**THIRSTING FOR THE SPRINGS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**04. STAYING THE PLAGUE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."*

*Psalm 91:10*

WE move amid moral pestilences. Plague-stricken people are all around us. We are daily in contact with men and women who are afflicted with moral and spiritual diseases. The diseases are highly contagious. How are we to escape them? "Evil communications corrupt." Is that true always? "He went to be guest." Was He corrupted? Was He smitten? Did the evil contagion find lodgment in Him? Evil communications do not always corrupt. Contagion demands prepared conditions. If the conditions are absent, the contagion is impotent. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." There were no appropriate conditions. There was no congenial soil. The devil could find no footing. The evil microbe could discover no sustenance. The secret of healthy living consists in the exercise of care lest we lapse or degenerate into conditions which will be congenial to the germs of moral and spiritual disease.

We have now had twenty-five years of bacteriological investigation. Profound research has been devoted to the infancy and growth of disease. The preparatory conditions in which the microbes find their sustenance have been laboriously studied, and some fruitful conclusions have been established. Now the flesh is more than a vesture. It is a literature. It is an assembly of parabolic hints. It offers suggestions as to the creation of a well-ordered soul. Here, then, are two or three of the prepared conditions which offer a foothold to encroaching disease.

**I. -- Physical Exhaustion**

The natural forces are reduced. The energy is spent. The army is recalled from the walls. The gates are left undefended, and the enemy has an easy access. Our physical defences are constituted out of the natural resistance of the body. Impoverish these, and our security is gone. Let me change the analogy. In the physical life our income must be a little above our expenditure. Physical exhaustion means that the emphasis has been changed. We have got an inlet with a one-inch bore, and we have got an outlet of one and a half. How is exhaustion to be interpreted? Some sources of income have ceased. Some correspondence has been severed. Perhaps the correspondence has been broken with the restoring realm of rest. We have gone on grinding and grinding until the energy has been spent. Then comes along the microbe and settles itself in the congenial conditions of weakness, and extends the insidious distribution of some most crippling disease.

How is it with the soul? Its defences are its resistances. If the soul is strong and powerful and energetic, the microbe of evil will gain no footing. But the soul can become faint, its defences may be straitened, and the strong hold may be easily taken at the first besiegement of the evil one. How does the soul become exhausted? By the breaking of the correspondence with the land of rest. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" "Return unto thy rest." We are made to hold communion with the restoring centres of rest. By prayerfulness and by spiritual meditation the communion is kept established. But, if the communion be broken, the soul sinks into spiritual weakness and exhaustion, and the microbe of a temptation or suggestion, finding us defenceless, fattens on our weakness, and holds us in the bondage of a foul and appalling disease. Men easily capitulate to the devil when by prayerlessness they have reduced themselves to spiritual exhaustion.

**II. -- Bad Food**

Diet is not altogether an indifferent matter in reference to the advances of disease. Some foods are the friends of our foes. They encourage the plague. They prepare its way. They arrange congenial conditions. It is not otherwise with the spirit. Diet is not a matter of indifference. What kind of food do we give the mind? Is it possible we may be pre disposing the mind to easy surrender to moral disease? How about our reading? Is the food good, or is it unsound meat? Can we honestly expect our minds to be healthy with the kind of food we give them? "God gave them bread from heaven to eat." "I am the Bread." The Master's bread is not all to be found within the province of one book. He has given His bread to His disciples, and they distribute it to the multitudes. He has given His bread to poets, to singers, to artists. My counsel is this: Pick your bread; do not eat whatever comes. Be even more careful in dieting the spirit than in feeding the body. "This is the bread of which if a man eat he shall not die"

**III. -- Undisciplined Emotion**

The investigations of the last twenty years have revealed this as one of the predisposing conditions of physical disease. Excessive grief and worry have exhausted the body and thrown its gates open to the invading germs. Little griefs can despoil the body. It is the dropping tap which empties the cistern. Little by little men get run down, and make themselves easy victims to any plague that may be prowling about. How is it with the soul? Is not undisciplined emotion one of the predisposing conditions of spiritual collapse? Unregulated emotion impoverishes the spiritual defences. It becomes our enemy rather than our friend. The devil likes to get our emotions well stirred, and to make us pleased with our emotions, and then behind our satisfaction he carries on his nefarious work. It is one of the perils of great evangelical missions. Mere emotionalism weakens our defences, and leaves us more disposed to the devices of the devil. Emotionalism has often proved the forerunner and help meet of the plague, and has provided conditions which have been converted into domains of widespread spiritual disease.

**IV. -- Uncleanness**

Perhaps this is one of the greatest discoveries of the realm of surgery during the present generation. We have come to see, as never before, the absolute necessity of the most scrupulous cleanliness. Microbes love dirt. Our surgeons are, therefore, exactingly careful that all their operations are performed with sterilised instruments, and under the severest conditions of cleanliness. The smallest remnant of dirt gives an advantage to disease. How is it with the soul? There is need of a similar scrupulousness. Do we exercise the same scrupulousness? Do we not treat small scruples lightly? Do we not label them as puritanical? Do we not compromise in the matter? Many of us become the victims of the plague because at first we harbour, not deliberate or intentional wrongs, but little biases towards the devil. We make little compromises in his favour. We retain a dirty little prejudice, or some mean little policy which we persuade ourselves cannot be called wrong, but only expedient, and these retained uncleannesses afford occasion and opportunity to the evil one, and through the entrance thus obtained he leads on his forces of darkness, the strong and black battalions of hell. If we are to defeat the enemy, we shall have to attend to the scruple. One defilement, deliberately treasured, may ensure the absolute triumph of the plague. "Create in me a clean heart, O God"

Let me add one or two closing words. Here is a suggestive sentence from a text-book of science: -- "The most universal and active and economical agent of sanitation is the sun." The worst enemy of the microbe is the sunlight. It is the room that gets but little sunshine which becomes fusty. And is all this not true in the regions of the soul? Our light is our defence. "The Lord God is a Sun"; and, therefore, "a shield." Let us put on the "armour of light." "Walk in the light." It is the light that burns up the destructive invader. "Our God is a consuming fire."