**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**06. THE THANKFULNESS OF JESUS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

I WANT to lead the meditation of my readers to one of the private habits of our Lord--His habit of thanksgiving. Everyone who knows the New Testament knows how the apostolic life abounded in praise. It runs like some singing river through all their .changing days. And where did they learn the habit? They had got it from their Lord. The Master's habit must have made a profound impression upon them. There must have been something very distinct and distinctive about it. We are told that the two disciples, journeying to Emmaus after the awful happenings in Jerusalem, recognized their risen Lord when He began to give thanks. "He was made known to them in the breaking of bread." They knew Him by His gratitude and by the manner in which He expressed it. He was recognized by His praise. Let us recall two or three examples of this shining habit of our Lord.

"And Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks." That is to say, He took commonplace, common bread, and associated it with God, and it was no longer a commonplace. He gave thanks, and in the recognition the common was revealed as the Divine. The ordinary meal became a sacrament with the Unseen Presence as real as we apprehend Him at the table of the Lord.

Now, a man who feels the divine relationships of bread will have a very transfigured road. The man whose praise is elicited by loaves will also be thankful for the cornfield, the sunshine, the dew, and the rain, for the reapers who gather the corn, for the touch of God in the labourer, and for the millstones which grind the corn that makes the bread. He who took the loaves and gave thanks would also give thanks for the common lily of the field, the daisy of His native land. Indeed, I think we may truly say that the Master's habit of praise made every common thing radiant, and every wayside bush became aflame with God. He breathed His music of gratitude through the commonest reeds.

Now unless His disciples can do the same, unless we can touch and feel God in the commonplaces, He is going to be a very infrequent and unfamiliar Guest. For life is made up of very ordinary experiences. Now and again a novelty leaps into the way, but the customary tenor is rarely broken. It is the ordinary stars that shine upon us night after night; it is only occasionally that a comet comes our way. Look at some of the daily commonplaces--health, sleep, bread and butter, work, friendship, a few flowers by the wayside, the laughter of children, the ministry of song, the bright day, the cool night--if I do not perceive God in these things I have a very unhallowed and insignificant road. On the other hand, the man who discovers the Divine in a loaf of bread, and lifts his song of praise, has a wonderful world, for divinity will call to him on every side.

I do not know how we can better begin to cultivate the Master's habit than by beginning with daily bread. Because if we begin with bread we cannot possibly end there. If we see one commonplace lit up with God, other commonplaces will begin to be illumined, until life will be like some city seen from a height by night, with all the common lamps in the common streets burning and shining with mystic flame. So let us begin with bread. But let us give thanks reverently, not with the sudden tap and the sharp, superficial sentence of a public dinner. Let us do it quietly, apprehendingly, with an effort to realize the presence of the awful, gracious, merciful God. And let us do it without formality, and seeking deliverance from the perilous opiate of words. Let us change our phraseology, let us sometimes bow in silence, and share the significant, worshipful stillness of the Friends.

Let us watch our Master again and listen to His praise. "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Our Master thanks the Father that spiritual secrets are not the perquisites of culture, that it is not by cleverness that we gain access into the Kingdom of Grace. He gives thanks that "these things" have not been made dependent upon academic knowledge, that they are not the prizes of the merely clever and acute, but that they are "revealed unto babes."

Now, mark this: Out of six men only one may be clever, only one may have the advantage of knowledge, but all six may have the elementary simplicities of a child. All cannot be "knowing," but all can be docile. All cannot be "cute," but all can be humble. All cannot be "learned," but all can be trustful. All cannot attain to mental sovereignty, but all may sit on thrones of sovereign love. And it is upon what all may have that our Lord fixes His eye; it is the common denominator for which He offers His praise. He takes bread, the commonplace of life, and gives thanks; He takes the child, the commonalty among men, and gives thanks. He offers praise for the commonplaces and the commonalties. He gives thanks for the things that are common to Erasmus and Billy Bray, to Spurgeon and John Jaspar, to Onesimus and St. Paul. To give thanks for commonplaces makes a transfigured world; to give thanks for commonalties makes a transfigured race. The one unveils the world as our Father's house; the other unveils the race as our Father's family.

Now, would it not be good to exercise ourselves in that form of praise? Would it not be wise to allow our minds to rove over the race of men irrespective of class and condition, and search out the commonalties and sing our song of praise? One thing such praise would do for us. It would preserve in our minds a vivid sense of the relative values of things. We should recognize that academic learning is not to be mentioned in comparison with loneliness, that carnal power has not the holy standing of meekness, and that mere eminence is not to be counted in the same world with love. What we may have in common with the poorest and most ignorant is our most precious possession.

Look at the Master once more. "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me." The Master gave thanks before the miracle was wrought, while the dead was still lying stiff and stark in the tomb. He offered praise not for the victory attained but for victory about to be won. His song was not for what He had received, but for what He was about to receive. He gave thanks before the dead marched forth, and before the mourners' tears were dried. The doxology was sung at the beginning and not at the end.

"Father, I thank Thee ..." "And when He had thus spoken He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth, and he that was dead came forth." The sound of praise thrilled through the call that awaked the dead.

Have we learned the habit? Is that the gracious order of our thought and labour? Sometimes we thank God for food we are about to receive. Do we thank God for power we are about to receive? Do we thank God for victory we are about to receive? Do I go forth in the morning to the warfare of the day with thanks for coming victory filling me with exhilaration and powerful hope? Did I rear my altar of praise before I took my sword? Is that how I go to the pulpit, thanking God for victories about to be won? Is that how I go to my class, quietly confident in the coming of my Lord? Is that how I take up the work of social reform? Is the song of victory in the air before I enter the field? Can I begin to sing the song of harvest home as I go forth to sow the seed? Am I sure of God, so sure that I can sing as soon as the struggle begins? That was the Master's way. It was first the thanks and then the miracle.

And so Jesus assumed that His prayer was answered before He addressed the dead. And the significance of the act is this. To gratefully assume that prayers for power are answered opens the entire being to the full and gracious influence of the answer. Gratitude opens the channels of the whole life to the incoming of the Divine. There is no mood so receptive as praise; it fills the soul with the fulness of God, and the indwelling God works wonders, even to the raising of the dead.

I have given these three examples of the Master's habit of thanksgiving. It is our great wisdom to follow in His train. All manner of things are promised to the grateful heart. Thanksgiving is to be a minister of vigilant sight; "watch in the same with thanksgiving." Thanksgiving is to be a stimulant to a jaded and weary soul: "Be not drunken with wine, ... but be ye thankful." Thanksgiving is to be a beautifier of the regenerate soul. Ten lepers were purified, only one was beautified; "he returned to give thanks." And, lastly, thanksgiving glorifies God. It is by the brightness of our praise that we offer the best witness to the goodness and power of our God.