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

**30. PREJUDGING CHRIST by JOHN H. JOWETT**

"DOTH our law judge a man except it first hear from himself, and know what he doeth? "But that is Christ's fate every day and all the days. He is judged from hearsay. Men will not come face to face with Him and "know what He doeth." In the days of His flesh the Pharisees judged Him by extraneous standards. What was His birthplace? "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." What were the range and quality of His rabbinical knowledge? What heed does He pay to the customary ritualistic practices? "He eateth with unwashed hands." "Thy disciples fast not." The ordinary habiliments of the popular sect were wanting, and, therefore, He was despised and rejected. And these are typical examples of the prejudices through which many men looked at the Lord. It is the characteristic of a prejudice that it is small and. yet it produces monstrous perversions. A tiny obliquity in a lens can make the outlook grotesque. A small prejudice can so distort our vision of the Master that "when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we shall desire Him."

And small prejudices lead to great misjudgments in our own day. A man's opinion about the Church is allowed to fashion his relationship to the Christ. Some professing Christian has broken his covenant and betrayed his Lord, and, therefore, the Lord Himself is forsaken. Or men recoil from some phrase in a credal statement of the faith, and they turn their back upon the Lord of life and glory. Through churchianity many men interpret Christianity, and it is difficult to get them to come with a "fresh eye" to the contemplation of Christ. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?" Most assuredly this is the prejudgment which many men call conviction.

What is the right way of judging the Christ? First of all, we must bring the right implements. We must consecrate to the quest the medium of a sensitive heart. It will not suffice that we spend a week in worldliness and sin and then set about to give an hour's consideration to the claims of the Lord. It will be impossible to see even a sunset truly on those terms. The heart that is befouled by unclean living is in no condition to estimate aright the glory of the Lord.

And then, in the second place, we must bring an open mind. Every blind must be up and every window opened. We must be perfectly candid and sincere in our approach. It is not enough to have a clean lens on the telescope--we must take the cap off! A man must strenuously rid himself of all perverting prejudices and draw near to the Lord with a single desire to see Him as He is. And to this end we must, in the third place, bring an alert imagination. We cannot vividly realize a page of ordinary history if our imagination is dormant or dead. If we are to see the movement of a past day in all its life and colour our imagination must be awake and active. Now this is peculiarly true when we come to the story of our Lord. All our powers must be surrendered to the quest, and more especially this talent of the imagination by which we recover the vitalities of yesterday and realize them as though we were in the very movements to-day.

And with this equipment we must "hear Him." We must hear Him patiently and hear Him through. We must hear Him concerning God, concerning Himself, concerning ourselves and our brother. We must listen to Him as He speaks of life, and love, and duty, and death, and destiny. We must listen while He tells us what we are and what we may be, and by what ministries of grace the transformation can be effected. But we must also know "what He doeth." We must pass from His words to His deeds, from a quiet listening in the oratory to the contemplation of His doings in the laboratory of the great world. We must investigate His work upon others and see what He has done. For instance, we must look at the man whose river of life was like the flowings of a sewer and which is now cleansed and pure as crystal. We must regard the other man whose will was like a trembling reed, and which has been converted into a resoluteness like the strength of an iron pillar. We must study His work in the gay, fast woman of the world who has been transformed and transfigured into a strong and gracious saint. Yes, we must honestly "know what He doeth." And we shall not have gone far in the search before our souls begin to bow in that wonder which is the parent of love and praise.

But this is not enough. If we are to lay aside every prejudice, and all that has hindered a true and full knowledge of the Lord, we must investigate His work upon ourselves. That is to say, we must convert inquiry into experiment. I cannot understand men and women passing the years in wordy controversy concerning Christ and never submitting His claims and promises to the severe and serious test of personal experience. Surely it is one of the first marks of candour in all our relationships to the Christ, to see if His word works, and if by the fulfilment of His conditions we ourselves are brought into the promised possession of peace and joy. Let a man sit down to the New Testament. Let him with clean, sincere eyes search out the requisite conditions of a conscious relationship with the personal Power of the world. Let him, if need be, write them out, and set them before him. Let him make them his maxims for the government of his life by day and night. Let him make test if there is anything in them. Nay, rather let him test if there is anything in Him. Let him experiment for twelve months. Let him do it with humility and reverence, earnestly desiring to know the reality of things behind the veil, and he shall assuredly feel the presence and the power of the Eternal. What will happen? The miracle will happen which has been wrought in innumerable lives. The man's heart will begin to be purified. The man's mouth will begin to be cleansed. His eyes will begin to be radiant with vision. His sympathies will put on chivalry and the joy of sacrifice. He will know that his Redeemer liveth.

Surely this is the way of honest inquiry. Let not a man be made the slave of unillumined prejudice. Let him not govern his life by hearsay and rumour. Let him be content with nothing second-hand. Let him seek a first experience of the things of the Highest, and the Highest will not leave him in the lurch.