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

**03. DIVINE AMELIORATIVES by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Sleeping for sorrow."*

*Luke 22:45*

I AM not concerned with the element of human weakness suggested by my text; I want to dwell entirely upon the Divine graciousness which I think is enshrined in it.

"Sleeping for sorrow." Is it not a very strange conjunction of words? One would have thought that wakefulness and sorrow would have been associated, and that sleep and sorrow would never have found communion. But here is sorrow passing into sleep! As though sorrow itself contains a gracious opiate which lulls and subdues into slumber. As though God had determined that every distress should carry a certain palliative in order that we might not be burdened beyond measure. When sorrow becomes very intense it induces sleep. A Divine ameliorative is at hand, and the strain of the galling burden is lightened. They say in the North that there is never a nettle that has not its companion dock. The dock supplies the opiate for relieving and destroying the sting of the nettle. And so I wish to consider some of these Divine amelioratives which the good Lord has appointed for reducing the burdensomeness of grief, and for making the daily sorrow tolerable.

The ameliorative of sleep. What a wonderful minister is the genius of sleep When our bodies are tired out, and the nervous force is almost spent, and we feel ourselves wearied and "down," what a hotbed is provided for irritableness, and doubt, and despondency and despair! A tired-out body offers a fertile rootage to all manner of mental ailments. Many a man in the evening time feels that life is very colourless and juiceless, and this 'sense of the sombreness and dullness arises from a body which has temporarily lost its spring. And then comes sleep! During the hours of sleep our gracious God comes and refills the exhausted lamp, and in the morning the touchiness and irritableness and tastelessness have all gone, and we face the new day as men renewed. The Lord has been near with His gracious palliative of sleep, and the oppressiveness of the passing day has been removed.

Then how frequently sleep acts as a gracious opiate when we are inclined to make precipitate vows! Something has happened and we hastily resolve upon hasty action. But some discreet friend says to us, "Sleep on it." And the influence of the one night's sleep scatters our rash resolve like morning mist. Have we not recently been told of a great minister who, in some moment of impatience, resolved upon sending his resignation to his deacons, but he took the counsel of his wife to "sleep on it," and the resignation was never sent. God's gracious gift came in the meantime, and the storm-tossed mind and heart were laid to rest.

And what a wonderful servant is this same sleep in the time of bereavement! I have frequently known a widow in the very first day of her widowhood, when the body of her husband was scarcely cold, pass into a deep and most refreshing sleep. "I have had the best night's sleep I have had for many a month," she has said; and this was the first night of bereavement! "Sleeping for sorrow." It is a wonderfully gracious providence of our God to mingle this Divine opiate with our sorrows, and to put us into a quiet and restoring sleep. "He giveth His beloved sleep."

The ameliorative of Time. What a healing minister we have in Time itself. The old proverb tells us that Time brings roses. And a still older proverb, coming down from the days of the Romans, tells us that Time is generally the best doctor. The new railway cutting is a great red gash in the green countryside, but Time is a great healer and restorer, and day after day the bald, bare place is being re-covered with fern and grass and wild flower, until at length the ugly cutting harmonises with the colours of the surrounding landscape, and the gash is healed. And Time works a similar history with human life. A cutting injury is done to me. I think I can never forget it. The wound is deep, rankling is sore. But Time takes the thing in hand, and little by little, and day by day, the healing process is continued, until at length the open wound is closed, and I wonder how I could have been so silly as to make so much stir about it. And we all know what Time can do even for the sharp pangs of a great bereavement. In the first dark and cloudy day it seems as though no light will ever fall upon our path again. "I shall never laugh any more." Oh, yes, you will! Time, the Lord's ameliorative, will begin to minister to the broken spirit, and however incredible it may now appear, some day the smiles will come back in the blanched cheek, and the mouth will be filled with laughter. And this because, as the days go by, Time turns a beautiful memory into an alluring hope. We not only feel the season behind us, but the pulling power of the age that lies before. Let us never forget, when we are counting our blessings, to thank God for the glorious ministry of gracious Time.

The Divine ameliorative of work. May we not speak of work as one of the Lord's servants appointed by Him to subdue the distresses of life, and to mitigate its pangs? How frequently it happens that the needful work that is required to be done immediately after a death is a gracious helpmeet to the spirit. We have to be busy about the funeral, and even that bit of business is a minister of rest. We say one of another, "It's well she had so much to do." Goethe's mother said of her son, "My son, when he has a grief, puts it in a poem and so gets rid of it." We cannot all put our griefs into poems, but it is amazing how much of them we can put into work. And so it is well for us to look upon work as a signal token of Divine Providence and Fatherly love and grace. He has appointed us to work, and the work has been ordained for our eternal good. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake"; yes, but the cursing of the ground was for the blessedness of man. In cursing the ground God blessed the race. When God cursed the ground He made it essential that man should work. The curse was only a restraining of the natural energies of the earth, in order that man should co-operate and bring the hidden things to fruition. God made work compulsory in order that man might regain his lost Eden. To lose his Eden, and then to have no work, would have made the alienation too grievous to be borne. The compulsory work was the decree of Eternal love.

I am not surprised, therefore, when I turn to the New Testament to find how great was Paul's fear of indolent Christians. The early believers gave up their ordinary work and passively waited the coming of their Lord. Now Paul knew that, in the time of stress, and persecution, and tribulation, to have no work would be to take sides with the enemy. Therefore "let every man abide in the calling wherein he was called." Let every man go on working, for he will find in his work an ameliorative for his sorrows. To cast aside work is to deprive oneself of the means of grace. A doctor, quite recently in my hearing, said to a man who was inclined to become a little morbid and depressed, "Go out and weed your garden." The weeding of the garden was the smallest part of the hour's work; while the man was weeding the garden he was also extracting weeds from his own heart and life. Let us thank God for work.

The Divine ameliorative of service. I distinguish between work and service. Work is primarily for our own profit; service is primarily profit for others. And therefore I speak now of labour expended in another's good, and in this kind of service I say there is a grand ameliorative for the griefs and distresses of life. It is an amazing thing to watch the new colour which our sorrow assumes when we go out to minister to others. The rawness goes out of our own wound while we are dressing the wounds of our neighbour. Our own pang is lessened when we seek to take the pang out of another's soul. "I felt as though my heart would break, so I just got up and went out to help a poor body who I knew was in need." Yes, and while she went to bring comfort to her needy sister the heart's-ease came into her own soul. This is the beautiful, gracious way of God. We can go out with a broken heart to minister to other broken hearts, and a cooling balm is applied to our own feverish pain and fears. Along these lines we can all make bold and immediate experiment, and you may depend upon it you will find that in this kind of service there is hidden a gracious opiate which deadens the sense of our own sorrows and makes it possible for us to endure them.

All these are Divine amelioratives, the gracious ministers of God, and I would that we might more frequently remember them when we seek to tell the story of His mercy and grace. Let us think of them as the angels of the Lord, appointed by Him to do us service in the dark and cloudy day. "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."