals of Devotion, and I find directions such as these: --"Forty-five rules for the suppression of Jealousy!" "Twenty rules for the cultivation of Charity!" Surely regulations so multiplied will act like burdensome harness, and will oppress the life they were purposed to help. Christ refused to give rules. He would not multiply small regulations. "Till seven times?" "I say not unto thee until seven times." He would lift the soul out of the bondage of small literalisms into the large opportunity of the Spirit. "Come unto Me," ye souls that are laden with regulations and trappings, "and I will give you rest."

And so rest is to be gained by finding Christ. How is it to be retained? How are we to keep our "rest" fresh and healthful? God does not want His bread to become stale; He wants it to be ever palatable and good to our taste. He does not want His "rest" to become stale, He wants it to remain fresh and sweet that I may experience it every day like a newly-discovered thing. He wants His "gift" to be a daily "find." "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me ... and ye shall find rest." He wants His rest to be so fresh in experience that it may surprise me every day as though it were a thing I had newly found. He wants it to remain a novelty, and never become a commonplace. He wants his rest to be "new every morning." And this is how it is to be accomplished:--"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." Find out the Master's way of doing things. Dwell with Him and appropriate His Spirit. Approach everything from His stand-point. Do not confront anything in vanity and pride. Take up all your tasks and encounter all your sorrows in "meekness" and "lowliness"; and the rest He gave us when first we turned to Him we shall find in everything, and it will daily occasion us a glad and palatable surprise. What He gives us we may in "meekness" and "lowliness" continually re-find. Life will be a prolonged spiritual discovery in the peace and rest of God.