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

**16. THE MINISTRY OF HOPE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Having no hope... . But now in Christ."*

*Ephesians 2:12,13*

"HAVING no hope." We are familiar with hopelessness in common life. We know the rout that begins in the sick chamber when hope goes out of the room. So long as the patient remains hopeful the doctor has a mighty helpmeet in his ministry, but when the patient loses heart and hope the doctor strives in the face of almost assured defeat.

The influence is similar in the ministry of the nurse. I was impressed by a phrase uttered in my hearing by a nurse in a conversation which I had with her concerning the nature of her work. "I like a life-and-death case," she said, "with just a chance for life!" She rejoiced in the struggle if the bias was on the side of victory. But when the last chance is gone, and there is no possibility of recovery, and the nurse has to labour confronted by sheer defeat, the service becomes a burdensome task.

It is not otherwise on the battlefield. Armies that go out without the inspiring presence of hope prepare themselves for defeat. I know there is what we call a "courage of despair," but it lacks the very elements of radiant victory. It has dash but no sight: it has force but no song; it is a wild leap and not the jubilant march of strength.

Now, what prevails when hopelessness invades the sick room and the battlefield is also experienced in the more secret life of the spirit, in the realm of religion. When a man becomes hopeless in religious life he loses the very springs of activity, and he sinks in ever-deepening degradation. The Scriptures employ a very powerful figure to express the state of those in whose life there is no hope. "They that sit in darkness." It is a very graphic picture. Try to realise it. You sit by the fireside on a winter's night, with a bright fire making the room genial and cheery. You sit on until the fire burns low and eventually dies out, and the warmth gives place to a searching chill. Then the light goes out and darkness is added to the coldness. You sit on. "They that sit in darkness." And there are people whose soul-life is just like that. There is no fire in the grate and their light is gone out, and they abide in cold and dreary desolation, "Having no hope."

Now, what are some of the causes of this dingy and paralysing hopelessness? Surely I must in the first place mention the tyranny of sin. When sin enters into a life and is welcomed there and entertained in daily hospitality, certain consequences assuredly happen. One of the first things to happen is this: sin puts out the light of joy. I am persuaded that there is not a man or woman in God's wide world, who persists in deliberate sin, in whose life we could find the light of joy. There is disquiet and unrest, and a sense of a great and hungry uncertainty, and these are incompatible with the abiding presence of joy. No, that light is turned out. But sin goes farther, and proceeds to quench the heat of endeavour. When sin ceases to be a visitor and becomes a tenant in the home of my soul, it assumes the position of master of the house, and I become its servile attendant Repeated experiences of the power of sin create within me a sense of impotence, and I feel how impossible it is to regain my lost sovereignty. My endeavours become more and more lukewarm, my spiritual strivings more and more spasmodic and cold. But sin goes still farther, and eventually scatters and tramples out the very fire of desire. In the earlier stages a man may feel the uselessness of endeavour while still he may eagerly wish to regain his lost estate, but in the latter stages his very wishes are destroyed and he sinks into the "ill of all ills, the lack of desire." The light of joy has been turned out The heat of endeavour has been quenched! The fire of desire has died away! And the man is reduced to a state of cheerless and wintry desolation, "Having no hope."

The second cause of hopelessness which I will name, is the tempest of sorrow. I saw an account, a little while ago, of one of our steamships which had passed through tremendous seas, and the waters had got down into her engine-room and put out the fires. When I read the record I immediately thought of a kindred experience in the spirit, which I find expressed in the ancient words of the Psalmist: "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." The passage through heavy seas of sorrow may be attended with complete security, or it may be accompanied by unspeakable loss. It is when the waters of sorrow get down among the fires of the life, the driving passions, the loves and the joys and the hopes, that dire ruin is wrought. It is unfortunately not an infrequent occurrence that the sorrow of a life is permitted to approach the central fires, and the light and warmth and cheer of the life are put out. I have many times heard sorrowing people say, "I feel as cold as stone." May we not say that the engine fire is temporarily out, and that they are drifting in hopeless bewilderment?

And the third of the causes which I will name is the monotony of labour. All monotony is tedious and depressing. To be compelled to listen to one persistent note of the organ would be an intolerable affliction, and would weigh the life down in heavy depression. To be obliged to listen even to a monotonous speaker tends to drain away the springs of inspiration. It is the unchanging note that makes the life sink in weariness. And this perhaps is pre-eminently so when one's daily toil is one of unrelieved monotony. There are people whose work calls for no intelligence, no ingenuity, no skill. It makes not the slightest demand upon their thought. It is a purely mechanical service, and works as unsentimentally and as rigidly as a machine. The life looks out every day and sees nothing new. The morning finds it at the old routine. There is no expectancy in the day, no surprise by the road. The hammer of the daily experience hits the same place at every moment, until life settles down into a benumbment which has no vision and no hope. The spring goes out of the spirit, and frequently it happens, as it did in other days, that "Because they have no changes they fear not God."

