**THE SILVER LINING - MESSAGES OF HOPE AND CHEER BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**02. IN TIME OF FLOOD by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."*

*Isaiah 59:19*

THESE heartening words were spoken to exiles who were preparing to return to the homeland. They had become so accustomed to their captivity that emancipation seemed a dream. Even when they lifted their eyes to the possibilities of return they seemed to gaze upon range after range of accumulating difficulties which would obstruct their journey home. As often as the prophet proclaimed their deliverance they proclaimed their fears. Their fears were laid one by one, but as soon as one was laid another arose!

There was, for example, the wilderness to be crossed with all its fierce and sombre desolation! "The wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." And there was the weary, pathless desert, offering only the prospect of homelessness to the bewildered pilgrim! "And an highway shall be there, and a way," clean and clear across it. There are waters to be crossed and floods to be overcome! "When thou passest through the waters they shall not overflow thee." And other difficulties will arise, all the more burdensome because unforeseen! "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low." And the enemies on the right hand and the left hand, what about them? The hostile peoples will accept their chance, and will come down upon the returning company in destructive array! "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." To every fear the prophet presents a promise; to every suspicion he offers an assurance. Now, we, too, are exiles returning to the homeland. We, too, have been in the dark realms of captivity, and by His redeeming grace our eyes have been lifted toward the better country. And we, too, are full of uncertainties and fears. There is a desert to traverse, a wilderness to cross, waters to pass through, mountains to climb, and we know not how we may safely reach our journey's end. And particularly are we beset by the enemy, who suddenly and unexpectedly sweeps down upon our path. But if we have the fears, ours, too, are the promises. Between the enemy and ourselves there shall be erected the standard of the Lord. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood."! think that the figure is surely taken from the river-beds of their native land. They had looked upon the dry, bleached ravines in time of drought, when scarcely a rivulet lisped down its rocky course. And then the rain had fallen on the hills, or the snow had melted upon the distant mountains, and the waters had torn down like a flood. I have picnicked away up in the solitudes of the higher Tees, when there was only a handful of water passing along, a little stream which even a child could cross. And once I saw what the natives call the "roll" coming away in the distance. Great rains had fallen upon the heights, and this was their issue; in a moment the quiet stream became a roaring torrent, and shouted along in thunderous flood. That, I think, is the figure of my text. When the sudden "roll" shall come in the life, and the little rivulet is changed into tempestuous waters, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Now, what are some of these flood times in life when the enemy comes against us in overwhelming power? There is the flood of passion. There are many among my readers who do not know that flood. We are very differently constituted, and some there are in whom these particular waters bring no peril. There are some whose passion fills up slowly like a cistern; there are others who overflow in a moment. There are some who are constitutionally calm; there are others who "boil" at the slightest provocation. Well, now, floods always destroy something valuable and beautiful. I have watched a great river in flood, and I have seen how many precious things are carried down in the violent stream; a sheep that has been harmlessly playing by the bank, some tender sapling, some useful bridge. And so it is with the flood of passion that sweeps through the soul. It always damages the life through which it flows. Some seed of the kingdom, just beginning to germinate, is washed out of the ground. Some tender growth is impaired or destroyed, some little plant of meekness, or gentleness, or faith, or hope, or love. Even onlookers can frequently see the ruin; and to the Lord the fruitful place must become a desert. "The enemy has come in like a flood."

And sometimes the flood is in the form of a great sorrow, and we are engulfed by it. Billow after billow goes over us, and does tremendous damage. I know that there is a sorrow appointed of the Almighty, but it is never ordained to hurt or destroy. And yet how often this particular flood, rushing into a life, works havoc with spiritual things. Have we not known many such in our own experience? "Was not So-and-so at one time a great worker in the Church?" And the answer was, "Yes, but he has never done anything since his child died!" The flood had done its evil work. And so it frequently is in lives that have been drowned in the enveloping waters. In one of our churches a little while ago a flood occurred, and the two things that were injured were the heating apparatus and the organ. I could not but think of the destructiveness wrought in the soul by the gathering waters of sorrow. Very frequently they put out the fires of geniality, and they silence the music and the song.

And so it is, one may say, with all the perilous waters that arise in human life. Sometimes the flood gathers from a multitudinous contribution of petty cares. It is amazing how mighty a volume can be made with small contributions. We could deal with one; the multitude overwhelms us! We could deal with one worry, but multitudes of them create the flood we call anxiety, and we are overthrown. And again great damage is done, working havoc to our peace and self-control and magnanimity.

Now, whenever a flood in the life damages a life the work is the work of the devil. When I am tempted into overflowing passion, or into excessive sorrow, or into overwhelming care, it is the work of the enemy. I think that if we could realise this we should be greatly helped in these perilous and frequently recurring seasons. If we could only practise our eyes so as to see in the tempting circumstance the face of the evil one we should be less inclined to the snare. If we could only get into our minds and hearts the settled conviction that behind all these threatening approaches there is the ugly enemy of our souls, we should more eagerly turn our eyes and feet toward the Lord of life and beauty. Now that Lord of life offers Himself as our defence in the time of the rising flood. He will "lift up a standard against him." I think that is very beautiful! King Canute had his regal chair carried down to the flowing tide, and he commanded the waters to retreat. The waters paid no heed, and the mighty flood advanced. But our King raises His standard against the threatening flood, and the retreat is absolutely ensured. In the moment when we are tempted to the overwhelming passion He will come between us and the flood. "The waters shall not overflow thee." Have you noticed that wonderfully suggestive passage in the Book of Revelation where a promise is made of help in the time of flood? "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away at the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." I believe that that great promise has been abundantly confirmed in countless lives. Even the earth itself is our ally in contending with the foe. The beauties of nature will help us to contend with the forces of evil desire. I believe that if we more frequently communed with the flowers of the field we should find that the earth was a minister of the Holy Spirit. The earth would swallow up the flood. But we have more than Nature as our defence; we have the Lord of nature, the Lord in nature, not so much the supernatural as the Spirit who pervades nature and all things. That gracious Spirit will subtly steal into the threatened parts of our life, and will contend with our foe.

And so, too, it is in the flood times of sorrow. The Spirit of the Lord will engage for us, "lest we be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." Have I not seen it done a hundred times? Have I not seen sorrow come into a life, and it has been entirely a minister of good and never of ill? The devil has not got hold of it, and used it as a destructive flood. Not one thing has been damaged or destroyed. It has been a minister of irrigation rather than destruction, and in the moist place of tears beautiful ferns have grown, the exquisite graces of compassion and long-suffering and peace.

"The Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard!" Well, then, let Him do it. Do not let us attempt to do it for ourselves. Let us hand it over to Him. "Undertake Thou for me, O Lord." The life of faith just consists in a quiet, conscious, realising trust in the all-willing and all-powerful Spirit of God.