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

**29. WISE FORGETFULNESS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

IT was a wise and comprehensive prayer which the old saint offered when he said, "Lord, help us to remember what we ought not to forget, and to forget what we ought not to remember." Our memories are very defective, arid very erratic, and very unsanctified. Oliver Wendell Holmes said that "Memory is a crazy witch; she treasures bits of rags and straw, and throws her jewels out of the window." And memory remains capricious even when life has entered into the highest relations and has made a faith-covenant with the eternal God. We forget the way the Lord our God has led us. We forget all His benefits. We forget that we were "cleansed from our old sins." The remembrance of His mercy sometimes goes clean out of our mind. Memory has some very big holes, and some big things drop away into oblivion.

But just now I want to consider the other aspect of her vagaries, her careful hoarding of things which she ought to throw away, the diligent remembrance of things which ought to be forgotten. There are some things for which we need mnemonic aids; there are other things for which we require mnemonic an#230;sthetics. If at some times the memory needs refreshing, at other times there is dire need of spring cleaning when her rubbish can be swept away. The full sanctification of memory, while it will vitalize some relationships, will surely destroy the sensitiveness of others.

It would be a blessed thing if we could lose the remembrance of our injuries. For one thing, the sense of injury is aggravated by remembrance. A spark is fanned into a flame, and "behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth." And in that fire it is our own furniture which is consumed. Some very precious furnishings of the soul are burned to ruin: Self-reverence and self-control are destroyed. Gentleness and modesty wither away like the undergrowth in a forest fire. Indeed, every power in life is damaged, even conscience herself being seared. But apart from these moral damages, what an uncomfortable guest this is to entertain in one's remembrance! She keeps us continually ruffled and feverish. She fills the chambers of .the soul with heaviness and gloom. She despoils us of the sweet sunshine of grace, and she sours every feast. Why should we keep her? Above all, why should we give her so much attention? For when she absorbs the attention the Lord Himself is eclipsed. If this bitter resentment could just become incarnate, and in visible ugliness could sit with us at our table, we should very speedily order her out of the house. If memory could lose her we should have great gain. If only we could forget her we should more clearly remember the Lord.

And then some of us are unwisely remembering our forgotten sins. There is the sin of a far-off yesterday, of which we have repented, and which we have confessed, and which the gracious Lord has forgiven, and yet we turn to it again and again with heavy and unrelieved heart. We go back and dig it up again when the Lord Himself has buried it, and when over its grave He has planted fair heart's-ease and lilies of peace. If ever we do return to those fields of defeat we ought to pluck a little heart's-ease or bring back a lily with us, that we may testify that where sin abounded "grace doth much more abound." There ought to be no room in our memories for the heaviness of forgiven sin. "His banner over us is love," and that banner is waving over the entire realm of our yesterdays if we have sought His pardoning grace.

Some people carry too vivid a remembrance of their beneficiaries. They are continually rehearsing to themselves the detailed story of their benefactions. In memory they pass them from hand to hand and back again, letting their right hand know what their left hand doeth. They had much better forget them. It is spontaneity that gives our ministries their worth, and a spontaneous character quickly throws off the remembrance of past services. The well is ever bubbling up anew, and the waters of yesterday are forgotten. Yes, it is spontaneity that makes our services fresh and refreshing. But self-consciousness, especially when it wears the smile of self-satisfaction, seeks to win commendation and reward, and so its real beneficence is stricken at the heart. When we begin to gloat over our goodness men begin to see that it is a trick and they will know that it is not the fruit of the tree of life. "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness to be seen of men," and we surely may add "nor to be seen of self." Forget them!

I will mention one other matter where a defective memory would be for our good--the matter of past attainment. It is possible so to hug our past triumphs that we never get beyond them. We may so linger with our success that we become satisfied, and have no aspiration for anything beyond. And thus it is literally true that some men's chains are found in their achievements. They have sat down in their victories, and life's progressive march has ceased. It was surely on some such peril as this that the Apostle was looking when he proclaimed his strong and positive determination to forget "the things that are behind." He used the figure of the racer who had covered part of the course, but whose goal was yet ahead. And the racer would not permit himself to turn and gaze upon the ground already run, still less to sit down and contemplate it with satisfaction. He would forget his present attainments in the quest of something better beyond. But we are always in peril of stopping in the midst of the course and seeking attainment in partial triumph. We have had a good spurt; let that splendid spasm do for the race! Or to change my figure, we are satisfied to win a battle, and we become indifferent about the campaign. Our satisfactions are premature. We fondle what we have done, and we are drugged by our successes into degeneracy and retrogression. Our minds must be filled with the vision of the fields that are yet to be won. "Glories upon glories hath our God prepared." Let us feel the call and the allurement of the days before us, and press on to the apprehension of their hidden treasure.

The grace of God is our provision for the sanctification of the memory. Perilous remembrances will be avoided if we are possessed by "the grace of the Lord Jesus." His grace is a "savour of life unto life," but it is also "a savour of death unto death." It can put things to sleep that ought never to have awaked. Apart from the grace of the Lord we have no sufficient power to hallow the memory. Mere effort will not avail. It is conscious communion with the Lord that ultimately transforms the consciousness. It is by the fulness of His might that all the spaces of the soul become realms of beauty and dwelling-places of eternal truth.