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

**14. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GRAVEYARD by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"You did He quicken, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins."*

*Ephesians 2:1*

"Dead through your trespasses and sins," ... "you did He quicken." The transition is like passing from a graveyard into a sweet meadow in which the children are playing! But this illustration is very imperfect, and in order to make it in any way an adequate analogy of the apostle's thought we must conceive the transformation of the graveyard itself. The graveyard must be converted into a sweet and winsome meadow, and its dead must emerge from their grave clothes in the brightness and buoyancy of little children. It is not a transition from the cemetery to the sweet pastures; it is the transformation of the graveyard itself. "Dead through your trespasses and sins," ... "you did He quicken"! Or we may change the figure and regard it as the passing of winter into spring. There is winter; cold, bare, flowerless and fruitless. Then there is a feeling of spring in the air. Everything is vitalised and begins to manifest the signs of growth and increase, and we behold the welcome beauties of the genial season. And here is another winter; "dead through your trespasses and sins." Everything is cold, insensitive, barren. And then comes the vital breath, the vitalising wind of the Spirit,--"you did He quicken." The once dead life begins to manifest evidences of the quickening, and clothes itself with the beauty and glory of the Lord. And "lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come."

Winter! "Dead through your trespasses and sins." And what are the deadening ministries which create this appalling condition? The apostle mentions two, "the course of this world," and "the prince of the power of the air." These are the two mighty forces ever at work upon the lives of men, producing paralysis of the higher powers, benumbing and impairing the finer sensitiveness, and sinking all the worthy things in the life to degradation and death.

Here is the first of the deadening ministries, "the course of this world." And is there anything more deadening than the ordinary course and custom of the present world? Look at the world's way of thinking. How deadening is its influence upon the perceptions of the spirit! The thinking of the world always runs on low planes. It is ever in search of compromise. There is nothing lofty and ideal in its aim and purpose. It seeks purely temporal and transient ends. No man can come under the influence of the world's manner of thought without losing the fine edge of his spiritual powers, and rendering himself insensible to the glorious things of the Spirit. And look at the world's way of speaking. It substitutes gossip for gospel. Its conversation is not seasoned with salt. There is nothing in it to preserve it from corruption. No man can put himself under the influence of the course of the world's speech without reducing his powers of spiritual apprehension. Let a man spend the entire day under the corrupting ministry of worldly speech, and in the evening time he will find that the difficulty of communing with God is incredibly increased. And look at the world's way of doing. The course of this world is always egotistic, emphasising the interests of self; it is therefore always combative, assuming an attitude of antagonism to one's brother. Now, all these are deadening influences. They work upon the loftier powers of man in sheer destructiveness, and bring his better self to ruin. Men are degraded and sunk into spiritual death by "the course of this world."

And the second of the deadening ministries is "the prince of the power of the air." We are confronted with a personal power, who is ever at work in the realm of evil suggestion and desire. There is a great leader in the hierarchy of evil spirits. He is the antagonist of men's welfare, and seeks to destroy the finer faculties by which they hold communion with God. He is "the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience." When some little flame of carnal desire is kindled in the life, "the prince of the power of the air" blows upon it, and seeks to fan it into fierce and destructive fire. Who has not experienced his influence? It is painfully marvellous how the spark of evil-thinking so speedily becomes a devouring heat! The prince of the power of the air is ever at work blowing upon these incipient fires, in order that in the intense heat of a greater conflagration he may scorch and burn up the furniture of the soul.

Now see how these two deadening ministries work. The apostle declares that they seek to determine our manner of "walk," and also our manner of "life." They seek to subject us to a bondage in which we shall "walk according to the course of this world," and in which we shall "live in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Now, to influence one's walk is to determine one's conduct; to influence one's life is to determine one's character. By our walk I think the apostle means all the outer movements and activities of the life--what we call our conduct; and by life I think the apostle describes the abiding inclinations and resting-places of the soul--what we call our character. These deadening ministries seek to establish us in the ways of the flesh, to make us choose our dwelling-place in the outer halls and passages of the life, and to neglect the secret and inner rooms where we could hold spiritual communion with God. They lure us into the snare of the bodily senses, and hold us captive there, and so deprive us of that larger life of the spirit which is found in the secret place.

Now, when men's conduct is determined by "the course of this world," and their life is limited by the will of "the prince of the air," all the higher powers in the life languish and droop, and at length pine away in paralysis and death. The deadening ministries complete their work, and man is "dead in trespasses and sins."

Spring! "You did he quicken." It is well to read the earlier verses of this great chapter, and to go slowly through its description of the winter time, until we are pulled up by this great and hopeful word: "But God"! The antagonistic word introduces the Lord of the spring-time, who is about to break up the bonds and chains of the winter season. And see how graciously the spring is introduced. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (for by grace are ye saved!)" Could anything be more gloriously rich in genial and gracious evangel? All the biggest words in the New Testament are introduced in this one verse of Holy Writ. Here we have "grace," and here we have "love," and here we have "mercy," all co-operative in the ministry of breaking up the winter. Grace is the grand, glorious goodwill of God. Love is grace on the march toward us, speeding on a crusade of chivalrous beneficence. Mercy is love arrived, distributing its gifts to those who are enslaved and winter-bound. Surely, here is a rich and all-efficient atmosphere, in which even the firmest tyranny can be melted away! Now watch the ministry of the spring. "Hath quickened us together with Christ." He hath made us alive again. He hath released the appalling grip of the despotic master, and the deadened faculties are alive again.

The quickening is sometimes a painful experience to the one who is being revived. I am told that when a drowning man is brought to shore, and is resuscitated, the renewed flow of life, as the blood-current rushes again through the half-dead and contracted channels, is attended by spasms of agony. And in the life of the spirit I have known the awakening to be a time of keen unrest and pain. But, shall I say, it is only a "growing pain," and is significant of spiritual recreation and expansion? We are acquiring a new sensitiveness toward God and man, and a new capacity, both for joy and pain. "And hath raised us up together with Him." We are not only quickened, we are lifted out of our graves. We are taken away from the place where we have been lying, the realm of tyranny where we have been enslaved.

What shall we say then, one to another, when God has lifted us out of the graves? Let us urge one another not to go back to the cemetery, not even to look upon it, lest we stumble into the grave again. It is a strange and harrowing thing how frequently even saved men will go perilously near to the grave out of which they were redeemed! It is altogether a wise and healthy and secure thing to keep a great space between us and the place of our old enslavement.

"And hath made us sit together with Him in the heavenly places." Said an old Puritan, "A man is where his head is." Of course he is! And as the Christian's head is in heaven, so he is with the Lord in the heavenly places. Here, then, in the coming of the Lord we find our resurrection, "You hath He quickened"; our ascension, "and hath raised us up together"; our enthronement, "and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places with Christ." But in every case our redemption is accomplished "with Him." It is all done "together"! There is no man so dead that he cannot choose this deliverance by the Lord of life. To choose Him is to have Him; to be willing to have Him is to receive Him. And to receive the Lord is to admit into our life the great Emancipator, who will convert our winter into spring, and turn the life of barrenness into a garden of spiritual fertility and glory.