Now, so far we have not brought in the Lord Christ, and just because He has been so deliberately left out, the hopelessness of men has been unrelieved. Let us now bring Him into the dark cold life, and see what happens. "But now in Christ Jesus"--what? What kind of hope does the Master kindle when He enters into communion with a human life? Well, I think He kindles and keeps aflame a threefold hope; hope in the perfectibility of self, hope in the instrumentality of all things, and hope in personal immortality.

Christ kindles hope in the perfectibility of self. He comes to me, a poor sensitive, devil-governed man, and whispers to me that I too can attain to freedom and put on the strength of the ideal man. I stand amazed before the suggestion. Quietly He reassures me and tells me that I too can be perfected. What, I; with the fires out, a poor bit of driftage upon life's sea, that I can be renewed and filled with power and made master of circumstances, and voyage happily and safely to the desired haven? Can I be perfected? I have seen what men can do. I have seen my fellows take a mere refuse place in the city, one of its eyesores, and turn it into a place of beauty. Yes, I have seen the place of refuse transformed into a garden. And even now I hear my fellows speaking confidently of the re-afforesting of the Black Country, and turning the place of slag and cinder heaps, of blackness and death, into a place of sweet growth and pleasantness and beauty. But my Master tells me that the same miracle can be wrought in the realm of the spirit, that the black country in the soul can be re-afforested, that that place of indiscriminate refuse can be turned into the place where the Lord would delight to dwell. "The wilderness shall become a garden, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." I, too, can be perfected! This is the hope he kindles, "the hope of glory," "the hope of salvation." The Master begins by breaking the tyranny that holds me captive.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,

He sets the captive free."

And when I have experienced even a little of His emancipating ministry my soul walks in a wonderful hope. That is the reason why I am always so anxious that men should have one experience of the power of the Master's grace. One experience will make them the children of a confident hope. Once they have tasted they will want to remain at the feast. "Oh, taste and see how gracious the Lord is." "He will perfect that which concerneth me."

The Master kindles hope in the instrumentality of all things. If He purposes my perfection, then all my circumstances will be made to conspire to the accomplishment of His will. Nothing that comes to me will make me despair. I am hopeful that He will convert everything into a helpmeet and friend. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Even sorrow? Yes, sorrow. Sorrow is one of the "all things," and is subjected to the Master's will, and is one of His instruments for the attainment of His ends. Sorrow can accomplish what comfort would always fail to do. There is a legend that tells of a German baron who, at his castle on the Rhine, stretched wires from tower to tower, that the winds might convert it into an Aeolian harp. And the soft breezes played about the castle, but no music was born. But one night there arose a great tempest, and hill and castle were smitten by the fury of mighty winds. The baron went to the threshold to look out upon the terror of the storm, and the Aeolian harp was filling the air with strains that rang out even above the clamour of the tempest. It needed the tempest to bring out the music! And have we not known men whose lives have not given out any entrancing music in the day of a calm prosperity, but who, when the tempest drove against them, have astonished their fellows by the power and strength of their music? "Stormy wind fulfilling His word." In Christ I have a hope that everything is made to work for my good. The rough experience is an agent of refinement to polish and take away the rust.

And surely this applies to my work, however monotonous it may be. With the assurance that my Lord will use it for my spiritual profit, into my labour I shall put a song, and the way of drudgery will become the very highway of my Lord. Everything will give me a lift if I am in close communion with my Lord.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee,

Nearer to Thee;

E'en though it be a cross

That raiseth me;

Still all my song shall be,

Nearer, my God, to Thee,

Nearer to Thee."

The Master kindles hope in my personal immortality. "Because I live, ye shall live also." "He hath begotten us again unto a living hope." "He that believeth on Me shall never die." What a hope He kindles! Such a hope gives to life an amazing expectancy. When Samuel Rutherford was near his end, he was so gloriously excited at the prospect that those about him had to counsel him to moderate his ecstasy! The fine flavour of that glorious expectancy should pervade all our days. That we are to live for ever with the Lord is a prospect that should fill our life with quiet and fruitful amazement. To have that life in front of us will enable us to set all things in true perspective, and to observe their true proportions. Set "money" in the line and light of immortality, and we at once observe the limits of its ministry and range. Set "rectitude" in the same radiant line, and we see how it clothes itself with abounding glory. Everything must be placed in that long and glorious line or nothing will be truly seen.

These, then, are some of the hopes kindled and inspired by Jesus Christ our Lord. What He kindles He will keep burning. "Having loved His own, He will love them unto the end."