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

**20. THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Learn of Me."*

*Matthew 11:29*

THIS is a word of the Master, to which the heart of man turns with most ready inclination. It is a little favourite rendezvous of pilgrims to Zion. In other parts of the Scriptures we may find only a few footprints or a faintly-outlined road. For instance, there are some parts of Ezekiel, and some parts of what we have foolishly called the Minor Prophets, and large areas of the Book of Revelation, where it is like untrodden moor. But in other places we find a well-made road, suggestive of the passage of multitudinous feet. Such a road we find at the twenty-third Psalm, and at the fourteenth of John; and there are many well-trodden parts which are like the immediate circumference of a pool in the meadows where the kine have gathered to drink. And this word of my text marks one of the well-trodden places where thousands of pilgrims are gathered every day.

But just now, amid the abundant wealth of the evangel, I want to concentrate upon one particular part of the counsel, "Learn of Me." How great are the differences which divide us in the mere capacity of learning! Some can suck in knowledge as a sponge takes in water; others throw it aside like the imperviousness of igneous rock. What amazing differences there are in our children in just this quality of receptivity, the power to appropriate knowledge! You give one child a hint and he has got the entire lesson! to other children you have to spell it out slowly, a syllable at a time. And so it is in the realm of religion. There are magnificent scholars in the school of Christ, scholars who can follow hard at the Master's heels, and who can appreciate His lightest word. But there are poorer scholars, like Mr. Ready-to-Halt, who limp on painfully and slowly, and often slip and fall and slide on the upward track. Some of the scholars do not apply themselves, and through sheer indolence they make no progress. Others have no method, and because their study is disorderly they are attended by constant failure. They never seem to rise above the first standard, and they abide in the rudiments of the religious life.

It is to this latter class that I want to try to speak a word of heartening and cheer. A great student and scholar, speaking about quite other roads and realms of knowledge than the purely religious, recently gave some helpful counsel, and I want to lift it from the restricted sphere in which it was employed and apply it to the greater realm of the religious life. "The secret of learning," he said, "is to ask much, to remember much, and to teach much." In what we imperfectly call the secular fields of knowledge these have been found to be fruitful suggestions; I think they will be equally fruitful when applied to our discipleship to Christ. They enfold some of the secrets of successful learning in the school of Christ.

If, then, we would learn of Christ we must "ask much." Now "asking" is a great sign of a fine learner. We cannot come into contact with a man who is finely receptive in any department of knowledge without discovering his fierce inquisitiveness in his own particular realm. I walked out some little time ago with a most learned geologist, and in the course of our journey we passed a common gravel-pit, and at once my friend was all alert and full of inquiry, and immediately began to question the little heap of pebbles which he took in his hand. His "asking" led him to the secrets of a new neighbourhood. Within the last few months I walked also in the company of a renowned botanist, and I was amazed at the eager spirit of inquiry which possessed him in every dale and country lane. He was for ever "asking," "seeking," "knocking," and everywhere he found the appointed reward. I am perfectly sure we have got to cultivate this spirit of inquisitiveness in our relation to Christ. We are not great askers in the school. Let us ask for illumination as to character. Let us be full of questioning concerning what the Master calls "heavenly things," the spiritual mysteries, the heavenly glories, the far-off destinies and goals. You will find immense help in such life-quest from the example and experience of the Apostle Paul. A keen asker is a splendid companion to have on a tour. He will put questions which you would never dream of asking; he will talk with the road-mender by the way, and with the old peasant at his cottage door, and with little children on the village green, and the country begins to tell its secrets in answer to the search. Paul, I say, was a splendid asker, and we can train ourselves by the example which is revealed to us in his own great letters. Turn to Colossians, or Ephesians, or Philippians, and mark the things he asks about, and pursue your search along the same lines, and you will most assuredly pass from stage to stage in the Master's school, and have ever-expanding visions of the glory of the Lord.

