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

**22. WEALTH THAT NEVER FAILS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"The unsearchable riches of Christ."*

*Ephesians 3:8*

"THE unsearchable riches!" The inexplorable wealth, ranging vein beyond vein, mine beyond mine, in land beyond land, in continent beyond continent! "The unsearchable riches of Christ!" And then, side by side with this immeasurable glory, the apostle puts himself. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given!"

What an arresting and daring conjunction! "The unsearchable riches" ... "me, the least of all saints!" It is like some solitary mountaineer contemplating the uplifted splendours of Mont Blanc. "The unsearchable riches" ... "unto me ... given!" I turned my eyes away from the printed page, and I saw a bee exploring the wealth of a nasturtium flower. Then I thought of all the flowers in the garden, and of all the flowers in my neighbourhood, and of all the flowers in my country, growing in quiet meadows, on heathery moor, and in twilight glen and then my imagination roamed away to the floral splendours of other lands, bending on the blowing plain or nestling in the hollows of the towering heights, and still further ran my thought to the inconceivable luxuriance of the tropics. And then I came back to my bee, as it visited the hearts of the single flowers in my garden; I thought of that bee setting out to explore the floral wonders of the universe; and then I came back to the apostle, equally busy, extracting juices "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb," and almost bewildered by the vast and overwhelming glories of his inheritance. "The unsearchable riches of Christ" ... "unto me" given, "who am less than the least of all saints!" The wealth is inexplorable. It cannot be pegged out. It cannot be finally traced. No inventory can be given. There is always a beyond! His riches are inexhaustible.

"The first-born sons of light

Desire in vain its depths to see,

They cannot tell the mystery,

The length and breadth and height."

Let us turn our contemplation to one or two aspects of this "unsearchable" wealth. The Lord Jesus Christ has created so exacting a conception of Himself in the minds of men that no ministry of man can satisfy it. No human ministry can express it. In all our best representations of the Lord there is always a missing something, an "unsearchable" something, which the most masterly fingers cannot span. Art cannot express Him. I gazed, the other day, upon a powerful picture of our Saviour in conversation with Simon Peter. They were sitting together in Peter's fishing-boat, drawn up upon the beach, and the disciple was busy mending his nets. And as I looked upon the fisherman--strong, muscular, brawny, and watched him as he strayed his fingers, and lifted his keen, restless, impulsive, friendly eyes upon his Master--I said to myself, "That's my Peter! Whenever in coming days I seek communion with him, this is the likeness that will occupy my vision! I want no other! The inspired artist has given me Simon Peter, and I am satisfied!" But when I turned from the fisherman to his Lord my heart gave no leap of contented recognition. No, it was not my Saviour! There were lines of suggestive strength and beauty, but my heart withheld its homage. There was amazing wealth in the representation, but who can express "the unsearchable riches of Christ"? "No, that is not my Saviour," I said, and I turned away unsatisfied.

Nor can literature express Him. The finest lineaments leave the half untold. I suppose that Tennyson has given us his conception of the Christ-man in King Arthur, as Thackeray has given us his in the delicate and lovely likeness of Colonel Newcome, but when our hearts have kindled and glowed in their masculine refinements, when we have stood wondering at the mingled strength and transparency of their life as it moves and shines like a glassy sea, our very wonder is chilled if we are told that the likeness must be interpreted as the representation of our Lord. No, a fine man, but not my Saviour! The heart is unsatisfied. And so it is with all human ministries, with music and literature and art--they can give us a little of the glory, they can give us diamond wealth as we see it in the jeweller's window, but the diamond mines are unexplored. So exacting is the conception which the Lord Himself has given us, that no human representation is possible, and all our expectations fall dispirited before every attempt to portray "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

But it is not only that our Saviour has created an exacting conception of Himself, He has also, by His "unsearchable riches," created an exacting ideal of human possibility. When His disciples have been emancipated from the bondage of sin, and have been led to occupy some radiant summit in the realm of piety and virtue, even in the midst of their highest attainment they have an overwhelming sense of inexhaustible glories beyond. That was not characteristic of Stoicism. The Stoic got his feet planted upon a lower height, and abode there in undisturbed satisfaction. Most certainly it was not characteristic of the Pharisee. The tragedy of the Pharisee was this--he had finally attained, all his riches were in possession, he had arrived. Pharisaism had a jeweller's window, it had no mines. It spent its time in window-dressing, it never set out on wondering explorations. But the Lord Jesus has created an ideal of character, and has opened out dim and enticing vistas of possibility which leave us, after every conquest, with new dominions yet to be won. Every summit brings a new revelation, the reward of every attainment is a vision of further glory. And so it happens that, altogether unlike Pharisaism, in the ranks of the Lord's disciples the best are the lowliest, those who are furthest up the slopes are the least conscious of their attainments, for they contemplate, with breathless reverence, the far-spreading glories of their "unsearchable riches" in Christ. "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I press on ...!"

