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

**21. THE MINISTRY OF REST by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."*

*Mark 6:31*

THIS is not the speech of an old man, but of quite a young man, barely thirty-three years of age, and who is burdened with the superlative ministry of the redemption of the race. All the arrangements of His public life are made on the assumption of its brevity. And yet He made time for rest! Sometimes we allow the sacredness of our labour to tempt us to regard rest as indolence and relaxation as waste. True rest is the minister of progress. The hour of seclusion enriches the public service.

What were the special circumstances which impelled our Lord to call His disciples apart? They were twofold. They had just experienced the shock of a great sorrow. John the Baptist had been done to death. The deed had come upon them as an awful collision with their rosiest expectancies. The great Deliverer was near; the Kingdom was at hand; the Divine sovereignty was about to be established; on the morrow He would be on the throne! And yet, here was the pioneer of the kingdom, in the very dawning of the victory, destroyed by the powers of the world. The disciples were stunned and bewildered. The world of their visions and imaginations tottered like a house of dreams. And it was in this season of mental confusion .that our Lord called them apart to rest.

But, in the second place, there was the constant distraction of the ubiquitous crowd. "There were many coming and going." There is a strangely exciting interest about a multitude. It whips up the life to a most unhealthy speed and tension. And the peril is that we do not realise the intensity when we are in it. When we are on board ship we do not realise how noisy the engines have been until for a moment they cease. We are not conscious of the roar and haste of the traffic of Ludgate Hill until we turn aside into St. Paul's. And it is even so with the influence of a crowd. It acts upon us like an opiate; it externalises our life, it draws all our interests to the outsides of things, and we are almost unconscious of the distraction. And this was the mesmeric influence in which the disciples were constantly moving. The outsides of things were becoming too obstrusive, and the insides of things were becoming dim. And these same two presences are with us to-day, the calamity and the crowd, the ministers of bewilderment and distraction. And to us, as to the disciples, the call comes from the Redeemer Himself: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while."

Now what will these deliberately contrived seasons of spiritual rest do for the stunned and distracted soul? In the first place, they will help us to realise the reality of the invisible, the immediacy of "things not seen." I know that if we were spiritual experts this fine perception would be experienced everywhere. But the possibility in publicity is conditioned by experiences in private. If we are to have a real sense of God in the crowd it must be by discipline in secret. We require special centres if we would spread the healthy influence over the life. One special day of rest is demanded if the entire week is to become a Sabbath. One special place is to be sanctified if the Lord is to be apprehended everywhere. In my own experience I know that the shocks of the day and the distractions of the crowd tend to remove the Invisible into the dim background, until the Invisible plays no mighty and awe-inspiring part in our lives. It is apart, in the awed quietness and individual loneliness, that the Invisible rears itself like a great mountain. When the pressure of external circumstances is relaxed, and we are alone, the veil of the temple parts asunder, and we are in the holy of holies, and we know ourselves to be in the presence of God. If we practise that Presence in the special moment it will abide with us through the hour.

In the second place, by going apart for rest we shall gain a bird's-eye view of the field of life and duty. In the midst of life's moving affairs we see life fragmentarily and not entire. We note a text, but not a context. We see items, but we are blind to their relationships. We see facts, but we do not mark their far-reaching issue and destiny. We are often ill-informed as to the true size of a thing which looms large in the immediate moment. Things seen within narrow walls assume an appalling bulk. A lion in your back yard is one thing; with a continent to move in it is quite another. There are many feverish and threatening crises which would dwindle into harmless proportions if only we saw them in calm detachment. There are some things which we can never see with true interpretation until we get away from them. There is nothing more hideous and confusing than an oil painting when viewed at the distance of an inch. To see it we must get away from it. Detachment is essential to the comprehension of the whole, and therefore to the discernment of a part. It is not otherwise with life. We are often too much in the thick of things to see them. We cannot see the wood for the trees, the whole for the part, the life for the living. "Come ye apart!" Leave this and that and the other, and from the place of sacred and restful detachment look over the entire field of life and duty, of purpose and destiny, and the fragment shall take its appointed place in the vast design, and shall no longer masquerade as an appalling and overwhelming totality.