And let us ask for illumination as to conduct. We not only want knowledge of ideals, but how to apply the ideals to our immediate life. We want principles and we want rules. We want "a light to our path and a lamp unto our feet." We don't ask nearly enough concerning the next step, and the next step, in our forward march. Turn to the Acts of the Apostles and mark the spirit of questioning which always possessed the Apostle Paul in relation to the practice and immediate goings of his life. Or take the simple experiences of Brother Lawrence, and mark how every emergency presents an occasion for making inquiry into God. In this realm we are to be "as little children," voraciously inquisitive, yearning for knowledge of the Divine will, so that we may know the mind of Christ. "Ask much!" We must not be timid in our approach. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." This is one of the great secrets of progressive learning.

"Remember much!" Ah, there is the difficulty for many of us! We can take, but we cannot keep. We can receive an impression, but we cannot retain it. We can do the exposure, but we are not expert in the fixing. We have a vision in the night, but it fades in the glare of the next day. We have a glimpse of glory or of duty, but common affairs obliterate it again, and the experience seems to be wasted. This leaky memory is very obtrusive in realms other than religious. How we have to jog our remembrance in the little things of daily life! We knot our handkerchiefs, or we put a ring on another finger, or we call to our aid some system of mnemonics, and all this that we might be able to retain something we have got. Can we call any sanctified expedients to the help of our spirits that we may remember what we have learnt in the school of the Lord? I think we can. We can have, in the first place, some specially appointed time for the ministry of recollection, for reviewing ourselves and our possessions in the presence of the Lord. I place great emphasis upon this expedient. I mean, not so much a time for reading the Scriptures or even for actual supplication, but a season for recalling what we have learned about the Lord, and what we have discovered in the ways of our experience. It is everything to fix definite times for these periods of holy contemplation. Fixity is a great virtue in the discipline of the soul. Fixity helps to engender firm habit, mental bias, and moral inclination. At appointed times the mind is ready for the work, and will more and more answer our bidding to produce its garnered stores. And further, if it be possible, let us have some special place for the ministry, some corner of a room, or some particular street on our way to work, and we shall find that the very place becomes a co-operative friend helping us to revive the partially-effaced impressions. I heard one of the most beautiful spirits in our ministry, one who is now at home in glory, declare some years ago that a particular part of the shoreline of England, where he walked every day in the contemplation of his knowledge of God, had become almost a system of mnemonics. Every headland, and every rock, and every cove silently helped and suggested the findings of past days. You will be amazed at the ministry of places in awaking and confirming the impressions of the soul.

But it will perhaps be best for you to devise your own helpmeets for the ministry. You want to recollect God, and the things of God, and the things He has made known to you. Well, sit down and devise some means of "stirring up your remembrance" in this holy exercise. But do not let any one assume that he is alone in the labour of remembrance. We have a great Helper in the sacred work. "He shall bring to your remembrance whatsoever things I have said unto you." Only let us be honest and eager, sincere and ingenuous, and He will work to the establishment of our souls in the knowledge of God.

"Teach much!" We shall never really know Christ as He is to be known until we begin to tell what we already know. In the realm of religion we never really know until we testify. Until the disciple becomes an apostle he is never an advanced disciple. Every teacher knows this; his knowledge grows while he imparts it. I heard a friend of Watts say in the Tate Gallery some time ago, when he was taking a little party through the famous chamber: "Every time I try to explain these pictures I see more to explain!" In the act of stating a principle the light brightens for ourselves. That, perhaps, is one of the glories of the ministry of Jesus Christ. While we ministers seek to tell about the beauty of the Lord the beauty grows upon our vision. While we declare the grace of redemption, grace more abounds toward us. While we testify as to the way of peace we are led into the more secret place. If we would be fine learners we must be ready teachers. Are you saying you cannot be? Is there anything you know about the Lord? Tell the little you know, and the little will grow. Have you no sick neighbour, no care-worn friend, no depressed fellow-pilgrim who is fainting on life's way? Teach him the little you know. You will be perfectly amazed at the effect upon your friend, but still more wonderful will be the effect upon yourself. As you go home from that house, the truth which hitherto shone like a candle, will burn like a star. "He that doeth the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so, the same shall be called great." These are some of the secrets of successful discipleship in the school of Christ.