"Unsearchable riches!" We cannot compute their glory in Christ our Lord, we cannot put our finger upon their limits in human possibility, and, thirdly, we cannot exhaust their Dowers of application to the ever-changing conditions in human life and destiny. In the Christian life new conditions never find us resourceless. Our wealth is inexhaustible, and always manifests itself as current coin. An old well was pointed out to me the other day, of which there are records stretching back through many centuries. I thought of the strangely varied and changing life, which had gathered about its birth, and how it had abundantly satisfied the needs of different environments that had passed away like dissolving views. Here had come the wandering minstrel, and the devout monk, and the tired soldier, and the itinerant evangelist, and the farmer and the labourer, and the woman and the child, and the spring had never failed! Through mediaeval days, and in the wonderful light of the Renaissance, and in the fierce, stern days of martial enterprise, and amid the ferment of the Reformation, and the later kindlings of the evangelical revival, down to our own day, when nothing harsh or hard seems to disturb the pastoral peace and simplicity, the well has been flowing, a minister of unceasing refreshment.

It is so with the inexhaustible "riches of Christ," their glory is found in their immediate applicability to all the changes of our changing years. They never leave us, we never have to discard them, they are always up-to-date and pertinent. We can begin to use them when we are young. It is beautiful, and to me always very wonderful, that our little ones can begin to handle the unsearchable wealth of Christ. Our "weeniest bairns" paddle in the unsearchable sea, and if you lift your eyes you may see that same ocean carrying the great liner upon its broad bosom, and all its unknown freight of sorrow and joy. And our little ones can put their little feet into the vast sea of infinite love and grace, and the experience enhances their joy and liberty. "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Aye, believe me, our very youngest have the power to enjoy God. They have a delicate apprehension, like slender tendrils of climbing plants, by which they can lay hold of the Eternal, and live the aspiring life of communion with God. And when we grow older, and the apprehension has become a little more matured, larger resources are disclosed to our larger capacity, and the riches are plentiful to the vaster needs. Our Lord never wears out. He is always equal to the problem. He always brims to the new occasion, and in Him we are always full.

"To Thee shall age with snowy hair,

And strength and beauty bend the knee:

And childhood lisp, with reverent air,

Its praises and its prayers to Thee."

But it is not only that "the unsearchable riches of Christ" adapt themselves, and reveal their wealth, to the changing condition of our years, it is that in our personal crises, when life suddenly leaps into fierce emergency, their resources are all available, and never leave us in the lurch. There are three great crises in human life--the crisis of sin, the crisis of sorrow, and the crisis of death--and by its ability to cope with these crises every philosophy and every ministry must be finally determined and tried.

How fares it with the riches of Christ in these emergencies? Is the ocean of grace only for childlike paddling, or can it carry a liner? When we come to crises like these, is the Christian's exchequer empty, or is there an abundance of money, and is it current coin? How is it with sin? Are "the unsearchable riches" available? Is there any ministry in broad England dealing with the real virus of sin, and the haunting, paralysing Nemesis of guilt, except the redeeming grace of Christ? Do you know of any other ministry that is seeking to

"Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff

Which weighs upon the heart"?

Is it not the bare truth to say that every other exchequer is empty? And is it not the bare truth of common experience to say that into the wretchedness of our moral impoverishment, and into the sunless places of our spiritual depravity, redeeming grace enters, and begins its mighty work of restoration and enrichment? This was the glory of Christianity to the Apostle Paul, and this it was which inspired his loudest and most triumphant song. "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free!" And Paul found those liberating energies in strange places; they were to him "the treasures of darkness," for they sprang out of the awful poverty and desolations of Calvary. To the Apostle Paul Calvary just meant "the unsearchable riches" of love and grace in conflict with unspeakable powers of guilt and sin, accomplishing their triumphant overthrow, and establishing an open way to the heavenly land of light and peace. "The unsearchable riches" do not "give out" in the high crises of our awful sin and guilt. "What is that you once said?" asked a distressed woman of me the other day in a remote corner of this country, "what is that you once said of the love of Christ to sinners? Tell it me once again!" And she helped my memory until I had recovered the word she wanted, and it was this: "He hath loved thee more than thou hast loved thy sin!" And again I repeat it, that everybody may know, that "where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound," and that in this deep and dark necessity, where every other form of wealth fails, the "unsearchable riches of Christ" are all-sufficient, for He has "purchased our redemption with His blood."

It is even so with the other crises I have named, the emergency of sorrow and the solemn and austere occasion of death. What wealth of grace He piles up about the sorrow of them that love Him, throwing upon it riches of soft and softening light; until, like the bare screes at gloomy Wastwater when the sunshine falls upon them, colours emerge which make the grief tolerable, as it lies transfigured before the countenance of God. "The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light." "In Thy light shall we see light." "Now are ye light in the Lord."

And at the end of the journey, when we arrive at the toll-gate through which we all must pass, we need fear no ill. The "unsearchable riches" will be still available, and we shall pass quietly and serenely into the realm of clearer air and of larger service. We can never get to the end of "the unsearchable riches of Christ." They are our glory in time: they will be our endless surprise in eternity.