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

**13. WAVE AND RIVER by JOHN H. JOWETT**

I AM writing these words in sight of a fine, fresh sea. A strong south-westerly breeze is blowing, and huge waves are moving swiftly to their culmination, and breaking majestically on the shore. A little way up the coast a broad river, full and brimming, fed by a hundred tributaries from the rain-drenched hills, is leisurely emptying its voluminous flood into the advancing sea. And as my eyes pass from the sea to the river, and again from the river to the sea, I am reminded of two very powerful figures, used by the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, and which may have had their birth in conditions similar to those which I am gazing upon to-day. "O, that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments; then had thy peace been like a river, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea." The figures are strikingly original and suggestive, and I think that they enshrine conceptions of truth which afford healthy correctives to some soft and effeminate thinking of our own time.

"Then had thy peace been like a river!" That itself is a most unusual sphere in which to find a symbol of peace. Most people, when they want a symbol of peace, would seek it in some secluded mountain-tarn, nestling quiet and unrippled far away from beaten roads, and where even the cry of a vagrant bird is only rarely heard. It is by these "still waters," and in these deep silences, that we should call to mind the gift of peace. Other people are impressed with the "peacefulness" of the chamber of death. When they see the body lying perfectly still, and when every sound is muffled, everybody speaking in whispers, and going about on tiptoe, they feel constrained to say, "How peaceful!"

How different is the prophet's choice of figure! Not a stagnant tarn, not a lifeless body, but a river! The erroneous conception gathers about a particular sort of stillness; the true conception gathers about a particular quality of movement. Peace is not motionless quietness, but quiet motion. Peace has its appropriate figure in the brimming river, deeply quiet because of its depth. Peace is liquid motion, frictionless movement! That is the phrase which expresses my present thought. Perfect peace is found in human life when that life moves in God's life without babble, or fret, or friction. It is not so much found in the absence of sound as in the absence of discord. It is musical movement, it is harmony.

Our Master's conception of peace is given in His oft-repeated words, "I and My Father are one." When one life flows into another life with perfect commingling--will with will, thought with thought, desire with desire, then we have the basal secret of peace. And when that perfect commingling is between the human heart and God, we have learned the secret of perfect peace. That was Jesus's peace, and this is Jesus's promise, "My peace I give unto you."

"And thy righteousness like the waves of the sea." Well, let me go nearer the sea. I leave the dry upper beach, and go down to the water's edge. There in the distance a fine wave is forming, gathering volume and impetus as it rolls. Let me step forward, confront it, and check its advance! The wave laughs at the antagonism, and races shoreward with powerful and jubilant flood. And my righteousness is purposed to be like that! "Thy righteousness like the waves of the sea." But in the lives of the majority of us, even of those who profess to know the Lord, there is nothing characteristic of a glorious wave. Our righteousness is more like some trembling rivulet, uncertainly threading its way in time of drought. Any small antagonism can check it, and delay it, and divert it. We timidly shrink behind the impediment; we do not clear it at a leap! The truth is, the wave-force is pathetically lacking in many Christian lives. There is nothing strong and positive; there is no vigorous trend because there is no definite end. Their purposes meander along, and any obstacle can hinder them, and any hostile foot can turn them aside.

If our life is to find a fitting symbol in the waves of the sea, then it is to be distinguished by a commanding force of character. It will be grandly impressive, and will be known by its "go." Surely, this must be something of the meaning of Paul's inspiring words, "we have not received again the spirit of fear ... but of power." Ours is not to be a spirit of fear, of trembling, like the uncertain surf, "carried with the wind and tossed" about the shore. Ours is to be a spirit of power, moving in noble impressiveness, and with the invincible majesty of a magnificent wave. Again and again our Lord sets before His disciples the strong ideal of a character which "tells," which is positive and bracing. He seemed to be afraid of their discipleship weakening down into an anaemic sentimentality, a forceless effeminacy which would never arrest the world, or take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm. He did not wish His disciples to be only as a pleasant perfume; He wished them to be more like that strong breeze which is even now blowing upon me from the southwest, pervaded with the pungent smack of the salt sea! "Ye are the salt of the earth." I think it is the same element of impressiveness which is suggested in the figure of the advancing wave. And when this forceful, impressive element is wanting, when this energetic spirit is absent, then the individual Christian, or that fellowship of Christians which we call the Church, becomes as "salt that has lost its savour," a poor, savourless presence, and the world will pay no heed, or treat it as something to be despised and "trodden under foot of men." There were some in the Corinthian Church who had become thus enervated and forceless, and the Apostle seeks to stir them up into a more vigorous life. "Some are sickly, and not a few sleep!" How far was this from the forcefulness of the triumphant wave! It was more significant of the stagnant pool, with a noisome corruption mantling its idle face. There are many men who, on the business side of their life, have all the strong impetuosity of a wave but on the distinctively moral and religious side their will beats as feebly as a forceless pulse. They flaunt a religious profession, but they have no religious "life." These constitute the very bane of the Kingdom, for they are the unimpressive professionals who make the Christian religion unattractive and repellent. But when our righteousness becomes like a wave, its very power will hold the world in rich and fertile wonder.