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

**25. TERMINUS AND THOROUGHFARE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

ONE of the most deadly temptations in life is to mistake a thoroughfare for a terminus, and to regard what is intended to be a means as an ultimate end. When we make a material thing a terminus we only exist; when we make the material a thoroughfare to the spiritual we begin to live. And, therefore, one of the determining questions in life, where subtle snares abound, is this: Shall the material be a terminus or a thoroughfare, a goal or a passage, a means or an end? Shall we seek to live "by bread alone," or, using bread as a subordinate means, shall we find our true life in the unseen? And here is the Saviour's answer. We live not in material things or in material quests, but in Divine relations. "This is life, to know Thee." By "bread alone" the body can exist; man needs the bread of the world; he can only live by the hidden manna of Divine communion.

Consider the reach of this principle in the light of one or two of its multitudinous applications. Apply the principle to nature, to our association with the wonders of the natural world. Our temptation is to dwell on the material side of nature, and never apprehend the spiritual significance of the Divine world. We stop at "bread"; we do not push through to God. There is a type of man to whom nature makes no sort of refined appeal. He seems to be insensible to its presence. His powers are held in a kind of benumbment. There is a second type of man who discovers in nature higher ministries of physical inspiration and delight. His senses are gratified. He is charmed by the play of colour, he is fascinated by the minstrelsy of song, he is exhilarated by the delicacies of flavour and perfume. There is a third type of man who rises to an aesthetic appreciation of nature. He exercises artistic and poetic discernment. Imagination is now at work, and delicate fancy, and a world of romance is unveiled. Idylls are born and lyrics are sung. But there is a fourth type of man who has a spiritual apprehension of nature, who holds communion with its spiritual world, who uses it as a thoroughfare to the Divine, who passes by its "bread," giving thanks for the bread, to find the true significance in God. He moves with awed and wondering soul through "the light of setting suns" to "the light that never was on sea or land," and through the apocalypse of the changing clouds to "the rainbow round about the throne." The outer bread conducts him to the hidden manna, and behind the world of the senses he discovers the world invisible, incorruptible, and full of glory.

Let us further apply the principle to our conception of history. It is possible to approach history and to abide in its outer courts it is possible to go further, and in history to find "the Word of God." We may have a materialistic conception of history, and when we survey its crowded procession we may see only the contention of material forces, and in its changing triumphs we may see only the changing ascendency of the brute. We may have a spiritual conception of history, and behind all its perspiring tumults and noise and armies and brutal riot and disorder we may discern a spiritual presence and hear a ghostly word, the word "proceeding from the mouth of God." In my own schooldays the learning of history was the memorizing of bald and innutritious dates, or we were ceaselessly watching the glamour and pageantry of kings and queens, or we were following the doings of armies and gazing upon rivers of blood. Since those days our attitude towards history has changed. We are not so much concerned with the fittings of monarchs as with the movements of peoples, not with the life of the palace but with happenings in the cottage, not with the growth of armies but with the growth of freedom.

But even with this revived attitude we are still outside the temple, and may still be tempted to abide in its material and social passages, and not press through to God. What is God saying in history? What is "the word proceeding from the mouth of God"? What is He saying in the history of the empires of the ancient world? What is the speech of events? What is the clearly defined word of results and destiny? In this way we are to press through the garish shows of things, past the sheen and the pain and the blood, and we are to listen to the eternal word of the living God.

But the principle may not only be applied to the history of nations but to the record of the individual life. What is the Divine word in my own past life? Let me get through to that. I shall be tempted to take an unspiritual view of my own past. I shall be inclined to fix upon its cleverness, or its want of cleverness, or its fortune, or its misfortune, its luck, or its chance. I shall be foolish to stop there. It is the way of wisdom to push through the material, the outer furniture and equipment and to get into the secret room and hear "the word proceeding from the mouth of God." What does He say to us through our yesterdays? "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

So have I tried to show how the principle may be applied to nature and to history. It might be similarly applied to ordinary duty, to its outer halls and its inspired secrets; to common work, its outer form and its spiritual significance. Indeed, the principle has range of application to all the manifold relations and interests of human life. Everywhere we are tempted to make a terminus of what was intended to be a thoroughfare, to stop at "bread," and not get through to God. We are snared to stop at the material, the formal, the ritualistic, the symbolic, and we thereby miss the life indeed, and the heavenly bread that alone sustains it. We are enticed to remain in the outer halls of being, and we miss the secret room where is set the appointed feast.

The snare is about us when we meet for worship. We meet as immortal souls. The enemy of souls is present to entice the immortal to be satisfied with the material, the formal, the musical, the sensational, with the rites and rubrics of worship, and to have no concern for a personal communion with God. He seeks to make us contented with forms and postures, to make the hymn and the anthem and the sermon a terminus and not a highway by which we find "the secret place of the Most High." It is our daily wisdom to have the snare in mind, and to reject all enticements that keep us from our rightful inheritance in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.