**THE EAGLE LIFE - STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**03. BACK TO THE EARLY ALTAR by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"And he went on his way to Bethel ... unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first."*

*Genesis 13:3,4*

And that follows a dark chapter in the patriarch's life. It is a period stained by deliberate falsehood and deceit. It has been a time of increasing wealth, but decreasing piety. In this season there is no mention of any altar-building, as, indeed, there is no mention of the name of God. It is a sterile page of history, and it finishes up with the believer being rebuked by the heathen, and practically dismissed the country. And now we see him on his return, much increased in goods, but surely with the sense of something lacking, for which his possessions afford no recompense. And he makes his way to Bethel, "unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first." And there he sought to get hold of the broken ends of his life, to recover what he had lost, and in the genius of the place, and in the reawakening of sleeping sentiment, to walk anew in the fellowship of God.

Well, it may be or it may not be our lot to be trudging through a period of shame. Perhaps we have gone to pieces in other ways. Somehow we may have got away from the only things that really matter, and we have been narcotised by the world, and we have been scarcely conscious of our loss. Or perhaps the tragedy of our time, the universal convulsion, has shaken us out of our sleep, and a vital craving has arisen for a nobler life. What shall we do? The one thing to do is to make our way to a deserted altar, some revered altar of our earlier days. And, first of all, let us hasten away to the supreme altar, from which all other altars get their fire and virtue; let us hasten to the Cross, that altar of superlative and incomparably lonely sacrifice. Let us take our pilgrimage there, with our burdens upon our backs, and when we get to that first altar we shall share the experience of Christian, and the burden will be loosed from off our shoulders and will roll away into a sepulchre, from which it will never rise again. "At the Cross, at the Cross, where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away."

And let us get back to the altar of early consecration. It would be a blessed thing to visit the very spot where we made our first spiritual vows, to go to the little village church, to sit in the old pew, and under the influence of sacred memories renew our covenant with the Lord. "I will renew my vows unto Thee, O God." And we must visit the altar of early loyalties, for we have lost our first love. We must seek to regain the constancy of our early communion with the Lord. We must renew our tryst with Him in private prayer, and in family prayer, and in public worship and in Christian service. We must get back and rebuild these first altars. Nay, it will not be going back -- it will be going forward, upward, and in our glorious recovery of abandoned treasure we shall sing with the woman of old, "Rejoice with me, for I have found that which was lost."