Sometimes this season of discerning detachment is forced upon us by the ministry of sickness. The Lord says to a long-time healthy man, "Come apart, I have something to say to thee. I have things to show thee which thou hast forgotten, or Which thou hast never seen." And then the man is detached by sickness from the immediate labours to which he has been applying himself with fierce and blinding quest. And what frequently happens, as the outcome of his seclusion, is a transformed conception of life and destiny; "I see things quite differently now!" He had been engrossed in fireworks, and had forgotten the stars. He had been busy building and enlarging his barns and had overlooked his mighty soul. He had been feverish about the transient and negligent of the eternal. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now--!" In the season of seclusion he obtained a corrected vision.

And sometimes a holiday provides the requisite apartness, when life passes in review, and we apprehend its true significance and proportion. I think this is peculiarly true of a minister and his ministry. We are so apt to become riveted to the mere organisation, and overlook the very products for which it was devised. We become engrossed with agricultural implements, and we forget the harvest. Now a holiday takes us. apart and gives us a more comprehensive view of our work. In some of Dr. Dale's letters, as published in his biography, it is very evident how he utilised his holidays for this most fruitful purpose. He brought all his life under review--his work, the emphasis of his teaching, and the general proportions of his ministry. And what is pertinent for the ministry would be surely fruitful to all men. We may use our holiday times as seasons for looking at things from the standpoint of healthy detachment, and noting the real quality and bearings of our work, its drift and ultimate destiny.

But what holidays and sicknesses sometimes accomplish we can achieve by more immediate devices of our own choosing. By deliberately retiring from the pressure of our besieging work we can ordain a seclusion-chamber, where we can look at things in the calming, cooling, sanctifying presence of the Lord. In that sacred detachment many obscure things will become clear, "When I thought to know this it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary; then understood I... ." And in this sacred detachment many previous emphases will be changed. Many a valley shall be exalted, and many a mountain and hill shall be made low. The thing that seemed tremendous shall sink into a plain, and some things, which we had almost ignored, shall rear themselves as the very hills of God.

And there is something further. It is only by this seclusion with the Lord that we can obtain the restoration of our squandered and exhausted strength. Look at this handful of fishermen who were attending our Lord, and mark the life they were leading in these exacting days. They were subjected to the exhausting ministry of constant surprise. We all know how a day of wonders drains our strength, until even wonder itself is spent and weary. These men lived in the thick of the miraculous, and the presentation of every new infirmity was the occasion of a new surprise. I think, I say, wonder itself was dulled, and they became worn and weary. And then, on the top of it all, there was the constant drain of the crowd. The crowd sucks the very energy out of our limbs, and leaves us soft and good-for-nothing. At the time we are in the crowd the drain may be unconscious, but it is none the less real. I know that a multitude provides a stimulus, but the very stimulus consists in opening a sluice-gate of our own precious and secret resource. What a multitude seems to give, it first of all extorts. Here, then, were these men in the midst of all these draining seductions, and they were becoming tired out in body, mind, and soul. "And He said unto them, Come ye apart into a desert place, and rest a while," that in the ministry of seclusion ye may find the means of restoration.

Now this need is as pressing and serious today, perhaps even more so, than in the days of the disciples. Think of the constant drain in modern life. Think of the multiplicity of our correspondence, and every series of letters making its own exaction. Calculate the mere drain upon nerve force, the ceaseless suck upon our most vital resources, and then think of the influence of this constant efflux upon the mind, the organ of discernment, upon the emotions, the ministers of fellowship, and upon the soul, the medium of worship. Our vital strength is oozing out at every pore, and we need means of recuperation.

Now there is nothing that so refreshes the entire man as deep, quiet waiting upon God. Every other refreshment may be welcome, but it is only partial, and will leave some weary power still impaired. Get the soul restored, and every part of the being will feel the mighty influence of its rejuvenation. There are multitudes of men and women who take a week-end at the seaside who would be incomparably more benefited, even in body, if they spent the week-end in quiet, restful communion with their God. There is more real recreation in one hour of communion with Christ than in a whole week of social revelries, however gracious and worthy they may be. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."