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

**09. SEEKING THE BEST by JOHN H. JOWETT**

"THE Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls." This sentence gives us one great characteristic of the kingly life, for the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Heaven are the kingly men and women. They move in great stateliness through the Word of God. They are distinguished by humility and dignity, by a certain retirement which is allied with the most mysterious glory. Great images are used to suggest the greatness of their character. They move in impressive lordship and liberty. They are kings and priests unto God. And here I say is one of their distinctions; they are seeking goodly pearls.

And so the kingly life is a life in quest of big things. Everyone is painfully familiar with the temptation to fritter away life in interests that are small and mean. There are many Scriptural types of the wasteful and belittled life. There are those who spend their strength in seeking money. The concentrated purpose of their days is a quest for gold. They are zealous for artificial gems and they miss the goodly pearls. Judas Iscariot had the priceless privilege of communion with his Lord. He had the incomparable glory of living with the Master day by day--the opportunity of entering into the "inheritance of the saints in light," and he used his privilege in the quest for money, and all that he got out of his supreme advantage was thirty pieces of silver. He missed the pearls.

And here is another Scriptural type described as "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." They sought the transitory rather than the eternal. They were more intent upon the carnal than the Divine. They were out seeking rockets and ignoring dawns. All that they got from life was a transient flash. They missed the goodly pearl.

Here is another from the Scriptural gallery of disastrous failures. "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present evil world." Think of that man's opportunity! He had the privilege of the fellowship of the Apostle Paul, but he "loved the garish day," and he preferred glamour to serenity and a loud sensation to an ideal friendship. The world offered a Bohemian hour, and he took it, and the end thereof was found in. the white, cold ashes of moral defeat. Thus life is frittered away on a thousand trifles, and at the end of the restless quest we have no pearls.

Now the big things of life belong to the realm of spirit and character. It is in the region of the soul that we find the pearls. The really goodly things, the big things, are inside and not outside the man. The big thing is not luxury, but contentment; not a big house, but a big satisfaction; not accumulated art treasures, but a fine, artistic appreciation; not a big library, but a serene studiousness; not a big estate, but a large vision. The big things are not "the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen." "Seek peace and ensue it." "Seek the things that are above." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Such are the goodly pearls.

But the quest of the kingly man is not only for the big things--it is for the bigger things among the big, and for the biggest among them all. The merchantman was not only in search of goodly pearls; he discriminated among the values of pearls, and he knew when he had found "one pearl of great price." There are gradations of value even among good things. There are pearls and better pearls, and the true king in life is known by his pursuit of the best. Knowledge is a good thing, the mastery of the secrets of the visible world; wisdom is a better thing, the possession of fine judgment and delicate intuition, of moral and spiritual discernment. Acquaintance is a good thing; friendship is a better thing; love is the best thing. The respect of others is a good thing; self-respect is a better thing; a fine, untroubled conscience is the best thing. Love for our lovers is a good thing; love for our neighbours is a better thing; love for our enemies is the best thing. There are pearls and there are pearls of great price. And so this, I say, is a mark of the children of the kingdom. They are always in quest of something beyond. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I press on." There is ever a height beyond, a better pearl still to win. "Glories upon glories hath our God prepared, by the souls that love Him one day to be shared." Such is the aim of the kingly quest. It is in search of the goodliest among the goodly pearls.

Now let us look at the quality of the quest. A kingly man is "like unto a merchantman." So the pearls are not found by the loafer, by the mere strolling fiddler along life's way. We are to have the characteristics of business men, even when we are engaged in the affairs of the Highest. If only we assume that requirement as an essential condition of the Kingdom of Heaven, a thousand religious failures will be at once explained. The majority of us are about as little like merchantmen in our religious life as could be very well conceived. And yet this is the Master's demand. We are to be business-like in our search for pearls. And if we are to be business-like what will be some of our characteristics?

First of all, we shall have breadth of outlook. A good merchant has an eye for new markets, for fresh opportunities in new fields. He watches drifts and tendencies, movements of population, and he is the alert friend of every new discovery. His eyes roam over wide areas in quest of new openings to push his trade. And so it is in the Kingdom of Heaven. The man of the kingly life must seek his pearls in many markets and over wide fields. He must seek them in worship and in prayer and in praise. He must look for them in the crowded places of human fellowship. He must search the wide expanse of literature. He must busy himself with the treasures of history. He must be curious in the bright domain of wit and humour. He must be wakeful even on the battlefield, when he is in combat with hostile forces, as well as in the quieter places of human service and communion. He must assume that anywhere and everywhere he may find a goodly pearl. So he must have an eye for markets at every hour of the day and amid all the change and varieties of human experience. This he must do if he would be a "merchantman seeking goodly pearls."

And, secondly, he must have the ability to fix attention on details. The vision of a merchantman is not only telescopic, it is microscopic. "He lets nothing escape him." He knows the weight and force of apparent nothings; he knows the value of seeming trifles. He often finds his treasure in things that other men despise or throw away. He is very inquisitive when he finds apparent waste, if by chance he may turn it into gold. So must it be in the quest for the goodly pearls of the Kingdom. We must give keen attention to the neglected trifles of life. Lowly duties must be carefully scanned. Small disappointments must be examined as though they were dark caskets containing possible treasure. Even commonplace courtesies must not be scouted, but must be regarded as a possible hiding place of priceless gems. The Master Himself described the man of fine quest as being "faithful in that which is least." He does little things in a great way, and he makes great discoveries in doing them.

Thirdly, the kingly life must be distinguished by method and order. A fine business man must have method in his work. He has not only principles, he has rules; he has not only a general system, he has a detailed order. Men who have no method are soon compelled to close their doors. And so it is in the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. We do not stroll carelessly up to the pearls and find them in some haphazard and vagrant loitering. No man lounges into any treasure that is worth having. And that is why so many of us are very poor in the things of the Kingdom. We have no order and method, and the work of one hour is undone by the hour that succeeds it. Look at our prayers. How unmethodical and disorderly? Are they likely to find any pearls? Look at our worship. How little intelligent quest is in it! Is it likely to discover any pearls? Look at our service. How careless it often is and how pointless and unprepared! There are abundant signs that even our Lord Himself regulated His life and refused to allow it to frivol away in indefinite purpose and desire.

Lastly, the man in search of goodly pearls must be distinguished by decision. A competent merchantman knows when to act, and at the decisive moment he acts with commanding promptness. He watches circumstances when they are ripening, and at the proper moment he plucks the fruit. There are times in a business man's life when promptness requires great courage. There is a demand for risk and speculation and untried enterprise, and timidity would let the promising circumstance go by and lose its bounty. So is it in the Kingdom of Heaven. Here, too, there are "tides in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, lead on to fortune." It is a great thing to know when the hour is ripe for decision. It is one of the fine arts of living to know when to act upon an impulse, and when to accept the hints of emotion as the signs of a favouring gale. Here again our Lord is our example. He was very patient, but He was always very decisive. No one could move Him before the appointed time. No one could stop Him when He said, "The hour has come." Such is to be the quality of our quest. We are to be like merchantmen, broad in outlook, vigilant for detail, intelligent in method, and decisive in action.

With such a spirit we shall undoubtedly discover the goodly pearls, and we shall discover the best of all, "the pearl of great price." But for that pearl we may have to sell many others. What are we prepared to give for it? What are we ready to surrender? According to our consecrated enterprise will be our holy gains. If we refuse to part with Mammon we can never possess the Lord. If we contentedly hug the good we can never gain the better. If we take our ease in the realm of the better we can never enter the best. What are we ready to lose for Christ?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were an offering far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my life, my soul, my all.